



In honor of the festive month of Tishrei—Shnas Hakhel, we present this in-depth treatment of the mitzvah of Hakhel based on its sources in Torah and how the Rebbe applies it to our modern day. Much of the material herein appeared in a previous edition of the Derher magazine during the most recent Shnas Hakhel—Tishrei 5776.

As is well known, the Rebbe instructed that we too must fulfill the mitzvah of Hakhel by gathering Yidden together throughout the year and inspiring them to strengthen their yiras Shomayim. Many detailed instructions were given by the Rebbe in this regard, eventually coming to be known as “Mivtza Hakhel.” Many of these directives are collected herein.

It is our hope that this compilation will encourage our readers to act on the Rebbe’s call and engage in Mivtza Hakhel with greater enthusiasm.

May we merit to experience Hakhel this year in the literal sense, in the Beis Hamikdash Hashlishi with Moshiach.

הקהל הגדול



A SCENE TO BEHOLD

Once every seven years, everyone would come. The multitudes of Yidden scattered throughout Eretz Yisroel and beyond would make the long trek to Yerushalayim. *Everyone* was there: the hoary elders and the squealing infants; the farmers and the housewives; the simpletons and the learned scholars; the men, women, and children. They would all travel to Yerushalayim for ‘*hakhel*,’ the national mass gathering in the *Beis Hamikdash*.

It was a scene of Yiddishkeit at its height.

The gathering was set for the first day of Chol Hamoed. As the time came closer, one would hear Kohanim stationed throughout the public places in Yerushalayim blowing golden trumpets *tekia! terua! tekia!*

In fact, every Kohen would be blowing a trumpet on this day; if a Kohen was seen without a trumpet in his hand, people would murmur, “Seems that he isn’t a Kohen!” Close your eyes and picture it for a moment: every Kohen alive is sounding a trumpet; the sound must have been deafening.



These blasts were the signal for everyone to start making their way towards the *Beis Hamikdash*.

It was a sight of holy pandemonium. Millions of men, women, and children swarmed into the *Beis Hamikdash* and gathered around a large wooden podium in the *azara* from which the king was to speak. Miraculously the entire Jewish nation fit inside¹. The deafening sounds and crushing crowds overwhelmed the senses.

Finally, the time arrived. The king climbed onto the podium. The *chazzan* took the special Torah that was kept in the *azarah*² and gave it to the *rosh haknesses*; the *rosh haknesses* passed it to the *segan Kohen Gadol*; the *segan Kohen Gadol* passed it to the *Kohen Gadol*, and the *Kohen Gadol* passed the Torah to the king of Israel. [This signified that the king was elevated in ever higher levels above the rest of the nation.]

Under the gaze of the entire Jewish nation, the *hakhel* ceremony commenced. The king made the *bracha* on the Torah like at a regular *krias hatorah*, opened the Torah to *parshas Devarim* and read various *parshiyos* where Hashem exhorts the Yidden to keep true to His mitzvos. At the conclusion of the reading, he recited seven special *brachos* unique to this ceremony.

It was a stirring call for renewed dedication to Hashem and His mitzvos. All Yidden participated in the *hakhel* ceremony, no matter their station

הַחֶהֱלֵךְ

A YEAR OF HAKHEL

Although *hakhel* was a one-time event at the beginning of the year, the entire year is a *shnas hakhel*. Indeed, when the Torah describes the mitzvah of *hakhel*, it emphasizes that it's "At the end of [every] seven years," meaning that it is connected with the year as a whole.⁵

UNITY

At the time of *hakhel*, the *entire Jewish nation*—men, women and children—came together. This is because the message of *hakhel* applies to all Jews equally. In regards to learning Torah, or other issues pertaining to the mind, each person is on a different level; but *yiras Hashem* is critical for all people equally, regardless of their intellectual status.⁶

in life; whether they were great scholars or complete ignoramuses lacking a basic understanding of Yiddishkeit, for its inspirational message was felt equally by all.

Women were also obligated to participate, making *hakhel* unique among positive mitzvos that are time-dependent. And even newborn children were obligated to participate, which makes *hakhel* stand out amongst all other mitzvos³.

