



פרשת לך לך
מרחשון תשפ"ג
שנת הקהל



HAKHEL IN THE PARSHA

The Rebbe connects the theme of Hakhel to the Mitzvah of the Bris Milah which is found at the end of Parshas Lech Lecha.

The Bris Milah is a covenant between Hashem and the Jewish people. It is a general covenant that connects us to Hashem and binds us to Torah and Mitzvos in an eternal bond.

The Bris also unites and connects all Jews to one another.

These are the same themes reflected in Hakhel; the unity of the Jewish people and the strengthening of the covenant (Bris) between Hashem and the Jewish people and our observance of the Mitzvos.

www.kollelmenachem.com.au/hakhel

CHASSIDUS LEARNING EVENING

All men and Bochorim are invited to join a community Chassidus learning evening in preparation for Chof Marcheshvan, the birthday of the Rebbe Rashab.

Thursday 8:00pm in the Goldhirsch Hall, with hot refreshments.

Followed by a Farbrengen and Lechaim marking the end of the Shivah for Aryeh Dovid ben Zev Lawrence Hoffman

A collection of Torah thoughts produced by Kollel Menachem

חידוש Chiddush



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Saving the soul of Moshiach

How should we look at a Jew who has fallen into the depths of the spiritual abyss?

In Parshas Lech Lecha we read about the War of Kings. An alliance of four kings, led by Amrafel (who our sages identify as Nimrod), conquered five other nations in battle, taking their residents as captives. One of these cities was Sodom and Avraham's nephew Lot was one of the captives.

On hearing this news, Avraham armed himself and set out in pursuit. Miraculously he defeated the mighty armies of the kings and freed his nephew and brought him home.

This seemingly trivial historical account has a deeper lesson for us.

In Tehillim it says עָבַדְי דָּוִד מְצָאתִי דָּוִד, "I found My servant Dovid". The Midrash on this Posuk says "Where did I find him (Dovid)? In Sodom". What does it mean that Hashem found Dovid in Sodom?

The Midrash is referring to Lot. Lot would later father Moav from whom Rus, the great-grandmother of Dovid Hamelech descended of Moav. In Lot, in Sodom, Hashem had planted the seeds of the lineage of Dovid.

Dovid also refers to Moshiach. The Mekubalim teach that in Lot was the spark (Nitzutz) of Moshiach. This is what the battle was for. Nimrod wanted to capture and snuff out this spark. This is also the soul that the king of Sodom referred to when he said to Avraham תֵּן לִי הַנַּפֶּשׁ, give me *the soul*, the unique soul of Moshiach.

Rashi observes that it was Lot's choice to live in Sodom that caused him to be captured. Lot had grown up in the tent of Avraham. Yet he chose to abandon the ways of Avraham and join a corrupt community of the worst sinners.

Despite this, Avraham put his own life at risk and went with Mesiras Nefesh to save Lot and the spark of Moshiach that rested within him.

We live a time where many of our fellow Jews, like Lot, find themselves far away from the ways Avraham Avinu. They are lost in 'Sodom', either by choice or through ignorance.

The essence of every Neshama is the spark of Moshiach. It may be hidden under layers of concealment, but it remains pure and complete. When we see the Jew lost in 'Sodom', we should not judge their external situation, but rather see them for their inner essence. And with love and Mesiras Nefesh, we must try to bring them out of their spiritual captivity and back to their roots.

In risking his life to save Lot, Avraham instilled this love, self-sacrifice and moral-calling in his descendants.

This is the vision of the Rebbe and his call to each of us in our times; To see and sense how every Jew is precious, carrying a spark of Moshiach's soul, the Pintele Yid. And to do whatever we can to help reveal that soul within them and bring them back to a positive engagement and observance of Yiddishkeit.

1. Netziv
2. Antiquities of the Jews book 4 chapter 8. As a source on religious matters, the work of Josephus is questionable as we find a number of descriptions and statements that run contrary to the sages – for example the dimensions of the Beis Hamikdash
3. Tiferes Yisroel Sotah 7:8
4. See below an explanation how this can be deduced from the verses
5. Sotah 41b
6. This is in contrast to the previous Mishna which discusses the reading of the Torah on Yom Kippur by the Kohen Gadol. That Mishna does not call this "the Parsha of the Kohen Gadol" but merely the "blessings of the Kohen Gadol". This suggests that the Mitzvah of Hakhel requires that the reading be by the king
7. Perhaps this was the last Hakhel
8. Mitzvah 612
9. Hilchos Chagigah 3:1
10. Hilchos Chagigah 3:3
11. Unlike the Sefer Hachinuch. See Likutei Sichos volume 34 Vayeilech Sicha 1, note 20
12. Like the Tiferes Yisrael
13. Melachim 2 23:1
14. See Rambam Hilchos Melachim 1:3. This was also the understanding of the Chizkuni that as the leader of the generation, Yehoshua was the king. Presumably this was the basis for Rashi's commentary on the Chumash.
15. See Tosfos Yomtov who writes that he did not understand the derivation from the Sifri.
16. Sanhedrin 22a

The weekly Halacha analysis

Do we need a king for Hakhel? - Part 1

Rabbi Yonason Johnson

The Pesukim which teach the Mitzvah of Hakhel do not mention that the Torah must be read by the king. The Torah simply says “you must read this Torah before all of Israel”, without identifying who this ‘you’ is.

