



פרשת וירא
מרחשון תשפ"ג
שנת הקהל



HAKHEL IN THE PARSHA

In Parshas Vayeira we read how "Avraham planted an Eshel in Be'er Sheva and called there in the name of Hashem"

Chaza"l explain that Avraham had an inn where he would bring in travellers and would bring them to a recognition of Hashem.

This ingathering of guests and travellers for this purpose was like the gathering of Hakhel which was in order to strengthen Yiras Hashem.

In another connection, the end of the Parsha records the Akeidas Yitzchak which took place on Har Hamoriah. After the Akeidah Avraham names the place "Hashem Yireh" because "on Hashem's mountain He will be seen".

The Mitzvah of Hakhel took place "in the place that He will choose", a reference to Har Habayis. The holiness and the revelation of the Divine Presence at this site was an integral part of instilling the awe of Hashem in the people, which was the purpose of Hakhel

SHABBOS SHIUR

The community is invited to join the Shabbos shiur between Mincha and Maariv in the Yeshivah Shule. Topic: The Alter Rebbe's reconciliation of the paradox between free-choice and Hashem knowing everything.

A collection of Torah thoughts produced by Kollel Menachem



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"Do not send your hand against the child"

"We have to kick him out of the house, he is a terrible influence and danger to our son." So said Sarah said to Avraham about his son Yishmael.

The Torah tells us Sarah's cause for concern. She wanted Avraham to send Yishmael away because she saw him "Metzachek". Rashi, quotes our sages that this word refers to each of the three cardinal Aveiros of idolatry and immorality and also bloodshed, as Yishmael would shoot arrows at Yitzchak.

Yishmael did not reflect or live up to the values of his father's home and upbringing. Sarah did not want Yishmael to stay in the house where he may be a negative influence on Yitzchak. In her eyes, Yishmael's presence in the home posed a spiritual and physical danger.

Avraham was no fool. He knew who Yishmael was and how he was behaving. But he did not want to send him away. This was the same Yishmael that Avraham davened for when Hashem promised him another child; Lu Yishmael Yichye Lefanecha - if only Yishmael will live before you.

Avraham believed in Yishmael and davened that Hashem help him to do Teshuvah. Avraham loved Yishmael and wanted to keep him close. He could not agree to Sarah's request.

Hashem told Avraham to listen to and do what Sarah was asking.

This past week a member of the community asked me about this episode. Surely we would not do this now; to "throw-out" a child who is rebellious. Why would Hashem say such a thing? And what lesson are we supposed to take from it?

Perhaps that is the lesson! That only Hashem Himself, who is all-knowing and absolute truth and goodness, could command such a thing. And only if Hashem Himself directly said to do so, would one be able to take such a drastic step.

At the end of the Parsha we read about the Akeidah. Hashem tells Avraham to take Yitzchak and offer him as a sacrifice—effectively a command to kill his son. As Avraham was ready to bring down the knife to fulfil this command, an angel calls out, telling him "do not send for the your hand against the child."

When it comes to a death-sentence, only Hashem alone can issue the command. But to save a soul, we listen to even a far-lesser voice of authority.

We live in times where sadly many Jewish parents and families face the challenge of children who have gone away from the values of their upbringing. In some cases they may be caught up in very harmful and negative behaviours.

Parents struggle with worry about them being a negative influence on their other children. Sadly in the past there was a belief that such children should be removed from the home.

I believe that the Torah wants us to know that "throwing a child out of the house" is like pronouncing a death sentence; taking a tremendous emotional and psychological toll with terrible risks ר"ל. These children desperately need the love, support and protection of their parents, home and family.

Yishmael was in a different category entirely. None of the extreme behaviours we see in our homes today are anything like Yishmael! And even for him, Avraham went out to bat, to try at all costs to keep him home. Only Hashem could make that call.

Today we hear voices of reason from Daas Torah, Rabbin and therapists telling us "do not send your hand forth against the child". Like Avraham at the Akeidah, this is the voice that we need to heed.

