

לזכות הרה"ת ר' הלל ראובן וזוגתו מרת חנה
וילדיהם שניאור זלמן, דבורה לאה, ח' מושקא, מנחם מענדל,
חיים ברוך, ישראל, שיינא, שטערנא שרה, שמואל צבי שיחיו
סקאפ

”והקהלת כולם יחד היא שעמדה והיא שתעמוד לכל בני”י”

GATHER TO SAVE THE NATION

The Wonders of Hakhel



In connection with shnas Hakhel, A Chassidisher Derher is pleased to host Rabbi Yosef Minkowitz of Montreal for some words of inspiration on the importance of Hakhel and the role it plays, spanning three Hakhel cycles with the Rebbe.

This “chassidische farbrengen” on paper, filled with inspirational stories and first-hand memories of encounters with the Rebbe, will surely inspire our readership with a very timely message.

קוּגֵם אֶת הַנֶּחֱדָה - אֵת הַיָּמִים הַנִּפְיָסִים וְהַיָּסָדִים

We, as Chassidim, have been *zoche* to millions of lines of Torah from our Rebbe, each word precious and meaningful. Because of this vastness, there may be some lines to which less attention has been paid than others. I would like to bring attention to a few precious lines in the vast sea of the Rebbe's Torah.

There is a letter penned by the Rebbe in the beginning of Cheshvan 5734.¹ At the end of the letter there are a few lines that really underscore the immense importance of *Hakhel*. The Rebbe writes:

“וניתוספה הדגשה בענין הקהל האנשים הנשים והטף במאורע שהתחיל ביום הקדוש דשנת הקהל זו, שהי' מכוון ג"כ כנגד אנשים הנשים וטף בתור קהל בני",
 הקהלת כולם יחד היא שעמדה והיא שתעמוד לכל בני, אשר כהבטחת הנביא: הוי' צבאות יגן עליהם, על עמו גוי אחד בארץ, הוא גאלם וינטלם וינשאם כל ימי עולם.”

“An additional emphasis on the *Hakhel* [unity] of the men, women, and children took place with the event that began on Yom Kippur this year [i.e. the Yom Kippur War], which was directed against the men, women and children, as they comprise קהל בני ישראל (the Jewish people).

“Everyone uniting together [קהלת כולם יחד] is what saved and will continue to save all Jewish people, as the *navi* promises, *Hashem Tz'vakos* shall shield them—his nation, one people in the land—He will redeem them and hold and carry them forever.”

The Rebbe makes it abundantly clear that the power of *Hakhel*—everyone uniting together—is what protected us from those who wished to harm the Yidden as a קהל (an entire nation), *chas veshalom*.



תשל"ד

1973

Nearly seven years had gone by since the miraculous events of the Six Day War. The Israeli government, confident in their ability to repel any strike with ease, relied on the Bar-Lev Line, a series of fortifications in the Sinai Desert, to protect from Egyptian aggression. The Rebbe advised time and again against this strategy²,

but the Israeli government did not change its stance. Eager not to be seen as the aggressors, they did not so much as muster their reserves, even as the Egyptian Army massed at the Suez Canal.

In the summer of 5733, the Rebbe urgently requested³ that there should be gatherings of Jewish children. The Rebbe emphasized that this will protect the Jewish people, as the *possuk* says, מפי עוללים ויונקים יסדת, עוז... להשביט אויב ומתנקם Out of the mouths of infants and sucklings You have established might....to silence the enemy and avenger.

During the farbrengen of *Shabbos Selichos*⁴, the Rebbe once again asked



ISRAELI SOLDIERS ON THE FRONTLINES SHAKE THE LULAV AND ESROG IN A MAKESHIFT SUKKAH SHORTLY AFTER THE START OF THE YOM KIPPUR WAR.



