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EARLY BEGINNINGS

The Rebbe's *hakhel* campaigns only began decades later, but early seeds for this *koch* can be found as early as 5692, long before he assumed the *nesius*. [Note, that this was the Rebbe's first *hakhel* as the Frieddiker Rebbe's son-in-law, and we immediately see a huge *koch* in *hakhel*.]

The Rebbe had come to spend Tishrei with the Frieddiker Rebbe in Otwock, Poland, and many other Chassidim were there as well. During Chol Hamoed, the Frieddiker Rebbe instructed the Rebbe to farbreng for the Chassidim.

The farbrengen lasted many hours—from 8 o'clock in the evening until 7 o'clock in the morning—and as participants later recounted, it was a farbrengen to be remembered. Those were the days when few people knew the Rebbe more than on a superficial basis, and his greatness was hidden from public view. This was an extremely rare opportunity to see the Rebbe up close. During this farbrengen, the Rebbe spoke in all parts of the Torah, as he weaved together *nigleh* and Chassidus, *halacha* and *agada*, along with practical *horaos* in

avodas Hashem.

Notes of this farbrengen were kept in the Rebbe's *reshimos*,¹⁰ and there we find that a main focus of the farbrengen was *hakhel*, as 5692 was a *hakhel* year. The Rebbe gives fascinating explanations, in *nigleh* and Chassidus, on many different aspects of *hakhel*: The reason *hakhel* was set for the year after *shemita*; why the king must read the Torah (and the king's general role in Jewish society); the Torah portions that the king reads; and more.

In the same time period, the Rebbe also kept a fascinating correspondence on these subjects with his father, Harav Levi Yitzchak¹¹.

WITH TIME

As far as we can tell, the Rebbe's *koch* in *hakhel* was his own *chiddush*; we don't find that the earlier Rabbeim emphasized the idea of *hakhel*.¹²

Even by the Rebbe himself the focus on *hakhel* didn't start all at once. In the first years of the *nesius*, we find only a smattering of *hora'os* about *hakhel*; but as the years went on, it became a major focus and a huge *shturem*.

In 5713, the Rebbe mentioned *hakhel* many times in letters and *sichos* throughout the year, and in addition to that, something special happened. Every year, the Rebbe would hold a farbrengen for *talmidei hayeshivos* during Sukkos (a custom that began before the *nesius*). That year, the Rebbe held an additional farbrengen in honor of *hakhel*, where he spoke at length on the subject. (These *sichos* were later printed as *sichos* in Likutei Sichos in 5747-5748, in the lead-up to

HAKHEL IN YOUR OWN LIFE

The Rebbe pointed out that every person can make *hakhel* in their personal lives.

What does this mean? The theme of *hakhel* is to unite the entire nation—men, women, and children. Now, each of these segments have general characteristics; men have the trait of leadership and strength outside of the home; women are the *akeres habayis*—they oversee the home and the *chinuch* of the children; and children are the ones who are being educated and receive from their parents.

Every person has—and needs—all of these characteristics: Strength and firmness to lead the outside world; leadership in the home; and the willingness to learn from each and every person.

In the year of *hakhel*, a person must take all of these characteristics and bring them together in his inner *Beis Hamikdash*; that his whole being and all his traits should be infused with a singular idea: "To fear Hashem all the days."

hakhel.)

In the subsequent *hakhel* years of 5720, 5727, and 5734, the Rebbe said many *sichos* explaining the concept of *hakhel* and how it applies today. The Rebbe also mentioned it often in letters; in fact, every *nichtav kloli*, all letters to *mosdos chinuch*, and even telegrams for *yom tov*, had a mention of *hakhel*. In these letters, the Rebbe emphasized the significance of *hakhel* and the effect it should have on every single person.

In 5734, Shemini Atzeres was the scene of a special event. During *hakafos*, before *Ata Hareisa*, the Rebbe instructed the *gabbai* Rabbi Moshe Pinchas Katz to announce the following: “Since this year is *shnas hakhel*—עמדו הכן כולכם—stand ready, all of you, men, women, and children, to bring in *zman simchaseinu* of Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah!” [Similar announcements were made after the second and third *Ata Hareisa* too.]

Such pronouncements didn’t happen every day; this was a unique scene that left a lasting impression on everyone there.

NEW FRONTIERS

In 5741, many people came to spend *hakhel* with the Rebbe, and 770 was even more packed than a usual Tishrei. This was the year that *hakhel* became a central focus of the Rebbe’s *sichos*.