In the merit of our unconditional love and dedication to every child, may Hashem shower us with His love and bring us back to our home, to Yerushalaim with Moshiach Tzidkeinu.

1. It is generally accepted that once Shemittah was no longer a Biblical Mitzvah (after the Exile of the two and a half tribes from the Eastern-side of the Jordan when Yovel ceased), Hakhel, which is connected to Shemittah, was also no longer a Biblical Mitzvah. If so, the Mishna's account of Agripas' Hakhel would be Rabbinic.
2. See Likutei Sichos volume 19
3. This would be the view of Rashi in his commentary on the simple meaning of the Chumash. On the Posuk of Hakhel he writes simply that the king would read, suggesting that this is the simple meaning of the verse.
4. Rashi Sotah 41b
5. See Likutei Sichos volume 19
6. See Rashi Bava Basra 14b that the Sefer Haazarah written by Moshe Rabbeinu was read at Hakhel. Tosfos writes that this was only when the Mishkan stood in Shiloh and Nov. In the Beis Hamikdash they could not go into the Kodosh Hakodoshim to take out the Sefer Torah for this purpose. See Tzafnas Paneach
7. See also Tzafnas Paneach on Parshas Vayeilech
8. He points out how the Mitzvah of Hakhel and the Mitzvah for a king to write a Torah scroll employ similar terminology; to learn and to fear Hashem.
9. Mitzvos Aseh 16
10. Parshios 10
11. Baal Halachos Gedolos, Rambam Sefer Hamitzvos, Sefer Hachinuch, Yereim



The weekly Halacha analysis

Do we need a king for Hakhel? - Part 2

Rabbi Yonason Johnson

In last week's edition we presented the opinions on whether the Torah reading at Hakhel must be done by the king, or if it could be read by someone else. The obvious ramification being that in the absence of a king, could the Mitzvah of Hakhel still be observed.

This question would have been relevant in the years before Shaul was anointed as the first king. It would also have been relevant during the greater part of the second Temple era, where there was no king until the Chashmonaim reinstated a monarchy¹.

Even according to the authorities who write that the king should read the Torah at Hakhel, it is still possible to argue that it was not integral to Hakhel and that the Mitzvah could still be observed in the absence of a king.

The Rebbe² presents the following Chakira on the reading by the king at Hakhel, which could be viewed in one of two ways;

Is it a requirement of Hakhel that the king read the Torah or is it a requirement of the king to read the Torah at Hakhel?

The practical outcome of this Chakira is whether the king is integral to Hakhel or not. If it is a requirement of Hakhel, the king is essential and without a king the Mitzvah could not be fulfilled. If it is a requirement of the king - that he should be the one to read, then it is not integral to the Mitzvah of Hakhel and the Mitzvah could still be fulfilled without a king.

The Rebbe explains that the answer to this Chakira depends on the source from which we derive the king's obligation to read.

One possibility is that we derive the requirement from the passage of Hakhel itself. When the Torah says "you shall read" Moshe is addressing Yehoshua who has the status of a king. Based on this, the king reading would be an integral element of the Mitzvah of Hakhel as it is learned from the Mitzvah of Hakhel itself³.

Another view is that we derive the king's obligation to read at Hakhel from the Mitzvah for the king to write a Sefer Torah found in Parshas Shoftim; "and he shall write for himself this Mishneh Hatorah". The Sifri⁴ explains that the Torah uses the term "Mishneh Torah" because the Parshios read by the king at Hakhel all come from the Book of Devarim

According to this derivation, it could be argued that the king's reading at Hakhel is not a re-

quirement of the Mitzvah of Hakhel itself. Rather it is one of the king's personal Mitzvos, like the other Mitzvos recorded there. This would mean that if there was a king, he would have the Mitzvah to read, but not as an integral element of the Mitzvah of Hakhel itself.

The Rebbe⁵ suggests another practical difference arising from where we derive the king's obligation to read the Torah at Hakhel.

