



Likkutei Sichos

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Faith in a Crowd

Translated by Rabbi Y. Eliezer Danzinger

General Editor: Rabbi Eliezer Robbins | Content Editor: Rabbi Zalmy Avtzon

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1.

HAKHEL - INCLUDING THE SMALL CHILDREN

The mitzvah of *hakhel*¹ (observed following the first day of the Sukkos festival,² at the start of *chol hamoed*,)³ has a unique feature: It embraces all Jews, including **small children**, as the verse says,⁴ “Assemble, *hakhel*, the people — the men, the women and the *taf* {small children}.”

We don't find any biblical mitzvah that includes children together⁵ with all other Jews with the exception of *hakhel*.⁶

This unique characteristic of *hakhel* conveys the principal point and lesson of this mitzvah, as will be explained.

2.

THE OBLIGATION TO INCLUDE TAF FALLS UPON THOSE WHO BRING THEM

As understood simply, the obligation for the small children to participate in *hakhel* falls on the **father** (and the mother) by having to bring them; it does not fall on the small children themselves. As the Gemara says (in tractate *Chagigah*) {quoting Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya}:⁷ “...why do the *taf* come? To reward those who bring them.”⁸

¹ Concerning the details of the mitzvah of *hakhel*, *הקהל*, mentioned in the *sichah*, see the explanation of Rabbi Yerucham Fishel Perlow, on *Sefer HaMitzvos* of Rabbi Saadia Gaon, positive precept 16; *Encyclopedia Talmudis*, p. 140 (numerically equivalent to *הקהל*), and sources note there.

² *Sotah* 41a; see Rashi, ad loc, 41b, s.v., “*me'eimas*”; *Tosafos*, ad loc., 41a, s.v., “*kasav*.”

³ The phraseology in *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Chagigah*,” ch. 3, par. 3.

⁴ *Devarim* 31:12.

⁵ In contrast, the Torah's command to teach Torah to children (*Devarim* 6:7); and likewise, the mitzvah to narrate the story of the Egyptian exodus, “tell your **children**” (*Shemos* 13:8), which (aside from the Torah not emphasizing that the mitzvah concerns **taf, small children**) is a special obligation placed on fathers regarding their children, whereas the mitzvah of *hakhel* includes everyone.

⁶ The *Jerusalem Talmud*, beg. of *Chagigah*, says that “in {the mitzvah of} *re'iyas panim* {pilgrimage}, even a child is obligated.” However, this is also derived from the mitzvah of *hakhel*.

⁷ 3a.

⁸ See *Turei Even*, *ibid.*, ad loc., who discusses whether the obligation rests on the father {exclusively} or also on the *Beis Din*; see *Hamakneh, Kiddushin* 34b, on *Tosafos*, s.v., “*ve'ana amina*.”

Accordingly, it should turn out that even if a child should be in the same state {of health} that would exempt him as an adult from the mitzvah of *hakhel* (such as being deaf, blind, etc.), as a child, however, he is still included by the obligation. After all, the obligation does not fall on the child to come, but on his father to bring him. As such, the child's health is irrelevant.⁹

In light of the above, a problem arises. In tractate *Kiddushin*,¹⁰ concerning the mitzvah of *hakhel*, it says that had the Torah not explicitly obligated women, the obligation could have be deduced by a *kal vachomer*¹¹ from children — “{Since} minors {*taffeilim*} are obligated, then surely women are obligated by *kal vachomer*”:

If the obligation concerning small children rests only on those who bring them, as discussed, how could the Gemara in *Kiddushin* reason that since “minors are obligated...”? Moreover, if “minors” themselves are *not* obligated, how could it be derived by *kal vachomer*, from their “obligation,” that women are also obligated?¹²

[It would be very strained to answer that the statement in the Gemara (“to reward those who bring them”) was not said as a halachah but as an aggadah¹³ and a homily;¹⁴ we know that “we do not derive halachah from an aggadah,”¹⁵ and the accepted halachah is that children themselves are obligated in this mitzvah, as implied in tractate *Kiddushin*.