Every single person in the Jewish nation was present at *hakhel*, and the effects were felt for years afterward.

A MATAN TORAH EXPERIENCE

But *hakhel* wasn't just an inspiring moment. The Rambam compares it to *matan Torah*, writing that each person must listen intently and picture himself as if he were standing at *Har Sinai* and Hashem was



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giving him the Torah.

Indeed, it seems from the Rambam's language that the experience of *hakhel* is not simply *compared* to *matan Torah*, rather the theme of *hakhel* is to *re-live matan Torah* every seven years.

But what does *hakhel* have to do with *matan Torah*?

Let us first examine *matan Torah* for a moment. What was its main idea? It wasn't simply to transfer the Torah to the Yidden (especially considering the fact that they already had the Torah, which they had been studying since the times of Avraham Avinu). Rather, the main theme of *matan Torah* was that Yidden saw *Elokus*. As is written in the *pesukim*, "The entire nation *saw* the thunder..." "You have *seen*..." "Hashem has *shown*..."

Why was it so important for them to *see Elokus*? The *possuk* explains: "In order that His *yira* will be upon your faces and you will not sin." When a person simply hears or learns about something, it can remain theoretical.

But when he actually sees it, it suddenly has a much greater impact. It becomes real. So at *matan Torah*, when the Yidden saw *Elokus*, it gave them a much more emotional and immediate *yiras Hashem*. The absolute truth of “*Anochi Hashem Elokecha*” was seared in their souls.

Now we see how *hakhel* is so connected to *matan Torah*: they have the exact same theme. The purpose of *matan Torah* was to cause *yiras Hashem*, and the theme of *hakhel* is “in order that they learn and fear Hashem”—also to spur the Yidden’s *yiras Hashem*. Hashem gave Yidden the mitzvah of *hakhel* so that they can re-experience *matan Torah* and reignite their *yiras Hashem*.

When the king climbed the tall wooden podium, read the stirring passages from the Torah, and roused the *yiras Hashem* in the Yidden—it was *matan Torah* all over again.⁴

IN GALUS

M'doirasa, the mitzvah of *hakhel* only applies when all Yidden are in Eretz Yisrael, not in *galus*. *Chazal* did not establish a mitzvah *m'derabbanan* as a *zecher* to *hakhel*, as they did with many other mitzvos; so there is no mitzvah of *hakhel* today at all.⁷

Nevertheless, the Rebbe made a huge *shturem* about *hakhel*. This began in the earlier years of the *nesius* (and even earlier), and culminated in the year 5748, when the Rebbe went on a campaign for every person to become a “*hakhel Yid*” and bring *hakhel* into their lives.

In the second part of this article, we will see the Rebbe’s *koch* in *hakhel* up close. But first we must understand the why. Why the huge excitement about *hakhel*? It was a beautiful ceremony in the times of the *Beis Hamikdash*, but what relevance does it really have in the time of *galus*, when we have no king and no *Beis Hamikdash*?

Other mitzvos were also celebrated with huge fanfare and excitement in the times of the *Beis Hamikdash*, like the mitzvah of *bikurim* for example. Yet we find no *koch* in them in the times of *galus*. Why is *hakhel* different?

DEEPER LAYERS

In order to understand this, we must dig a bit deeper into the nature of the mitzvah of *hakhel*.

Every mitzvah has two parts: the **action** and the *kavana*. Let's take matzah as an example. The action of the mitzvah is to eat matzah; the *kavana* is to remember that Hashem took us out of *Mitzrayim*.

Now, which part of the mitzvah is more important, the action or the *kavana*? Is the mitzvah of matzah primarily the act of eating matzah, with the added *kavana* of remembering *yetzias Mitzrayim*? Or is it essentially remembering *yetzias Mitzrayim* with an added action of eating matzah? Or perhaps a combination of both?

In most mitzvos, the action is more important than the intent. If you eat matzah without *kavana*, you still fulfill the mitzvah. However, if you thought about eating matzah without actually doing it, no mitzvah was fulfilled.

