

TAKING THE LULAV ON SHABBOS

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

Taking the Lulav on Shabbos¹

Unity themes abound regarding the Four Minim. Different midrashim emphasize different angles, but the common denominator is that they see unity growing out of plurality. Each of the four minim is different, distinct. They may represent different parts of the body, or different kinds of Jews, but the bottom line is the same. The many are bidden to come together and form a unified collective.

This approach is a favorite source of discussion on Sukkos, but its logic is not immediately compelling. What does unity have to do with Sukkos, more than other times of the year? Additionally, the Torah specifies how the Four Minim are supposed to affect us. We are told to rejoice with them when we take them. How does the unity theme give make us want to jump for joy?

If we understand Sukkos to be the other side of the coin of the Yamim Noraim, the pieces all fall into place. We have already established that the point of Rosh Hashanah is to coronate the King, to fully realize and accept the authority of Hashem in our lives. During the first part of the month of Tishrei we work on this through the modality of yirah, or approaching Hashem through a sense of reverence. On Sukkos, we do the same, this time using the tools of ahavah, of love of Hashem.

More specifically, Sukkos is the time when we can turn the Kingship of Hashem from an abstraction to a reality vested in every part of our being. This is the significance of the Four Minim as representations of the different parts of the body. On Sukkos, as at no other time of the year, we can internalize His Kingship in all parts of ourselves. Cleansed of our shortcomings on Yom Kippur, we put our newly-won taharah to good use, applying it through love of Hashem to accomplish what yirah alone did not do. (The Torah provides a strong allusion to the role of ahavah, in the pasuk that commands us in the mitzvah of the Four Minim: "And you shall take on the first day, and rejoice." [2]) The first day of Sukkos is linked to Avraham, the first of the Seven Shepherds, whose midos are chesed and ahavah. While we may fail in attempts to achieve this clarity at other times of the year, Sukkos - with its gift of simchah and ahavah - can get us there.

A different medrash provides a variation on the unity theme. Each of the four species, it notes, has a different complement of qualities. When taken together, one compensates for what the next lacks. We can view this as a guide to life's challenges. Maharal teaches [3] that wholeness and perfection comes in three varieties. True perfection comes only if we are perfect in our relationship to Hashem, to others, and to ourselves. Like the Four Minim, life provides situations that have taam v'rei'ach -

taste and aroma, while others have one or the other. Some situations have neither.

This holds true for each of the areas of perfection. At times, Hashem makes His presence and closeness felt, and we sense the richness in serving Him. At other times, He withholds part of the experience, as if we could detect the taam but not the rei'ach, or the opposite. There are also times when we feel nothing, making it much harder on us. Our job, however, is to serve Him as the absolute King, regardless of how He presents Himself to us. Like the eved Ivri - the indentured servant of Shemos 21 - we are to work day and night, i.e. whether He illuminates our lives, or leaves us in the dark.

Our relationships with others are governed by the same diversity. Some people appeal to us in all aspects, while others offer at least some likeable characteristics. Still others do not excite us in any way at all. Nonetheless, we are instructed by the Torah to practice ahavas Yisrael to all Jews, regardless of how they strike us.

Similarly, we face mood changes that threaten the way we relate to ourselves. At the extreme, some people are subject to so many stresses and psychic changes, that peace and tranquility are distant and elusive goals. They become fundamentally dissatisfied with themselves. Here too, accepting the malchus of Hashem in its fullness demands that we not slip into moroseness and lethargy, but rise above our natural feelings. We must remain satisfied with our selves, confident that everything Hashem sends our way serves His purpose. He made us who we are, where we are, and what we must deal with. This allows us to bear all burdens with joy and love.

The message of the Four Minim - the lesson that this mitzvah was designed to impart to our neshamos - is that all four types and situations require the same response from us. Some may be more difficult or more attractive for us than others, but we are required nonetheless to remain steadfast and consistent in our pursuit of perfection in all our relationships, whether to Hashem, to others, or to ourselves. From the diversity of qualities in the four species, we arrive at a point of uniformity.

Uniformity is desirable in other areas as well. Elsewhere, we have spoken about the differences between emunah felt in different parts of ourselves. We recognized a cerebral emunah, as well as one emunah of the heart, and one which takes hold of every fiber of a person's being. The same distinctions apply to deveikus. We can cling to Hashem with our minds alone, or with our feelings and heart, or with everything that is in us. The Four Minim beckon us - and help us along the way - to attach ourselves to Him with all the we have, not just with one faculty or aspect of ourselves. On Sukkos we find that we have become a choir of different instruments, all ready to sing His praises. The different parts of ourselves come together in a unity of belief and commitment.

This internal uniformity in our deveikus leads us directly to joy and exultation. Our closeness to Him leads to simchah. Indeed, while simchah is part of the celebration of every Yom Tov, on Sukkos it is the overarching quality of the entire week. We call it zman simchaseinu, the season of our joy. The

simchah of uniform deveikus to Hashem, deveikus with all parts of us, is not another element of the holiday, but its very essence.

Some years, we seem to lose out on the experience. Chazal ruled that we do not take the Four Minim when the first day of Sukkos, the only day that the mitzvah applies on the Torah level rather than rabbinically. They were concerned that people might, in their zeal for the mitzvah, inadvertently violate the prohibition of transporting in a public domain. If our approach has merit, we can understand why Chazal were so ready to seemingly sacrifice a mitzvah that occurs but once a year because of what seems to us like a remote possibility of Shabbos violation.

They may not have sacrificed anything at all. Shabbos is called yoma d'nishmasa - the day of the soul. During its rarified hours, accomplishments move within range like at no other time. Shabbos is characterized by the twin mitzvos of zachor and shamor, or remembering and of guarding. The latter is observed passively, while the former requires only speech, not action. Another way of looking at this is that speech alone can accomplish on Shabbos what requires concrete action the rest of the week.

The mitzvah of the Four Minim ordinarily requires a physical activity to help us internalize the malchus of Hashem in every part of our being, or attach ourselves to Him with every dimension of ourselves. On Shabbos, we do the same without the physical lulav and esrog. When Shabbos and the first day of Sukkos coincide, we can find in the tranquility of its hours the same insights without needing to grasp the minim in our hands. We do not sacrifice the mitzvah, so much as engage it more internally.

We return to our original discussion. Many people take the different unity themes of the Four Minim as a lesson, a celebration of the value of coming together. We have added a few dimensions and variations. Sukkos, through the Four Minim, is a time of joyfully enthroning Hashem in all parts of ourselves, and finding a uniformity in our attachment to Him in all the varied days of our lives.

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1. Based on Nesivos Shalom, vol. 2, pgs. 203-206
 2. Vayikra 23:40
 3. Chidushei Aggados, Bava Kamma 30A

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