The Rebbe introduced the concept of *kinusei hakhel*—*hakhel* gatherings—and said that all children should participate in at least three *kinusei hakhel*: before Rosh Hashanah, during Asseres Yemei Teshuva, and on Sukkos.¹³ In many, many *farbrengens* during that Tishrei, the Rebbe *shtured* again and again that a “multitude of children”¹⁴ should come together for the *kinusei hakhel*, and that every person must work on arranging this according to their ability. “But their ability in a way of *lechatchila ariber!*”¹⁵ The Rebbe added that, “when a Yid makes a *hachlata* about *hakhel*, he is guaranteed that he will be successful!”



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[This wasn't the first time the Rebbe encouraged *kinusim* for *hakhel*. In 5734, the Rebbe instructed Rabbi Ezra Schochet, who lived in Bnei Brak at the time, to visit the Kosel with his family on Sukkos and learn a few *pesukim* of *parshas hakhel*. A similar *horaah* was given to Rabbi Efraim Wolf, with the added request to visit during the days of *selichos* as well.]

NIGHTLY KINUSIM

On the first night of Sukkos 5741, after *maariv* had drawn to an end and the Rebbe wished the crowd the customary 'Gut

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When a person is *navuch*—confused and unsure about the whole *mitvza hakhel*—he doesn't know whether the [Rebbe's] words about *hakhel* are directed towards him; he's unsure how to get involved, he's concerned about people's reactions to *hakhel*, etc. etc.

But through the *hiskashrus* to the Rabbeim, everything is done in a manner of *lechatchila ariber*. The Rebbe's entire being—from the beginning to the middle to the end—is in a manner of *lechatchila ariber*; and when he goes together with every Chossid, he will surely not allow the Chossid to go *arunter*.²¹

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yom tov, something astonishing happened. Instead of walking down from his *bima* and leaving shul, the Rebbe suddenly began saying a *sicha*! The Rebbe explained that although *hakhel* (and *simchas beis hashoevah*) would be held in the times of the *Beis Hamikdash* on Chol Hamoed, that was simply because certain aspects of *hakhel* could not be arranged on *yom tov*. However, in the times of *galus* we do not have these constraints, and “the *hakhel* that we make now—gathering Yidden together, men, women, and children—must begin on the first day of Sukkos.”¹⁶

These *sichos*, which served as the Rebbe’s own *kinusei hakhel*—continued for the rest of the nights of Sukkos. (In fact, the Rebbe continued saying a *sicha* every night of Sukkos every year thereafter. In 5748, the next *hakhel* year, the Rebbe said a *sicha* every night of Sukkos, Chanukah, and Pesach.)

Throughout Tishrei, the Rebbe placed a major emphasis on the role of children in *hakhel*. (As mentioned above, *hakhel* is the only mitzvah that children—even the very youngest—have a central role in.) On Chol Hamoed Sukkos of that year, the Rebbe established Tzivos Hashem.

The clearest indicator of the Rebbe’s *koch* in *hakhel* is from the Rebbe himself. A short history of each of the Rabbeim is printed in the front of Hayom Yom. The Rebbe’s history is also included, and each time the Hayom Yom was reprinted, they would add to the Rebbe’s section to reflect the years that had passed. At the beginning of 5742, the Rebbe was given the history of 5741 for editing. In his own handwriting, the Rebbe added a new line: מעורר שהשנה שנת הקהל—[He] spoke about this year being a year to **gather** the men, women, and children...to fulfill all the words of this Torah.

Throughout the year, the Rebbe continued mentioning *hakhel* in *sichos* and *letters*, making 5741 the first year known as being a “*shnas hakhel*.” However, nothing could have prepared anyone for 5748.



MIVTZA HAKHEL

The *shturem* of *hakhel* came to a climax in 5748. It is difficult to overstate the prominence *hakhel* held that year. Beginning in the month of Av 5747, the Rebbe connected everything he spoke about with *hakhel*, and discussed it without rest.

Every *sicha* was connected to *hakhel*. If the Rebbe explained a Rashi, he tied it in with *hakhel*. If he spoke about Rambam, there was a lesson for *hakhel*. The *kinus Torah* at the end of Tishrei was about the various *halachos* concerning *hakhel*.

And then there was *mivtza hakhel*.

The *mivtza's* central focus was that every person should arrange *kinusei hakhel*. The Rebbe said that in the year of *hakhel*, this is the mission of every single person—men, women and children: To gather the Yidden around them and rouse their *yiras Hashem* through speaking words of inspiration and teachings of Torah. Every person should reach out to all the people they know, in all the circles they run in, and gather them for *kinusei hakhel*.