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that gatherings for children be held throughout the days of *selichos* and *Asseres Yemei Teshuvah*. The Rebbe also said that he would give each child two coins, one to be his messenger to give to tzedakah, and the second as payment for fulfilling this job. At the rally, the children should say Shema, Baruch Shem, Torah Tzivah, and Avinu Malkeinu. The Rebbe also composed a special phrase for the children to recite, beginning with the words, “The Baal Shem Tov said.”

In a *michtav klali* sent out on Vov Tishrei 5734⁵, the Rebbe discussed *Shnas Hakhel*. The Rebbe referred to the entire year—even before Sukkos—as the year of *Hakhel*. A clear emphasis was being made on protecting *Am Yisrael* by gathering Yidden together and the importance of *Hakhel*.

Two days later, on 8 Tishrei, the Rebbe asked Rabbi Hodakov to add a small insert to the letter published on Vov Tishrei. As a side point in the letter, the Rebbe had mentioned there that the tranquility during the time period of Shlomo Hamelech, expressed itself through the fact that there was a very good relationship between the Jewish people and the other nations. Now, the Rebbe asked that a small note be added on to the above, “So it was in some of the following generations, as well throughout Jewish history; and so it will be again finally in the days of Moshiach?”

Days later, on the holiest day of the year—Yom Kippur—the Arab forces launched an all-out attack. The vaunted Bar-Lev Line fell in hours, and as the IDF scrambled to muster its soldiers, the Egyptian troops marched into the Sinai Peninsula. Miraculously, they never continued to the Israeli cities, and eventually the Yidden were victorious.

A few weeks later, on Shabbos Parshas Toldos⁶, the Rebbe explained that there is no question that the Israeli victory during the Yom Kippur War was a supernatural miracle; in fact an even greater miracle than that of the Six-Day War. When the Arab armies crossed the Suez Canal and breached the Bar-Lev Line, nothing stood in their path to Yerushalayim and Tel Aviv, and Heaven forbend what could have been the result had they reached the cities. The same was the case at the Syrian



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THE REBBE ADDRESSES THE LAG BOMER PARADE, 5727.

front. Yet, a supernatural miracle occurred: the Arab forces halted their advance after only a short distance, giving the Israeli army time to mobilize their troops and beat back the Arab forces.

In the above letter from the beginning of Cheshvan, the Rebbe spelled it out clearly: The power of *Hakhel*—the gathering of Jewish men, women, and children (הקהלת כולם יחד)—is what protected the Jewish nation from an attack aimed against the Jewish people—men, women, and children (as a קהל).

While thinking about what the Rebbe wrote in connection with the *nissim* of the Yom Kippur War, I noticed something incredible. This was one of three occasions that the entire Jewish nation [as a קהל] and Eretz Yisroel were in terrible danger, and the Rebbe emphasized *Hakhel*, with great *nissim* to follow. The other two were 5727 and 5741.



תשכ"ז

1967

The year 5727 was the first time that the Rebbe emphasized the importance of the entire year being a *shnas Hakhel*. The concept of the entire year being a year of *Hakhel* is the Rebbe's *chiddush*⁷, which was introduced for the first time in תשכ"ז. (In the two preceding *Hakhel* years during the *nesius*, the Rebbe mentioned *Hakhel* in connection with Sukkos, but not in connection with the entire year.)

During this very year, Eretz Yisroel faced an enormous threat from all the Arab countries surrounding Eretz Yisroel. Amassing vast armies, they planned to wipe out the Jewish nation in Eretz Yisroel, *rachmana litzlan*.

NOTHING SHOULD BE CHANGED. THE WEDDING WILL TAKE PLACE ON THE SAME DATE AS ORIGINALLY PLANNED, IN ERETZ YISROEL.

As the clouds of war gathered, consulates from many countries urged their citizens to leave immediately, as parks were surveyed for use as cemeteries ^{הי"ל}, while the enemy amassed along the borders.

Many rebbes and *roshei yeshivos* advised their followers to heed the word of the consulates and leave Eretz Yisroel. The Rebbe, however, stood firm, time and time again instructing everyone to remain in Eretz Yisroel, the land that Hashem's eyes are always upon.