Because from several sources, we see that this Gemara in *Chagigah* is used as a basis to also derive halachah. For example, the mitzvah enumerators, מוני

⁹ As *Minchas Chinuch* remarks on mitzvah 612 {in *Sefer HaChinuch*}; seemingly, the *Turei Even*, loc. cit., implies differently, as he is in doubt about the status of a child who has no property; see *infra*.

¹⁰ *Kiddushin* 34b.

¹¹ {Lit., “light and heavy,” *kal vachomer* is a talmudic logical proof, whereby a strict ruling in a lenient case demands a similarly strict ruling in a more stringent case; alternatively, a lenient ruling in stringent case demands a similarly lenient ruling in a lenient case.}

¹² See *Maharit* on *Kiddushin*, loc. cit.; *Hamakneh*, loc. cit.; **et al.**

¹³ {(Lit., “lore or narrative”); the portions of the Talmud and Midrash which contain homiletic expositions of Scripture, parables, stories, maxims, etc., in contradistinction to Halachah.}

¹⁴ As the Gemara, *ibid.*, puts it.

¹⁵ *Jerusalem Talmud, Peah*, ch. 2, halachah 4; see *Otzar HaGaonim*, “*Chagigah*,” in the Addenda (p. 65) from R. Saadia Gaon and Rav Hai Gaon (et al) that proof cannot be brought from aggadah, nor can aggadah be used to pose a contradiction; see *Encyclopedia Talmudis*, entry “Aggadah,” and sources cited there.

המצוות,¹⁶ cite this talmudic passage in connection with the mitzvah of *hakhel*, and there are halachic arbiters who reference this passage concerning the obligation of women when it comes to Torah study.]¹⁷

3.

TWO CATEGORIES OF CHILDREN

Seemingly, we could answer along the lines of the commentators¹⁸ who say that the passages speaking about *hakhel* address two categories of children: One category of children are those who have reached the age of education {when they are obligated to be trained in mitzvah observance}. Concerning this group, the next verse says,¹⁹ “Their {older} children, בניהם, who did not know {about the importance of religious behavior} will hear {the Torah being read in this impressive ceremony} and {thereby} learn to fear Hashem your L-rd.” Only the older children of this group are themselves commanded. In contrast, the previous verse,²⁰ “Assemble, *hakhel*, the people — the men, the women and the *taf* {small children}...,” is speaking about the second group of children called *taf*. These are small children who are not old enough to be educated.²¹ It is regarding them that the Gemara says,²² “Why do they {the *taf*} come? To reward those who bring them.” And this reward is also given for bringing children who have reached the age of education, since this is a corollary²³ {of Hashem rewarding parents for bringing children who haven’t reached the age of education}.

In light of the above, it emerges that when the Gemara says that “minors are obligated,” the intent is “minors” who have reached the age of education, and who are included among those who are able to listen and to learn.

¹⁶ *Yerayim*, “mitzvah 290”; and in the *Yerayim Hashalem*, sec. 433; *Semag*, “mitzvah 230”; et al.

¹⁷ See *Bach* on *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Yoreh Dayah*,” sec. 246, s.v., “*kasav*,” that this talmudic passage is the source for the distinction that Rambam makes regarding the Written Law and the Oral law concerning Torah study for women. See, also, *Taz*, *ibid.*, sub-par. 4; *Magen Avraham*, *ibid.*, sec. 282, sub-par. 6.

¹⁸ *Chidushei Maharsha*, on *Chagigah*, loc cit.; and see *Or Hachaim* commentary on the verse; *Kli Yakar*, *ibid.*

¹⁹ *Devarim* 31:13.

²⁰ {*Ibid.*, v. 12.}

²¹ Likewise, this is implied by Rashi’s commentary on *Megillah* 5a, s.v., “*ve’chagigah*,” who gives the reason that bringing the *taf* on Shabbos is impossible.

