Past [in Hebrew, *Av-ar*]: Before the Star of David came to be associated with Jews, the *arba-at ha-minim*, the four species of Sukkot - the *lulav* and *etrog*, the festive bouquet of willow, myrtle, *etrog* [citron] and palm, were among the quintessential Jewish symbols in the rabbinic period and early antiquity. As worshippers sway with the festive branches, singing the words of Hallel, psalms of praise, it is not difficult to imagine being intimately and intricately tied to the natural world.

Present [in Hebrew, *Ho-veh*]: On Sukkot we emphasize the importance of water and its impact on how things will grow. A prayer for rain is inserted into the liturgy, asking that rain will fall at its proper time. Each item in the bouquet requires differing degrees of water: the palm requires very little; the willow a great deal, myrtle needs only rainwater, the *etrog* depends on human irrigation. On Shemini Atzeret, the Eighth Day of Solemn Assembly, the concluding festival of Sukkot, Jewish tradition inserts a prayer for rain and we add the phrase “Who causes the wind to blow and rain to fall” to daily prayer. The congregation and the leader ask for rain as a blessing, not as a curse; for life, not death, for abundance, not famine. This year’s record temperatures around the globe, challenge us to remember that while much may be ascribed to natural quasiperiodic fluctuations, pattern and recurring patterns, it seems increasingly clear there is more than passive human intervention in the warming of our planet.

Future [in Hebrew, *A-tid*]: Sukkot reminds us of our connection to God, from whose plan the rains come, assuring a green future and the need to acknowledge personal responsibility in assuring that rain falls in season. Among the interpretations given to the *arba-at ha-minim* is that the willow represents the human eye, the myrtle the mouth, the *etrog* the heart, and the palm the spine—eyes, mouth, heart and spine. With but a slight variation, Sukkot and its festive bouquet serve as an annual reminder of the need for head, heart, soul and spine, using that which animates us to activate others in direct stewardship of this planet we call home.

1. What connection is there to nature in the Bible and in rabbinic texts?
2. Why does our tradition require that even in urban settings we pay attention to cycles of wind and rain?
3. In what ways can you activate others to follow your lead in making a difference in the world?

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