I was a *bochur* at the time on shlichus in Melbourne, Australia, and I recall the intense fear that was prevalent, as well as the impact that the Rebbe's words had on everyone.

Rabbi Chaim Gutnick's daughter was then studying in seminary in Eretz Yisroel, and just like many other parents, he wanted her to leave before the war broke out. He wrote about this to the Rebbe, and the answer he received was that whatever can be done is already being done by Hashem, and Hashem can be relied upon.

On Lag B'omer, at the parade, the Rebbe spoke forcefully about the situation in Eretz Yisroel. The Rebbe promised that the Yidden in Eretz Yisroel would have a great victory⁸. [The following Shabbos the Rebbe also launched *mitvza tefillin*, saying that through our heightened involvement in this *mitvza*, the enemies will flee.]

I recall that when the tape recording of that famous *sicha* finally reached Australia—around a week later, only days before the war broke out—Rabbi Chaim Gutnick cried like a small child.

Rabbi Zev Katz was a *chosson* at the time, and his wedding was scheduled to take place in Yerushalayim a few days after Shavuos. His family wrote to the Rebbe that they wished to change the location, or possibly even the date. The Rebbe said that nothing should be changed. The wedding will take place on the same date as originally planned, in Eretz Yisroel⁹.

Tensions grew by the day, as the world watched and waited with bated breath.

Then, an astounding miracle took place.

In a daring, pre-emptive strike, the Israeli Air Force wiped out virtually the entire Egyptian Air Force. With air superiority guaranteed, the ground battle took only a few days. Facing a force more than double their size, the Israeli army was miraculously victorious, routing the enemy and conquering vast swathes of land. A situation that had seemed hopeless to many had been transformed into an enormous victory, and the Jewish people were saved.

ISRAELI SOLDIERS LOOK UPON HAR HABAYIS SHORTLY BEFORE THE ATTACK TO OVERTAKE THE OLD CITY OF YERUSHALAYIM.



While the Rebbe never openly spoke about it with regards to 5727, the words of the Rebbe—“הקהלת כולם יחד היא שעמדה והיא שתעמוד לכל בני”י”—certainly apply here too.

The Rebbe’s *shturem*, for the first time, about the year being *shnas Hakhel*, along with the importance of gathering and uniting the Jewish people, may have been crucial to the miraculous salvation that occurred.



תשמ"א

1981

In Iraq, an evil dictator by the name of Saddam Hussein had risen to power. He spoke of destroying the entire Jewish nation, *rachamana litzlan*. Bent on achieving this, he began construction of a nuclear reactor, intending to create enough fissile material to make a weapon capable of doing devastating harm.

That year during Tishrei, the Rebbe founded Tzivos Hashem, uniting Jewish children around the world. Later that year the Rebbe urged that a *sefer Torah* be written for the Jewish children, in which each child will get their own letter, uniting them through Torah¹⁰. The Rebbe connected this *sefer Torah* with *shnas Hakhel*, saying that at the very latest, it should be completed by כ"ט אלול so that it should be completed during *shnas Hakhel*¹¹.

As it got closer to Shavuos, the Rebbe intensified the urgency of this project. On Shabbos Parshas Bechukosai, the Rebbe said that in conjunction with the current situation, they should boost the process of signing children up for a letter in the *sefer Torah*¹². On Shabbos Parshas Bamidbar, the Rebbe spoke again about the *sefer Torah* and asked that Tzivos Hashem rallies be held in preparation for Shavuos. The Rebbe added a personal request [*bakashah nafshis*] that these announcements should be spread out throughout the world¹³. On Shabbos Parshas Nasso, the day before Erev Shavuos, the Rebbe said that people should make an effort to register



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THE CONCLUSION OF KOS SHEL BROCHA, MOTZAEI SHAVUOS 5741.