²² {*Chagigah* 3a.}

²³ {In the Aramaic original, “זיל בתר טעמא.”}

However, the above explanation is strained for the following reasons: (a) Even children who have reached the age of education are themselves not held responsible for becoming educated about mitzvos.²⁴ Instead, those who raise and teach them are responsible. By and large, this refers to a child's father. On the face of it, the same applies in our case {concerning *hakhel* — the parent is responsible for bringing even a child who has reached the age of education}. And even if one were to posit that children themselves {who have reached the age of education} were given a special command concerning the mitzvah of *hakhel* (unlike other mitzvos), and a child himself is considered obligated —

[particularly, according to those *Rishonim*²⁵ who say²⁶ that although the educational obligation of a child who has reached the age of education rests on educators, this doesn't mean that the child is exempt. Rather, children of this age are obligated to perform mitzvos on account of the mitzvah of *chinuch*]

however, according to this, it turns out that there is a novel distinction between the two categories of children: Concerning very young children for whom the obligation and mitzvah rests only upon those who bring them (“to reward those who bring them,” as stated in tractate *Chagigah*) the obligation of *hakhel* includes also those children whose health would exempt them from *hakhel* as adults;

and specifically those children who have reached the age of education (the “minors” spoken about in tractate *Kiddushin*), since they themselves are obligated in *hakhel*, their obligation rests on them only when their health is such that as adults they would be obligated in *hakhel*

— it would be unprecedented to make such a distinction between these two categories of children.

²⁴ See the opinions regarding this matter in *Sdei Chemed*, “Principles,” entry “ches,” principle 60; see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 17, p 233, et passim.

²⁵ {The era of the *Rishonim* is from approx. 1000 - 1500 C.E.}

²⁶ *Brachos* 15a, *Tosafos*, s.v., “ve’Rabbi Yehudah”; *ibid.*, 48a, *Tosafos*, s.v., “ad sh’yochal zayis.”

(b) The main problem is from the diction of the Gemara in tractate *Kiddushin*. It says there that “**minors**, **טפלים**, are obligated” and not “children are obligated,” or something similar. Simply understood, the Gemara there is speaking about the same category of children (טפלים²⁷ – טף). Likewise, Rashi²⁸ is particular to say that we derive that “minors are obligated” from the word והטף in the previous verse and not from the next verse,²⁹ “Their {older} children, בנייהם, who did not know....”

From the above, it is understood that a child himself is obligated in the mitzvah of *hakhel*. And according to the opinions that the obligation {to attend} also concerns small children, small children are also obligated in the mitzvah of *hakhel*.

Since this is the case, the question remains: How is such an obligation compatible with what the Gemara says regarding *taf* — {that they are commanded to come only} “To reward those who bring them”? Also, how is such an obligation consistent with the **obvious** principle (which is logical) that young children³⁰ who are not yet intellectually developed are not given obligations?³¹

4.

THE NOVELTY OF Rabbi ELAZAR BEN AZARYA’S TEACHING

This will be clarified by prefacing with an explanation of the first part of Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya’s homily, “If men come to learn, and women come {at least} to hear [why do the small children come]?” What is the novelty introduced by this first part of his homiletical interpretation? After all, the verse explicitly

²⁷ See *Jerusalem Talmud*, beg. of *Chagigah*.

²⁸ *Kiddushin* 34b, s.v. “*Va’anah*”.

²⁹ {*Devarim* 31:13.}

³⁰ {In the original Aramaic, “טפלים.”} See *Pesachim* 116a.

³¹ See *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Maachalos Asuros*,” ch. 17, par. 27; “*Hilchos Korban Pesach*,” ch. 2., par. 4; and see *Pri Megadim*’s “General Introduction” to “*Orach Chaim*,” vol. 2, sec. 3; *Minchas Chinuch*, mitzvah 5, sub-par. 2; see *Tzafnas Paneach*, “*Hilchos Shabbos*,” ch. 24, par. 11; *ibid.*, “*Hilchos Ishus*,” ch. 4, par. 9; et al; see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 4, p. 1249.

states the purpose {of men and women assembling}: To “hear {the Torah being read} and learn”?

