

# FOUR SPECIES: ALL FOR ONE; ONE FOR ALL

by Rabbi Osher Chaim Levene

*The Mitzvah: There is a Biblical commandment to take Arbah Minim, Four Species on the first day of Succos, Tabernacles. There are two Hadassim twigs (myrtle), three Aravos (willows) are tied to the Lulav (palm branch) and grasped together with a Estrog (citron). The Four Species are also taken on the other days of the festivals with the exclusion of the Sabbath. Although a time-bound commandment that women are generally exempted, it has become customary for them to also observe this law.*

In the Jewish calendar, Succos falls at the end of the agricultural season: "when you gather in the crop of the land"(Leviticus 23:39). Not only is the field's produce joyously "gathered" into his warehouse by the farmer, but the mitzvah of Arbah Minim, Four Species fascinatingly involves "bringing together" different plants.

But what are we to make of this mitzvah? What is the symbolism of the straight long backbone of the lulav; the different shaped leaves of the aravos and hadassim; and of course, the exquisite and spotless surface of the beautiful estrog?

The underlying theme of this festival is that of unity.

A unique, indispensable individual, the Jew has a distinct mission in life, exclusively tailored to his personality and circumstances. Yet, at the same time, he is part of a whole. His point of reference is as a member of his family, a member of his community, and as part of the Jewish nation. The human body functions by unifying different organs. Only by operating together, will the heart pump blood around the body, will the eyes see, the mouth speak and the frame of the body stand. No component can work in isolation; each is essential and indispensable.

The Jewish nation is, similarly, one unified organism. Composed of different groups - Kohen, Levi and Israelite - the chosen people can only function where there is unity in their ranks. Only by "assembling" all parts of the people in a joyous harmonious unit, a "family reunion", can the Jewish nation fulfil its national role and achieve the ultimate level of unity: becoming one with G-d. Both are symbolized in the assembly of the Four Species.

Their shape famously depicts the four main organs collectively responsible for the essential activities of human life. The lulav resembles the human spine; the estrog parallels the human heart; the hadasim shaped leaves correspond to the human eye and the aravos represent the lips (Midrash, Vayikra Rabbah 30:14).

The Four Species further draw together the four types of Jew across the spectrum: the estrog alludes to a fully righteous individual who has both Torah learning (taste) and mitzvah observance (scent). The aravos with neither taste nor aroma depicts the wicked person. The lulav that has taste but no smell and the hadasim with smell but no taste indicate those Jews that have only one of the two categories (Midrash, Vayikra Rabbah 30:12).

Symbolizing the interaction of the bodily components and members of the nation "all for one", the Four Species captures the tone of Succos, "festival of the ingathering" (Exodus 23:16). All the energies of the agricultural year are assembled. Yet another illustration of this phenomenon is the mitzvah of Hakhel, "Assembly", where the nation would congregate as one to hear a public reading of the Torah on the festival of Succos after the sabbatical year (Deuteronomy 31:10-13)

Bringing together seemingly separate entities is illustrated, most vividly and memorably, in the Four Species. Like a family reunion, the consolidating all parts, "one for all", generates much joy and happiness. The peaceful harmony of the festival - as in our prayers "Succos Shlomecha, booth of peace" - is the period of being "completely joyous" (Deuteronomy 16:15). Together, we joyously come together - as one body and as one nation - under the protection of G-d to serve and become one with Him. Text Copyright © 2005 by Rabbi Osher Chaim Levene and **Torah.org**.