

The mitzvah of the arba minim, the four species, might be one of the most mysterious mitzvos in the Torah. Why Hashem tells us to hold these four plants, and not four different plants with similar qualities, is already somewhat beyond our ability to understand. Add to it the details of shaking the arba minim in all directions at particular points in davening, and circling the sefer torah with them during hoshanos, and it becomes clear that there are layers of meaning involved that we can only imagine.

But one theme that emerges from the many analyses of the arba minim is that they represent *shleimus*, wholeness. The four species represent four different kinds of Jews, from the most pious to the least pious, all united together in serving Hashem. Or they represent the parts of the human body, the spine, eyes, mouth and heart, all united together in serving Hashem. Or they represent the different parts of a tree, the trunk, branches, leaves and fruit, reminiscent of the Tree of Life and all united in serving Hashem.

The truth is that *shleimus*, wholeness, is a theme that pervades the yom tov of Succos. One of the most famous allusions in the Torah to Succos is when Yaakov Avinu, having escaped both the house of Lavan and the encounter with Esav, set up camp in a place called Succos. In the very next verse, the Torah says that **ויבא יעקב שלם**, Yaakov came in a state of wholeness -- as Rashi says, despite the challenges he had faced, his body was healthy, his wealth was preserved and his Torah learning had not suffered. In the Hoshanos, we make reference to the **סכת שלם**, the Succah that stands in Shalem, a reference to Yerushalayim but a word that means complete.

It makes sense, of course, that Succos should be the holiday of wholeness. It is the climax of the year, in which we will have experienced any number of ups and downs. But at the end of cycle of yamim tovim, we spend one last holiday with Hashem, a yom tov in which we can look back and say that despite every challenge we have faced, we are once again together with Hashem. We are still strong; we are still whole.

But there is another element of wholeness that is brought out in particular by the arba minim, the four species. The arba minim tell us that in order to be whole, not every element of our lives has to be perfect. The *aravos*, after all, have no smell or taste, and they dry out so very easily. They are not cured of this deficiency by being wrapped up with the other species. But they are included nonetheless. They are included because the more righteous species, so to speak, take responsibility for them, overcome what the *aravos* are missing by being bound together with them. Wholeness, in other words, does not mean that nothing is wrong, that there is nothing inside of us or outside of us that needs improvement. It means that we are honest about who we are and who we are not, that we engage both our good and our less good to understand the complete person that we are, that we understand that every member of the Jewish people is important and needs to be included, even if that means we have to overcome their flaws. That is what makes us whole.

Many of us probably feel like we are still licking our wounds this Succos. And there are still many elements of our lives that need healing. But we can still be whole. Like the

arba minim, we can pull everything together, the good and the less than good, to unite together to serve Hashem. ושמחתם לפני ה' אלקיכם -- that is how joy is found.

The Maharal teaches an important *mashal*, analogy, about the cycle of yamim tovim of Pesach, Shavuot and Succot. He compares them to someone who has been sent on an important mission by the king, entailing a journey to a distant land. There are three main milestones he experiences. The first is when he receives his mission, and the second is when he accomplishes his mission. But even when he accomplishes his mission, there is a third step. He must return to the king and report that he has done everything he was asked to do. On Pesach, the Maharal says, we receive our mission from Hashem by becoming the Jewish people. On Shavuot, we begin carrying it out by accepting the Torah. And on Succot, at the end of the year, we return before Hashem to declare that despite all the challenges, we have succeeded; we have done what He asked us to do.

The mission we have carried out this year has not been easy. But we are here to say to Hashem that we have faced all the challenges he gave us and are here to report success. We are here to say that we are whole. May Hashem continue to protect us in His shelter and bring us back to the *succas shalem*, whole and together.