



Hugs are NOT Seasonal

Here's my takeaway from Sukkot for this year. To be more specific, from the mitzva of the Arba'a Minim - Lulav, Etrog, Hadassim, Aravot.

I have a memory from when I was growing up in Crown Heights in Brooklyn. On the first day of Sukkot the Rabbi's drasha was about the Four Species representing different parts of the body - heart, spine, eyes, lips.

On the second day he would describe the Arba'a Minim as four different types of Jews.

Both ideas come from Vayikra Rabba. I would like to focus on the second one.

The requirement of taking all four together, otherwise there is no mitzva makes the point that all Jews - every Jew is part of K'lal Yisrael and none of us should dismiss the value of any Jew, no matter what he lacks in mitzvot and character traits that define Judaism.

We not only take all four together, but there is an additional HIDUR to

make an AGUDA, a bundle of the Lulav, Hadassim, and Aravot, thereby further bringing the different types of Jews together.

But it doesn't stop there. The mitzva is accomplished when we take all four species, all four types of Jews and hug them with both our hands, wrapping our fingers lovingly around them.

And we are not done yet. Not that it is a requirement, but there is a strong, widespread minhag (custom) to fulfill the mitzva, to bench esrog (as some of us used to call it), specifically in the Sukka. In shul, you will see people taking their Lulav into the shul's sukka after the repetition of the Amida of Shacharit and before Hallel. There are many people who will perform the mitzva at home (in the Sukka) before they go to shul to daven.

Technically, Sukka and the Four Minim are two separate mitzvot. But the custom to take the Lulav in the Sukka is very common.

And what happens in the Sukka? For this we go to a different Midrash, that of Shir HaShirim.

On 2:6 - "His left hand is beneath my head; His right hand embraces me." The Midrash interprets 'His left hand is beneath my head' as referring to the Sukka. The Pri Eitz Chayim, a sefer that contains many of the Ari

z"l's teachings, says that the minimum requirement for a Sukka to have two walls and at least a Tefach of a third wall resembles the upper arm, the lower arm and the hand, embracing the one in the Sukka. This is HaShem's hug. And this is especially so when we are in the Sukka bringing together Am Yisrael and symbolically hugging them. When we embrace one another, how fitting that we feel HaShem's embrace.

And as I indicated in the title of this PTDT, our attempt to unify our people (not to homogenize us all, but unify and not exclude) should be a goal towards which we strive and work - all year round. **PTDT**