TEFILAH

But then there are some exceptions, mitzvos where the *kavana* is central to their fulfillment. Take davening for example. The **action** of davening is saying the words, and the *kavana* is to realize that you are davening to Hashem. If you just say the words of davening—the action—with no *kavana* at all, you did not fulfill the mitzvah of *tefilah* according to some opinions, because without *kavana* it is not *tefilah*. In davening, the *kavana* is much more integral to the mitzvah.

Throughout its years of publication, *The Moshiach Times*'s cover would be reviewed by the Rebbe, who would often give fascinating comments.

On the original design of the Tishrei 5748 cover (right), which depicted *hakhel* in the *Bais Hamikdash*, the Rebbe gave the following comment through the *mazkirus*: “יתוסף עוד שיהי נראה יותר ילדים וטף [to the picture], so that more children and infants are visible.”

This comment was then written up and given to the Rebbe for final verification. The Rebbe underlined it twice and added a check mark indicating approval.

The final printed version (left).



HAKHEL

In a similar vein, the mitzvah of *hakhel* also has two parts: The action, which is the *krias haTorah* of the king; and the *kavana*, which is to inspire the Yidden to Torah and mitzvos. Which part is more important, the action or the *kavana*? Is it like matzah, where the action is paramount, or like davening, where the *kavana* is more important?

Based on the language of the Rambam, and sourced in the actual *pesukim*, the Rebbe learns that the *kavana* of *hakhel*, to rouse Yidden to Torah and mitzvos, is the most integral component of the mitzvah. The action, the king's reading of the Torah, is only secondary; it serves as a vehicle to reach the integral part of the mitzvah. [With this in mind, the Rebbe explains various other aspects of the mitzvah of *hakhel*.]

Once we establish that the integral part of *hakhel* is to stir the Yidden to Torah and mitzvos, we can understand its relevance today.

If the most essential part of the mitzvah had been the king's reading of the Torah, it would not have been relevant in the time of *galus*. But, in truth, the central part of the mitzvah is to inspire the Yidden, which is just as relevant today as it was in the times of the *Beis Hamikdash*.⁸

So far, so good. We have a powerful insightful explanation on the relevance of *hakhel* today. But now the *sichos* take a fascinating turn.

EVEN MORE IN GALUS!

The Rebbe says that in a way, the mitzvah of *hakhel* is even more relevant today than in the times of the *Beis Hamikdash*.

But how can a commemoration of the mitzvah be more potent than the mitzvah itself?

This, the Rebbe explains, is because doing an action can sometimes drown out the meaning behind the action. When you focus on the

action part of the mitzvah, you can be distracted from the meaning behind it.

Korbanos is a good example for this. When a person brought a *korban* in the times of the *Beis Hamikdash*, it was a big deal; twenty four Kohanim were involved in sacrificing and offering the animal. With all the action going on, a person could easily feel that bringing the physical animal was enough, and he might forget about the spiritual *avoda* associated with *korbanos*, which is to do *teshuva*; his *yetzer hara* could remain the same animal it was before. It would be a difficult task to convince him that the physical *korban* is not sufficient.

Today, on the other hand, when we don't have physical *korbanos*, a person knows that he has no choice but to do *teshuva*, because there is no physical *korban* to distract him from the spiritual element.

The same is true with *hakhel*: When the entire Jewish nation—men, women and children—gathered together in the *Beis Hamikdash*, a person could miss the king's true message of inspiration amidst all the commotion and excitement.

Today, on the other hand, there is nothing to distract us from focusing on the true message of *hakhel*—to rouse our *yiras Hashem* and recommit ourselves to Torah and mitzvos.

In effect, *hakhel* doesn't only have *some* relevance in the times of *galus*, rather it is *even more* relevant and immediate now. [In a *shulei hagilyon* (secondary footnote) to this *sicha*, the Rebbe immediately qualifies that, of course, nothing can be compared to the king's reading of the Torah. Indeed, the Rambam writes that the king is a *shliach* of Hashem at that moment. Nevertheless, there is a tangible advantage in the times of *galus*.]⁹

