

BOUND TOGETHER

What the Four Species Teach Us About Klal Yisroel

The lulav and esrog are the stars of Chag HaSukkos. The hadassim and aravos seem to play supporting roles. In truth, though, the four species stand as equals. The mitzvah of *arba minim* can only be fulfilled when all four are held together—not one substituting for another, not one more essential than the rest.

Four Species, Four Types of Jew

The Midrash in *Vayikra Rabbah* (30:12) teaches that each of the *arba minim* represents a different type of Jew. The esrog, which has both taste and fragrance, represents the Jew who possesses both Torah and *gemilus chassadim* (acts of lovingkindness). The lulav, which comes from the date palm, whose fruit has taste but no fragrance, represents the Jew who has Torah but lacks *gemilus chassadim*. The hadas, fragrant but tasteless, represents the Jew who has *gemilus chassadim* but lacks

Torah. And the arava, with neither taste nor fragrance, represents the Jew who seems to lack both.

Torah is the foundation of a Jew's life, which may be why the lulav and esrog take the leading roles among the four species. They both possess Torah, the very backbone of our existence. As the *Nefesh HaChaim* (4:11) writes, it is our *talmidei chachamim* who are the true builders of the world. And yet the Midrash insists we not forget the hadassim and aravos. They, too, are indispensable to the mitzvah's completeness.

Taken at face value, the Midrash seems almost extreme: could any Jew truly lack Torah and *gemilus chassadim* entirely? The Rebbe Rayatz (*Maamar Yom-Tov shel Rosh HaShanah*, 5710) explains that such a Jew does possess both — but neither is the defining focus of his life. Whatever nuance we bring to the Midrash's opening lines, its conclusion is unambiguous: "Bind them all together, and they will atone for one



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another." *Achdus* and teshuva come only when every type of Jew is joined to the others. None can be dismissed, not even the hadassim and aravos Jews we might be tempted to overlook. On Sukkos, they too must take their place bound with the others.

The Lesson of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai

The Gemara in *Shabbos* (33b) tells of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai emerging from the cave where he had hidden for

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twelve years. He could not comprehend the value of Jews who seemed to live without Torah, and for this he was sent back into the cave for another year. When he finally emerged, he saw a Jew carrying two hadassim, one for *shamor* and one for *zachor*. It is no coincidence that the very species representing the Jew who may lack Torah but possesses *gemilus chassadim* became the vehicle for teaching him this lesson, layered with the depth of the mitzvah of Shabbos. Turning to his son, Rabbi Shimon said: "See how beloved the mitzvos are to the Jewish people." Recognizing the worth of the "hadassim Jew" was precisely the lesson father and son needed to learn. It is a lesson we, too, must internalize each time we lift the *arba minim*.

The Arava Takes Center Stage

On Hoshana Rabbah, the last day of Sukkos, the arava takes on a striking role of its own. It is almost startling: after all the introspection of the Yamim Noraim and the joy of Sukkos, we culminate the season by elevating the very species that represents the Jew who appears to lack

both Torah and *gemilus chassadim*. The message could not be clearer. We are called to accept every member of Klal Yisroel for what he or she contributes to the whole. This is a lesson that resonates powerfully when we recall that the Three Weeks call us to cultivate *ahavas chinam* (baseless love). Every Jew has a role, and only by binding them all together can we say we have truly accomplished the goals of the Yamim Noraim and Sukkos.

The Midrash's closing words, "each one atones for the other," declare that true teshuva is achieved only through this unity. Hoshana Rabbah, with its intense focus on teshuva, returns us to us a message we may have let slip. Every Jew is precious, and *achdus* does not mean that every Jew is the same; it means that different Jews come together, bound as one. As Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks put it, what matters is the "We" more than the "I." Our greatness as a people lies in our being a people—not merely a collection of individuals, but individuals bound into a whole.

A Living Lesson

In my years working in chinuch and

kiruv — including my ongoing work teaching JSS talmidim who often arrive at Yeshiva University with limited Torah background — I have seen this lesson play out in real life. Welcoming someone as a full member of our *agudah achas* (one unified community) is the only path toward genuine growth in Torah. Respect must come first; only then can we hope for real change. Perhaps this is why Hoshana Rabbah leads directly into Simchas Torah. It reminds us that only after we have recognized every member of the Klal can each person claim his own portion of Torah.

Rav Kook, as quoted by Rav Moshe Tzvi Neria (*Moadei HaRaayah* pg. 128), offers a beautiful reading of the arava: it represents the simple Jew whose connection to Hashem is natural and unaffected, as the Gemara in *Sukkah* (43b) describes. Rav Kook notes that we do not beat the aravos. We beat with the aravos, joining ourselves to the simple, pure faith these Jews embody.

Two Truths, Held Together

We live, always, in two truths at once. Torah is the foundation of Jewish life, and this is why the lulav and esrog stand at the center. But we must never forget the worth of every Jew and the way we are all bound together in pursuit of the goals of Tishrei. May we merit a true *zman simchaseinu*, a joy that carries us all together through the rest of the year.



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