If we derive the requirement from the Parsha of Hakhel itself, then it would appear that the king would read from the Sefer Torah written by Moshe Rabbeinu, which is the Torah referred to immediately before the Mitzvah of Hakhel. Moshe instructs the Kohanim to "take this Sefer Hatorah and place it in the Aron". This Torah is known as the Sefer Haazarah⁶.

If we derive the king's reading as a personal obligation from the passage of the laws of the king - which refers to the king's Torah scroll as Mishneh Hatorah, then it would seem that the king would read from this personal Sefer Torah⁷.

An Amazing Chiddush

In his scholarly work on the Sefer Hamitzvos of Rabbeinu Saadiah Gaon, Rabbi Yerucham Fishel Perlow (Poland 1846-1934) writes a novel explanation on this topic. Not only does he assert that the king would read from his own personal Sefer Torah, he writes that the entire purpose of the Mitzvah for a king to write a Sefer Torah is to have it for the Hakhel reading and that they are the one-and-same Mitzvah⁸.

With this Chiddush he reconciles a number of contradictions between two of the poetic works of Rasa⁹ that enumerate the 613 Mitzvos.

In his Sefer Hamitzvos, Rabbeinu Saadiah Gaon lists two separate Mitzvos relating to Hakhel;

In the positive individual Mitzvos⁹ he writes "and the king will read it Belahakim". In the communal Mitzvos¹⁰ he writes "and the people at the blowing (trumpet) of the king gather".

Note that in this work Rasa⁹ mentions that the reading was performed by the king.

Rabbi Perlow makes another observation. In the Sefer Hamitzvos, Rasa⁹ does not record the personal Mitzvah for the king to write his own Sefer Torah. This is strange because it is an explicit Mitzvah in Parshas Shoftim which is counted in all other similar works¹¹.

The second work attributed to Rabbeinu Saadiah Gaon is the Azharos. It too enumerates the 613 Mitzvos in the form of a liturgical poem, based on the 10 Commandments.

Concerning the Mitzvah of Hakhel he writes; רב - מהיר יקרא ספר במועד שמיטת עדני - "a swift master will read the scroll at the time of the Shemittah". Here Rasa⁹ does not mention that the reading is performed by the king as he does in the Sefer Hamitzvos, but rather that it is read by a master or sage.

In a further difference, in the Azharos, Rasa⁹ does record the Mitzvah of the king to write a Sefer Torah, writing השבעת לקצין לכתוב לו פתשגן - אך למוד ילמד לצדק - "You have adjured the leader to write for himself Patshegen, but he should teach it to bring righteousness." Patshegen is a Persian term found in the Megillah which means a "copy", referring here to the Torah scroll.

The addition of the words "he should teach it" alludes to Hakhel where the king would publicly read from this Torah scroll.

Rabbi Perlow explains that according to Rabbeinu Saadiah Gaon the Mitzvah of Hakhel is a single Mitzvah for the people to gather for Hakhel where the Torah is read. The Mitzvah of Hakhel does not require the king per se, as indicated in the Azharos.

There is an additional Mitzvah for the king to read the Torah at Hakhel which requires him to write a Sefer Torah for this purpose. This is presumably follows the Sifri quoted above.

This is why in each of the works he only records two Mitzvos; In the Sefer Hamitzvos he records the Mitzvah of the Hakhel gathering and the Mitzvah for the king to read at Hakhel - but not a separate Mitzvah for the king to write a Sefer Torah.

In the Azharos he records the Mitzvah of the Hakhel reading (which could be done by anyone) and he records the Mitzvah of the king to write a Sefer Torah for the purpose of reading at Hakhel - including the reading at Hakhel by the king in this Mitzvah, rather than listing it as a separate Mitzvah.

Based on this, it appears that the opinion of Rabbeinu Saadiah Gaon is that the king reading at Hakhel is a personal Mitzvah of the king and not part of the actual Mitzvah of Hakhel itself. As such, the Mitzvah of Hakhel can be fully observed without a king.

Sources on reverse