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It is already quite a while that we are *shtureming* about *hakhel*, and we continue to *shturem* that all that was done until now is not sufficient; more and more must be done.

Someone might argue: 'I already worked on *hakhel*, what else do you want from me?'

And it's true, he did indeed work on *hakhel*...he went out, gathered men, women and children, and influenced them to add in their fulfillment of Torah and mitzvos. So what else is expected from him? What else is demanded from him?

But what is being demanded of him is this: He should work and toil in *hakhel* to the extent that when looking at him, you don't see anything else, you only see *hakhel*! You see before you that עם הקהל גייט ארום הקהל—*hakhel* is walking around!¹⁸



A STORM!

As Tishrei 5748 progressed, the *shturem* in *hakhel* continued gathering steam, and the Rebbe constantly spoke about the activities that every Yid must do during *hakhel*, utilizing all of his energy and *kochos*. During every farbrengen in honor of every Yom Tov, the Rebbe would emphasize the connection with *hakhel*, and the need to continue increasing the *hakhel*-activities. The Rebbe utilized every opportunity to implore, request, and inspire the Chassidim about *mitzva hakhel*.

On Sukkos, the *hakhel* fervor reached new heights. The Rebbe explained that one of the focuses of *hakhel* on Sukkos is to gather Yidden to dance during *simchas beis hashoevah*,¹⁷ and asked over and over that the *peulos* of *hakhel* should grow ever stronger. In the *sichos* on each night of Sukkos, the Rebbe explained the *maaleh* of each day in relation to *hakhel*, and expounded on the connection of each of the *ushpizin* with *hakhel*.

In one *sicha*, the Rebbe said that *hakhel* should be so much a part

of a person's life, that upon meeting a friend on the street, the first thing he should greet him with is a *bracha* for *hatzlachah rabah umuflaga* in all things related to *hakhel*; even before he wishes him *ah gut moed!*¹⁹

In fact, the Rebbe himself spoke about the fact that he keeps *shtureming* about *hakhel*, adding that since the whole point of speaking about *hakhel* is that it should translate to action, the great amount that he spoke about it must be reflected in a huge amount of action. No matter how much was done until now, everyone must do even more!²⁰

CHANGING A MINHAG?

The *sichos* throughout Sukkos 5748 were pulsating with *hakhel*, but one of the highest points was a *sicha* on the fifth night of Sukkos.

But let's go back a bit: During *hallel* on the first day of Sukkos, the Rebbe held his lulav and esrog together throughout the entire *hallel*. Now, as you probably know, the *minhag* of Lubavitch is to hold only the lulav throughout *hallel*, and to pick up the esrog for the *naanuim*. So when people saw that the Rebbe was holding them together, they were shocked. Why would the Rebbe suddenly do something different from the accepted *minhag*?

On the fifth day of Sukkos, the Rebbe addressed the issue;²² but before providing an answer, he made the question even stronger:

The reason for the *minhag* to hold only the lulav through most of *hallel* is because that's what the Friediker Rebbe did. For a while, this was a question



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HAYITACHEN?!

Similar to the Kohanim in Yerushalayim, the Rebbe explains, every person must ‘blow a golden trumpet’ and publicize *hakhel* to the world.

Someone can argue: What do you want from me? I don’t really connect with the whole excitement of *hakhel*, so how can you expect me to get involved for yet another night of *hakhel*? Besides, what do you need me for? There is already a huge amount of people clutching their ‘trumpets of gold’ and blowing. What will I add?!

To this we respond: How can you go now and relax, and chat about all good things in the world?! **Hayitachen! Where is your golden trumpet?!**

All the *chochmos* and explanations won’t help you...and it doesn’t help you if your father, teacher and son are already blaring their trumpets. You have a personal obligation, because if any kohen didn’t have a trumpet in his hand, people will say that it “seems that he isn’t a Kohen at all!” If you’re not ‘blowing your trumpet’ and publicizing *hakhel*, you’re missing something at the essence of your identity!²⁷

for me: The *daled minim* represent the four letters of *Shem Havaya*, and by bringing them together, the letters are united into one name. [There is a famous story of someone who didn’t hold the esrog during the *naanuim*, and he was told that he is disconnecting the last letter of Hashem’s name!] Hence, it would seem better to hold all *daled minim* together throughout the entire *hallel*. Why put the esrog down?

