

## A LESSON FROM THE PARASHA

## Hakhel In History

RABBI  
DOVID  
SPETNER

The penultimate *mitzvah* in the Torah is the *mitzvah* of *Hakhel*. Every seven years, on the Sukkos following *shmitta*, the men, women, and children of *Klal Yisrael* are commanded to gather in the *Beis Hamikdash* to hear the king read from key parts of the Torah.


The Gemara in *Chagiga* asks why the children are brought. It answers, "In order to give reward to those who bring them." Rav Yitzchok Hutner asks (*Igros u'Kesovim* #85), if there is no inherent value in the children being present, why not just command us to bring rocks?

Rav Hutner develops a very powerful understanding of the *mitzvah* of *Hakhel*.

The Rambam writes about *Hakhel*, "... to direct their hearts and listen with utmost awe and reverence, as on the day the Torah was given at Sinai. . . Each had to regard himself as if he had been charged with the Torah now for the first time, and as though he had heard it from the mouth of God, for the king was an ambassador proclaiming the words of God." We see from these words that *Hakhel* is in essence a reenactment of *ma'amad Har Sinai* (standing at Mt. Sinai). Every seven years, when we had a *Beis Hamikdash*, the Jewish people would re-energize themselves and their commitment by reliving the giving of the Torah.

Just as at the giving of the Torah, every man, woman, and child needed to be present at that moment of national destiny, so it is when we recreate that experience. The entire nation needed to be present at *Hakhel*, including the children. The children have no personal obligation to be present, being only children, yet the adults who bring them benefit by recreating the national Sinai experience.


Rav Hutner expands the idea of *Hakhel* by maintaining that *Klal Yisrael* has had *Hakhel*-like experiences throughout our history. These are times when the Jewish people collectively accepted a new element of Torah. He gives two prominent examples. One is the way in which all of *Klal Yisrael* accepted Talmud *Bavli* as the official body of Jewish law. The second was the widespread acceptance of the *Shulchan Aruch*. It took two of the most prominent *halachic* authorities, one representing the Sephardim and one representing the Ashkenazim, to fuse together a single work that could be utilized by all Jews. This is really something that borders on the miraculous and really expresses great *siyayta diShmaya* (assistance).

I once heard that the Vilna Gaon said that he considered writing his own *Shulchan Aruch* with irrefutable proofs for all of his positions. He decided against it and instead wrote a commentary on the existing *Shulchan Aruch*. He explained, that unlike the miracle (my word, not his) of the acceptance of the *Shulchan Aruch*, only part of the Jewish people would accept his new version, despite his irrefutable proofs, and it would thus split *Klal Yisrael* in two. The *Hakhel*-like quality of the *Shulchan Aruch*, like Talmud *Bavli*, is unique and only happens at certain times in our history. 

## A PARASHA Q 4 U

RABBI DOVID SPETNER

Moshe predicted the Jews would go "off the *derech*" at what point?

Bring this question to the Shabbos table and see who knows the answer! 

## THE RABBI WAS ASKED

ADAPTED BY RABBI DOVID TZVI MEISSNER FROM ME'AH SHE'ARIM BY RABBI YITZCHOK ZILBERSTEIN

Once, a *chazzan* (cantor) living in Teveriah (Tiberius) was hired for 6,000 *shekel* to lead a congregation in a different city for the High Holiday prayers and to blow the *shofar* for them. A few days before Rosh Hashana, the *gabbai* of the synagogue called the *chazzan* and confirmed their arrangement, including providing a rented apartment for the *chazzan* and his family who were to be traveling from their hometown.

Before Rosh Hashana, the *chazzan* began traveling to Elad, and when he got to the city, he called the *gabbai* to direct him to where he would be staying. The *gabbai* told him which street to go to, and the *chazzan* rolled down his window and asked some passersby how to get to that street. They responded that no such street exists there.

The *chazzan* told the *gabbai* that there is no such street. The *gabbai* then asked him where he was. "Elad" was the *chazzan's* reply. With a cry of bewilderment, the *gabbai* shouted out "we confirmed on Eilat, what are you doing in Elad?!" Apparently, during their original telephone conversation, the *gabbai* said "Eilat," and the *chazzan* heard "Elad."

