

**Good Yom Tov Everyone.** Anyone who has ever seen a Jew preparing for Sukkos can testify to the simchah - the happiness which the mitzvahs of that Yom Tov bring. One of the most special preparations for Sukkos is the selection and purchase of the Four Species, the lulav, esrog, hadassim and aravos. Hashem commands us in the Torah portion Emor, regarding the Four Species saying: "You shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of the citron tree (esrog), the branches of date palms (lulav), twigs of a plaited tree (hadassim - myrtle twigs), and brook willows (aravos); and you shall rejoice before Hashem, you G-d for a seven day period." (Vayikra - Leviticus 23:40) We see from this verse that taking these four species brings happiness. In fact, we refer to Sukkos in the Yom Tov prayers as zman simchasainu - the time of our happiness. Our happiness on Sukkos is therefore very much dependent on the quality of the Four Species which we buy to fulfill the mitzvahs. The lesson we learn is that the more time and effort we put into the mitzvahs, the happier and spiritually fulfilled we will be in life.

As Sukkos approached one year in Poland, it was very difficult to acquire the myrtle twigs for Sukkos. All the myrtle twigs that were imported into Poland were dry and invalid for the mitzvah. The Holy Rebbe, Reb Shmuel Abba of Zichlin bought a number of bunches, hoping to find a few suitable twigs amongst them, but the Rebbe was disappointed at finding none suitable for the mitzvah of the Four Species.

The Chassidim who came to Zichlin for Yom Kippur heard about the difficulty of their Rebbe in finding myrtle twigs. One of the Chassidim, a wealthy chassid by the name of Reb Yitzchok Zifkovitz from Azarkov, heard that there was a Church squire who lived in a village near his hometown who had myrtles growing in his garden. Reb Yitzchok told Reb Shmuel Abba of Zichlin about this possible source of myrtle twigs. Reb Yitzchok then undertook to supply the Rebbe with the myrtle twigs that the Rebbe wanted so much.

Once home, Reb Yitzchok called on the Church squire personally to ask him to sell some myrtle branches. Unfortunately, though, there was nothing left to sell: people had come from all over the surrounding district, buying all the branches and leaving nothing. Reb Yitzchok was very distressed. "Seeing that you are so obviously disappointed," said the Church squire, "I have an idea for you. Another Church squire who lives in such and such village over there also has myrtles growing in his garden, but it seems that the word has not yet got around. Let me send my man there to bring some for you."

The twigs he brought were so fresh and unblemished that Reb Yitzchok was happy to pay a good price for them. Early the next morning Reb Yitzchok dispatched the branches by special messenger to his Rebbe, Reb Shmuel Abba of Zichlin.

On his arrival at Zichlin with the precious bundle in hand, excitement in the town ran high. Every chassid in the village wanted to be the first to bring the good news to the Rebbe. The Rebbe was indeed happy to hear the news, and eagerly awaited the twigs themselves. Finally the messenger brought the myrtle twigs proudly into the study of the Rebbe. The Rebbe took one glance at the twigs and said: "I will not pronounce a blessing over these twigs, for I can see the shape of a cross on them."

And the Rebbe gave the order that the branches be removed from his house immediately. The messenger was dumbfounded. So much bother, so much exertion - only to have the Rebbe decline to use them for the mitzvah!?! But then what was there to do? He took his leave of the Rebbe, and set off on his sad journey home. Reb Yitzchok was very confused, and decided to investigate exactly where these myrtle twigs had been taken from.

On chol Hamoed - the Intermediate Days of the festival, Reb Yitzchok travelled to the village where that Church squire lived, and asked the man where the twigs in question had grown. The Church squire quickly took Reb Yitzchok to the spot where the twigs grew. Now all was clear: the myrtles grew among the gravestones, each topped by a cross, in the family cemetery of the Church squire.

Reb Yitzchok realized now what kind of vision his Rebbe blessed had. As the Psalmist says - "The secret of Hashem is with those who fear Him." (Tehillim 25:14) (from Sipurei Chassidim al HaMoadim, p.158, Reb S.Y. Zevin, R.U. Kaploun trans.) The commentator Radak explains this verse saying that Hashem reveals divine truths only to those Torah scholars who have fear of Hashem. (Radak as cited in The Metsudah Tehillim, p.44 on 25:14)

Mitzvahs bring with them tremendous happiness to a Jew. As we read in Psalms, "the laws of Hashem are upright, they gladden the heart."(19:9) In order to be guaranteed the most simchah - happiness from performing the commandments, we must try our best to perform the mitzvahs with the most effort possible. Then every day, not just the days of Sukkos, will be a happy and spiritually rewarding day. **Good Yom Tov Everyone.**