The Rebbe said that the reason seems to be in order to avoid damaging the esrog. The Friediker Rebbe began this custom in his later years; he refrained from holding the esrog together with the lulav so it wouldn’t get scratched due to his health situation.

Now, it says in the Gemara that Rav Acha brei D’Rava would



specifically try to use a *haddas* that was only kosher according to his Rebbe, Rav Kahana. Although Rav Kahana held that other *haddasim* were also kosher, and he could have easily used those other *haddasim*, Rav Acha pursued these *haddasim* in particular as an expression of his *hiskashrus* to his Rebbe.

The same is true here: Since the Frierdiker Rebbe would put down the esrog during *hallel*—whatever the reason may be—many Chassidim started doing the same.

So in effect, not only had the Rebbe strayed from an accepted *minhag*, he had changed a *minhag* that was rooted in *hiskashrus* to the Frierdiker Rebbe!

The Rebbe answered that this was all for one reason:

“When the *shturem* about *hakhel* began, in order to affect myself as well in regards to *hakhel*, I was forced to do something against my habit and nature, even something that has a *cheshash* that it may י״ח affect my *hiskashrus*, and

hold the esrog together with the lulav throughout *hallel*.

“Why?”

“The four *minim* represent the four types of Jews, and uniting the four *minim* represents the unity of Yidden; the unity of Yidden is the theme of *hakhel*.

“Therefore, in order to emphasize how important *hakhel* is—that it is *ikri, pnimi, nafshi*, and *gufni*, and all the other adjectives that could, and should, be used to describe *hakhel*, according to the letters of the *alef-beis*—I changed my custom of holding the *daled minim*. This was done *specifically* because it is so difficult, and specifically because it’s so shocking to the onlookers!”

[The Rebbe concluded that about the issue of *hiskashrus*, we can rely on the words of the Frierdiker Rebbe before he accepted the *nesius* from his father, that his *hanhaga* would be with *chesed* and *rachamim*. This is especially true when dealing with *hiskashrus*, since he surely knows that the reason for changing the *minhag* is only to emphasize *hakhel*.]

Changing a *minhag* is no small matter, and the fact that the Rebbe did so is a powerful message about the importance of *hakhel*.

HATZLACHA RABAH UMUFLAGAH!

The above *sicha* was on the fifth night of Sukkos, and the *shturem* continued through Hoshanah Rabah, Shemini Atzeres, and Simchas Torah. The *simcha* and excitement of Tishrei 5748 is legendary, remembered by all who merited to witness it; but it is beyond the scope of this article to describe all those amazing sights.

At the end of Yom Tov, the Rebbe distributed *kos shel bracha*, and when everyone had finished going by, the Rebbe made an announcement:

“*Hatzlachah rabah umuflagah* to every single person in *hakhel es ha'am*

ha'anashim vehanashim vehataf... Every single person could, must, and surely will be successful in the activities of *hakhel* in their place, neighborhood, and overall surroundings...²³

In the *yechidus klolis* to the guests a few days later, the Rebbe said that the time had come to act:

“Now—when everyone is returning to their homes—comes the time for *maase bepoel*. Every person is returning to his city, neighborhood and social sphere, which is where he has influence; so he has the responsibility to start getting things done.”²⁴

HAKHEL BY THE REBBE

For Chassidim, *hakhel* is the time to gather by the *melech*, the king—to be by the Rebbe. During the year of *hakhel*, many Chassidim traveled to be with the Rebbe for Tishrei in general, and specifically Sukkos. In fact, in numerous letters the Rebbe expressed his appreciation for those that came, and his dismay that others did not. (See Derher Elul 5775 for a general overview.)

On Shabbos Parshas Lech Lecha 5748, the Rebbe said:

“...A *yasher koach* to all the guests whose *chassidische hergesh* has illuminated their path in a revealed way, bringing into action the words of the *possuk* “*Lech lecha me'artzecha*” in order to be in the *daled amos*—shul and *beis midrash*—of the *nossi hador*, the [Friediker] Rebbe, during the time of *hakhel* [during Sukkos], even for at least an hour or a day, and especially those who were here for the entire Sukkos.”²⁵

As explained in the Rebbe's letters and *sichos*,²⁶ the mitzvah of *hakhel* unifies each and every Yid, through their connection to the *melech*, who illuminates the innermost *bittul* to Hashem within each and every Yid. For the *melech* is the “heart” of all the Jewish people—**לב כל קהל ישראל**.

May we be *zoche* that this year we will experience the real *hakhel*—in the *Beis Hamikdash* with *Moshiach tzidkeinu*.