The *chazzan* then said that since time was tight before Rosh Hashana, he would not be able to travel to Eilat. The *gabbai* said that he must come

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## THE RABBI WAS ASKED

CONTINUED

because they would be left without a *chazzan* or *shofar* blower for Rosh Hashana. The *chazzan* responded that had he originally known that the destination was Eilat, he would not have agreed to come for that price.

**Q** Who is correct, and who must pay for the apartment?

**A** If the *chazzan* is not hearing impaired, but rather misheard Elad instead of Eilat over the phone, he is considered an *oneis* (lit. forced), and he would be absolved of all responsibilities. (Perhaps he would be exempt even if he would be slightly hearing impaired.)

However, if at all possible, it would be a great mitzvah for the *chazzan* to travel to Eilat in order for the congregation to have an appropriate *chazzan*, but he need not exert himself more than others would to travel there. Additionally, his traveling would mean his leaving what is biblically considered Israel, and he is not obligated to lose the advantage of praying in Israel for Rosh Hashana. 🕊

## A LESSON LEARNED

YOEL WAS AN ORPHAN WHO LIVED AT THE DISKIN Orphanage in Jerusalem. It was recess time on a chilly winter day at the Eitz Chayim elementary school, and while most boys were running around or drinking a cup of hot tea that they bought for a few pennies at the cafeteria, Yoel seemed to be lost in space. Reb Aryeh Levin,

the legendary *mashgiach* of the Eitz Chayim school, was standing with the man who was in charge of, among other things, the tea, and asked Yoel why he was not warming himself up with a hot cup of tea. "I don't like how it tastes," Yoel answered. Reb Aryeh turned to the man next to him and said, "Go get him a cup of tea and I'll pay for it myself." "Didn't he just say that he doesn't like tea?" the man countered. "Is that what you heard? I heard something else. What he really was saying is that he doesn't even have the pennies to buy a cup of tea. One has to listen with his heart and not only with his ears." 🕊

## GLIMPSES OF THE KOLLEL



## SCHEDULE FOR THE UPCOMING WEEKS:

Sunday Selichos 7:20 am

Monday Selichos 6:50 am

Tuesday Erev Yom Kippur Selichos 7:00 am

Mincha Erev Yom Kippur 3:30 pm

Shachris Thursday 11 Tishrei 7:15 am

Shachris Chol Homoed 8:00 am

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THE TRAILBLAZERS, TRIALS, & TRIUMPHS OF AMERICAN JEWRY

RABBI MOSHE TZVI CRYSTAL

As delivery of children with forceps became more common in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the question was raised if the use of forceps would affect the mitzvah of *pidyon haben*. In order to redeem one's first-born son thirty days after his birth, the baby's birth must have been natural. This was normally understood to preclude a Caesarean birth, but now the question was if the use of forceps would also be considered a non-natural birth? Another possible issue was that the first-born son is referred to as the *peter rechem* which means he is the "first of the womb." In regard to the special laws that apply to a first-born kosher animal where the Torah uses the same terminology, the Talmud learns from those words that if something would be placed in between the womb and the animal being born, then the special laws would not apply. The question, therefore, was whether the same applied to a human birth? Would *pidyon haben* not be done because of the interference between child and womb? *Responsa* from several *Rabbonim* deal with these topics. Rabbi Avraham Aron Yudelevitz, then the *Rav Hakollel* of Boston, held that it would depend on when the forceps were used. If they were used after the baby's head came out, then the child was already considered *halachically* born, and the forceps would not have any *halachic* ramifications. However, if they were used in extracting the head, then the child would not receive a *piyon haben*. Rabbi Binyomin Fleischer, the rabbi of the Beis Medrash Hagadol Synagogue on the lower east side of Manhattan, held that in all instances the *pidyon haben* should be done without a *bracha*. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein was of the opinion that, in all instances, the *pidyon haben* should be done with a *bracha*. 🕊

SOURCE: Schwartz, HaRav Gedalia Dov. *Shaarei Gedulah*. PP.229-230. Chicago Rabbinical Council. 2007.

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