



MACCABI WORLD UNION

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תשרי תשע"ז

חג הסוכות וארבעת המינים

The Festival of Succot and the Four Species

Dear friends,

The Festival of **Succot** is also **Chag HaAsif**, the harvest festival, marking the agricultural character of these dates - the end of summer in the Land of Israel, with its consequent last great harvest and the start of the season of rest for our People, mostly farmers in our ancient history.

One of the symbolic expressions of the agricultural component of **Succot** is in the ritual use (in the synagogue and in the *Succah*) of **Arba'at HaMinim**, *the four plant species*¹, according to the order of the Torah - developed in the Mishnah: the **etrog** (citron, a citrus-like type of lemon), the **lulav** (a young branch, still closed, of palm), three **hadasim** (myrtle branches) and two **aravot** (willow branches). These *species* are bound together by palm leaves, and during the morning prayer of *Succot*, are set to "vibrate" as a single unit to the four corners of the Earth, and up and down - to the whole universe, the Divine Creation.

Our Sages established several allegorical explanations for the meaning of **the Four Species**. One of the most beautiful and best known is in the *Midrash*² which connects *tasty food* with Jewish scholarship, and *good flavor* with the performance of good deeds, and explains:

"Just as the etrog has good flavor and a pleasant fragrance, also among Jews there are men who are Torah scholars and who practice good deeds. Just as the palm fruit (the date) tastes good but has no aroma, so there are men who have studied but have not and do not apply their lessons properly. Just as the myrtle has a pleasant aroma but is tasteless, so there are men of good deeds who have no learning. Just as the willow is not edible and has no scent, so there are men with no learning and who do no good deeds. "

Thus, these four species symbolize the four archetypes that make up a nation, and in particular, our Nation. By joining together and "vibrating" the four species in the context of prayer in the company of our Community, we emphasize before God that the virtues of brotherhood, unity and national and community cooperation must be our collective goal, including all and each of the members of our people, even when

¹ Vayikrah XXIII, 40; Mishnah Succah 3,4.

² Vayikrah Rabbah 30.



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their conduct and their commitments are not the most desirable. The message is twofold, and powerful: first, we claim that *in our ship, the ship of the Jewish People*, no-one is left out – all share the same fate, and must ensure the inter-responsibility that binds us; on the other hand, it testifies that our strength as a people is precisely that which solidifies the unity of our People, sharing the virtues and achievements of some of its members with the difficulties and setbacks of our less graceful ones. We cannot – we must not – "vibrate" before God and in the context of our nation with only 1, 2 or even 3 of the *four species*: all 4 *together* make of our Nation *one being* – a varied, human, diverse being, overcoming obstacles, progressing to achievements as a *normal* People (and today more than ever, in the State of Israel, *the* national laboratory), and indeed into an *extraordinary people*, with consistently high goals that set our national path.

May God grant that *the four species of Succot* will renew in us the spirit of solidarity, unity and community and national brotherhood;

May this *Chag HaAsif*, this late summer harvest festival, harvest "fruits" of innumerable joys, happiness and hope.

**With best wishes,
Chag Succot Sameach!
*Chazak ve'ematz!***

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