Prior to the Mitzvah of Hakhel, Moshe was addressing the Kohanim and the Zekeinim (elders), instructing them to place the Sefer Torah that he had written and place it in the Aron. Immediately afterwards, the Torah introduces the Mitzvah of Hakhel “and he commanded them saying at the end of seven years...”.

This would seem to suggest that the directive to read the Torah at Hakhel was for one of the Kohanim or Zekeinim and not a king.

King, elder or Kohen Gadol

There are many commentators and Halachic authorities who write that the Torah does not need to be read by the king and can be read by someone else, such as the Kohanim¹ or elders.

The Ralbag writes that the Torah was read either by the king, the Kohen Gadol or the Nosi. Abarbanel writes that the Torah is read by the Gadol of the nation, either a king or a Shofeit (judge).

The Minchas Chinuch, on the Mitzvah of Hakhel writes; “I do not know whether the requirement that the king read is a Halacha L’Moshe Misinai (an oral tradition) and if there is no king, there is no Mitzvah, and if so, the Mitzvah was not observed until the time of Shaul. Or, perhaps the king is not necessary, but merely the greatest person of the generation...” He concludes “and this makes more logical sense”.

The writings of Josephus² describes how at the Mitzvah of Hakhel, the Torah was read by the Kohen Gadol.

One of the questions raised to support this understanding, is that if the king is required to read at Hakhel, how was the Mitzvah observed throughout the period of the Judges, before the first king was anointed³.

Authorities that require a king

In contrast to this position, most of the authorities and codifiers do require the reading to be by the king.

In his commentary on the Torah, Rashi writes “the king was the one who would read”. Rashi explains the simple (literal) understanding of the verses, suggesting that the requirement of a

king is clearly understood from the verses of Hakhel themselves⁴.

The Mishna⁵ refers to the reading at Hakhel as the “Parsha of the king”⁶. It describes how the Sefer Torah would be given to the king and how he would read it. The Mishna also describes the Hakhel reading by king Agripas, the last king from the Hasmonean dynasty before the destruction of the second Temple⁷.

The earliest codifiers of the Mitzvos; the Yereim, Baal Halachos Gedolos and Rabbi Saadiah Gaon all write that the king was the one who had to read. Some even listed this as a separate Mitzvah to the gathering as discussed in last week’s edition.

Sefer Hachinuch⁸ in his outline of the Mitzvah writes “we are commanded for the Jewish people to gather... and to read before them from the Book of Mishneh Torah,” without mentioning that the king would read. But in the details of the Mitzvah he writes “the king was the one obligated to read”. He further writes that if he did not, he was nullifying the observance of the Mitzvah.

The Rambam records the Mitzvah of Hakhel in the laws of Chagigah. In the first Halacha⁹ where he defines the essence of the Mitzvah, he does not mention that the king reads the Torah. Only in a subsequent Halacha¹⁰ he writes that the king would read from the Torah. He does not write that the king had to (חייב) read¹¹.

Either this was out of respect for the king¹² or some other reason as will be discussed later in our next edition.

From where do we learn that the king reads?

As stated previously, the Torah does not specify who should read the Torah at Hakhel. So from where do these authorities derive that it must be the king?

One possibility, as suggested by the Minchas Chinuch, is that it is a Halacha Lemoshe Misinai – an unwritten oral transmission as taught to Moshe Rabbeinu.

The Sefer Mitzvos Gadol writes that we derive this from the Neviim. The Sefer Mitzvos Katan explains that it is derived from the Book of Kings¹³ recording of king Yoshiyahu’s public reading of the Torah;

“And the king sent forth and all of the elders of Yehuda and Yerushalaim gathered to him and

the king ascended to the House of Hashem... and all of the people from small to old and he read in their ears all of the words of the Book of the Covenant that was found in the House of Hashem”.

A subsequent verse describes how the king stood upon a platform and exhorted the people to observe the commandments. These verses are very similar to the Torah’s description of Hakhel and it is suggested that this was indeed a Hakhel gathering.

The difficulty with this explanation is how can we derive the interpretation and application of a Biblical Mitzvah from the later writings of the Neviim and Kesuvim. How would we have known this requirement before the Neviim were recorded?

In his commentary on the Mishna, the Tosfos Yomtov writes that the requirement that the king read the Torah can be derived from Parsha itself. Even though Moshe was addressing the Kohanim and Zekeinim, the word תקרא (you shall read) is written in singular form.

This refers to Yehoshua who was also mentioned earlier in the Parsha. Yeshoshua was a king. Even though he did not have the title, as the leader of the generation in his time, he had the status of a king¹⁴.

In his commentary on the Gemara, Rashi writes that we learn that the king must read from the Sifri on “the Parsha of the king”, which reads את משנה התורה הזאת.

“The Parsha of the king” refers to the passage in Parshas Shoftim which details the Mitzvah of appointing a king and the Mitzvos that apply to him. One of these Mitzvos is for the king to write a Sefer Torah which he would keep with him at all times. The verse uses the term “Mishneh Hatorah”.

Mishneh Torah usually refers to the Book of Devarim. The Sifri learns that even though the king had to write the entire Torah, it is called Mishneh Torah because all of the Parshios read at Hakhel were from the Book of Devarim – Mishneh Torah¹⁵.

The Meiri¹⁶ brings a version of the text of the Sifri that the king’s Sefer Torah is called משנה תורה because עתידה להשתנות, that in the future it will read (שנון). He writes that this refers to the public reading at Hakhel.

Sources on reverse