



לקוטי שיחות
PROJECT
LIKKUTEI
SICHOS

Sicha Summary

Chelek 19 | Chag HaSukkos | Sichah 3

The Context:

Every seven years, the Jewish king had the obligation to perform the *mitzvah of hakhel*, assembling the Jewish nation:

“Assemble the people: the men, the women, and the children, and your converts in your cities, in order that they hear, and in order that they learn and fear the L-rd, your G-d, and they will observe to do all the words of this Torah.” (*Devarim* 31:12)

The Question:

The fact that children participate in this mitzvah is a rare exception in the Torah.

We find conflicting statements, however, regarding the definition of the children’s role in the mitzvah: Do they have an individual obligation to join the assembly? Or is their presence subsumed within their parent’s obligation?

The Talmud records that Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria taught:

“*Assemble the people: the men and the women and the children* — If men come to learn, and women come to hear, why do the little ones come? They come in order for G-d to reward those who bring them.” (*Chagigah* 3a)

This implies that the children do not have their own obligation to assemble, but rather, they come only for the sake of their parents being rewarded.

The Talmud also says, however, that even if the Torah did not explicitly obligate women, we would still infer their obligation with a *kal vachomer* argument: If children are obligated, how much more so should women be obligated! (*Kiddushin* 34b)

This implies that children **do** have a full-fledged “obligation” that is equivalent to the obligation of women.

The Preface to the Explanation:

Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria’s teaching is unclear:

“If men come “to learn,” and women come “to hear,” why do the little ones come? They come in order for G-d to reward those who bring them.”

Why does Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria have to reiterate what the verse says about why the men and women come? Why did he not just open with his question, “Why do the little ones come?”

The explanation is: The simple understanding of the mitzvah of *Hakhel* is that it is the **king’s obligation** to gather the people “in order that they hear, and in order that they learn and fear the L-rd, your God, and they will observe to do all the words of this Torah.” The individual men and women do not have a personal obligation to come; their attendance fulfills the king’s obligation.

Rabbi Elazar offers two novel insights:

- 1) Because the king can only fulfill his obligation if the population gathers, therefore, a personal obligation does devolve on each individual to join the assembly. This is why Rabbi Elazar says, “ If men come to... and women come to...,” meaning, the men and women have their own obligation to come and participate; they are not there simply to fulfill the king’s obligation.
- 2) The main content and theme of the mitzvah is not the assembly itself, but the “hearing and learning” that they will do there. They come “to hear and to learn.”

The Explanation:

In the essential obligation, then, all the men, women, and children are equal. For the king to fulfill his obligation to assemble the people, every person must be there. But there is a secondary, additional, personal duty to attend, and the reason for this is so that the men learn and the women hear.

Rabbi Elazar then is left with the question: Why do the children come? What is their secondary, personal role? They will not hear and cannot learn. Rabbi Elazar concludes that the children attend in order “to reward those who bring them.” Because the children cannot have a personal obligation, their role is to augment their parents’ reward.

The Deeper Dimension:

The purpose of *hakhel* is to uncover the innate faith of every Jew, “in order that they learn and fear the L-rd, your G-d.” This is the role of the king, the “heart of the nation.” His soul includes the souls of the entire nation, and so he can influence and inspire them to reveal their bond with G-d.

This is why the king is obligated to assemble every single Jew — man, woman, and child — because the innate faith within every Jew is equal.

But in addition to having this faith awakened and revealed, each person also must internalize it with his own abilities. Thus, Rabbi Elazar adds that the men and women do not come just to allow the king to fulfill his obligation by igniting their faith; they also come to learn and hear for themselves. As for the children who are not yet capable of this internalization, their presence deepens their parents’ experience, and allows their parents to internalize their faith more deeply.