CHILDREN SURROUND THE SOFER AS THE FIRST SHEET OF THE CHILDREN'S SEFER TORAH IS WRITTEN.

as many children as possible before Shavuos, and that a list of registrants should be sent in to the Rebbe before Yom Tov¹⁴. Men, women and children—in middle of Yom Tov preparations—stopped all that they were doing and went door to door to sign up children for a letter in the *sefer Torah*.

Meanwhile, in Eretz Yisroel, a fateful debate was underway. As construction on the Iraqi reactor continued, a daring proposal was put forth: A squadron of Israeli jets would fly about 1,000 miles across hostile airspace to bomb the reactor. Some members of the government advocated for the strike, while others were against it, fearing international backlash. Eventually the decision was made that the strike would take place.

Sunday afternoon, Erev Shavuos 5741, *Shnas Hakhel*, the Israeli Air Force jets took off. Miraculously encountering no resistance, they closed in on the reactor. The bombs struck their target, destroying the reactor, and with it, the plot against the Jewish nation. On top of that, every IAF pilot returned home safely.

We cannot presume to know the reasons for the Rebbe's holy actions. However, based on what the Rebbe revealed in the letter, the connection seems clear. Once again, **Hakhel**—the unity of the Jewish people—had protected them, saving them from harm directed at them as a קהל [nation], as the Rebbe wrote in the letter "הקהלה כולם יחד היא שעמדה והיא שתעמוד לכל בני"י"—Everyone uniting together [קהלה] is what saved and will **continue to save** all Jewish people.”



The Gemara explains¹⁵ the meaning of the *possuk* ¹⁶ לעושה נפלאות לבדו—“He who does miracles Himself;”—that only Hashem Himself knows that this is a miracle, but the one to whom the miracle occurred is not aware.

Additionally, it says in the *possuk*, לא אשים עליך כי אני, “Every illness that I inflicted upon Mitzrayim I will not afflict you with, for I am Hashem, your Healer.”¹⁷ The Rebbe asks: If it's לא אשים עליך—meaning that we are not afflicted—what purpose does a healer serve? The Rebbe explains¹⁸ that Hashem's *refuah* is in such a way that the person doesn't even become sick.

After three consecutive *shnos Hakhel* with great miracles occurring for the Yidden, perhaps in the merit of *Hakhel*, additional great *nissim* happened that only Hashem לבדו knows without us even recognizing it.

By looking back at these open miracles and the power of *Hakhel*, we can strengthen our *koch* in *Hakhel*, continuing to fulfill the Rebbe's *horaos* to make *Hakhel* a focal point in our lives and the lives of every Yid. Surely the ultimate *nes* will then take place: the coming of Moshiach when “ואתם תלוקטו לאחד אחד בני ישראל”¹⁹, and “קהל גדול ישובו הנה”²⁰, may it happen speedily in our days. **1**

1. Likkutei Sichos vol 10 p. 194. Igros Kodesh vol 29, p. 15
 2. See Igros Kodesh vol 27, p. 208
 3. See Likkutei Sichos vol 13, p. 166, 266 and onward. Vol 14 p. 261 and onward and p. 404
 4. Sichos Kodesh 5733 vol. 2 p. 399
 5. Likkutei Sichos, vol 9, pgs 484-489
 6. Sichos Kodesh 5734 vol 1 p. 136
 7. Read an in-depth article about Hakhel, Derher Tishrei 5776, “The Momentous Gathering.”
 8. Likkutei Sichos vol 7 p. 333
 9. Igros Kodesh vol 24, p. 332-333

10. Read more about this campaign, Derher Teves 5776, “Unite the Children.”
 11. Sichos Kodesh 5741 vol 3, p. 23
 12. Ibid, p. 486
 13. Ibid, p. 535
 14. Ibid, p. 581
 15. Niddah 31a
 16. Tehillim ch. 72, 18
 17. Shemos, 15, 26
 18. Likkutei Sichos vol 13 p. 281
 19. Yeshaya, 27, 12. Rashi Parshas Nitzavim, 30, 3
 20. Yirmeyahu, 31, 7