

# *The Lulav Of Denominationalism*

A branch is not a tree. When a branch mistakes itself for a tree, it bends towards idolatry. Idolatry is the adoration of a part as if it were the whole.

There are many branches from each of different sizes, length, width, but all attached to a common trunk that is sunk into nurturing roots. The roots are subterranean. They draw from ancient Jewish experience. Each branch grown out of the same fertile soil.

Branches without a tree are rootless. Trees without branches are barren.

Look at the tree whole. Each branch grows its leaves, flowers and fruits. Will the trees be stronger if any of the boughs is lopped off?

Our children are the flowers of our branches. But sadly, they are separated one from the other. They do not sway together, play together, pray together, dance together, sing together, study together, celebrate or commemorate together. They are compartmentalized, raised in separate nurseries. They attend separate denominational nurseries, schools, kindergartens, youth programs, summer camps, Hebrew schools, seminaries.

The branches so insulated may even forget the Tree Of Life and Knowledge from which they draw the sap of their uniqueness.

When the winds howl and the branches shake, they may cling to each other for support, but for a moment. After the storm subsides, they return to their own isolated domains.



The nightmare of self-imposed apartheid challenged our ancestors who feared the emergence of two Torah – one alien to another. Their fear is our own. Joshua warned the branches of the Rubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Menasseh lest, “Your children may say to our children ‘What have you to do with the Lord, the God of Israel’” (Joshua 22:24). Their fear is our own.

It is a tree of life for those who hold onto it. On the Festivals of Tabernacles, we are shown how to hold on to our trees and hold close in our hands the citron, palm, myrtle, and willow. Each gives forth its scent and its own taste, and there are some who give us neither scent nor taste but are nevertheless necessary. Should one of these four branches be missing, the benediction of the lulav is silenced. The wholeness of Godliness is lost.

The challenge to the threat is not resolved by turning them into one uniform body, but to interweave them and remind them of the source from which the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge spring. The whole lulav is a dream to be realized. Let the wise men and leaders send their scholars and poets to serve as residents in each other’s seminaries. Let retreats be organized so that the branches may come to see and appreciate their common roots. Let the children learn the art of loving dialogue, sing in interdenominational chorales and act in intercongregational dramas.

Without such denominational cross pollination, the land will lay fallow and the fruit will be desiccated. Let the branches of the tree turn upward, drawn by a sacred tropism.