The following explanation is not tenable: Perhaps the beginning of his homily, “If men come to learn, and women come to hear,” is not intended to teach something novel. Perhaps it is only intended to serve as an introduction to the conclusion, “why do the small children come?”³² This would be similar to prefacing the homily with the expression, “*bishlama*” (or “*hanicha*”)³³ “men... women....”

{This explanation is not tenable, however, as mentioned} because: (a) the homily should have been introduced using the **usual** idiom “*bishlama*”; (b) moreover, the term *bishlama* is used in the Gemara when some measure of novelty is derived, and is not used to qualify what has been stated explicitly. For example, “*bishlama* according to opinion....”³⁴ In contrast, in the context of our discussion, nothing new is introduced beyond what is already stated in the verse.

In particular, the proposed solution is even more problematic considering how it is referenced by Rashi in his Torah commentary. Rashi parses the homily, associating one specific subject in the verse to one verb mentioned by Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya: On the word, “men,” in the verse, Rashi comments, “to learn”; on the word, “women,” he says “to hear”; and on the word “*taf*,” Rashi remarks, “For what purpose did they come? To reward those who brought them.” In any event, we see that {according to Rashi} the linkage of “men” to learning and “women” to hearing are distinct interpretations and not merely a lead-in to the question, “*Taf*, for what purpose did they come?”

³² See *Iyun Yaacov* on *Ein Yaacov*, *Chagigah*, loc. cit.

³³ {Talmudic idioms meaning, “understandably,” “it makes sense.”}

³⁴ See *Yad Malachai*, principle 111.

5.

ANOTHER STRAINED EXPLANATION OF RABBI ELAZAR BEN AZARYA'S TEACHING

Seemingly, we could explain this {i.e., the reason for the first part of Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya's homily} based on a remark of *Tosafos*: “They said in the *Jerusalem Talmud* that this {exposition of Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya} is inconsistent with the opinion of Ben Azai who taught that a person is obligated to teach his daughter Torah.” Since Scripture says, “so that they will hear and so that they will learn,” without qualification, apparently, the intent is that it also includes women.³⁵ {On the face of it, this supports the opinion of Ben Azai.} Therefore, Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya, who disagrees with Ben Azai and maintains that teaching Torah to women is prohibited, needs to assert how he interprets this verse, parsing it into two parts: “Men come to learn, and women come to hear.” {Thus, the verse doesn't contradict his opinion that women should not be taught Torah.}

However, the above explanation is strained because the subject in the Gemara being discussed, and the homiletic interpretation of Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya, deal mainly with the laws and details of *parshas hakhel*. The Gemara and Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya are not discussing the halachah regarding the obligation or prohibition of women learning Torah.

6.

THE MITZVAH OF *HAKHEL* IS A COMMAND ON THE KING

The gist of the answer is as follows: From the straightforward meaning of the verse, “**Assemble** the people — the men and the women and the *taf*... **so that** they will hear and **so that** they will learn, and they shall fear...,” it is understood that the mitzvah rests on the individual — the king. He is obligated to assemble the men, women and children. But the mitzvah does not obligate the men, women, or children themselves. The continuation of the verse, “so that they

³⁵ Note *Or Hachaim* on the verse.

will hear and so that they will learn, and they will fear Hashem your L-rd... to fulfill...,” explicates the purpose of the mitzvah.

[The connotation of the conjunction used here, *lemaan*, “so that,” is like its connotation in several places in the Torah. For example, “*so that* he will instruct his children and his household after him,”³⁶ “*so that* your days will be increased, as well as the days of your descendents,”³⁷ and others. Normally, the purpose referred to by the term “so that” is not realized in the present but in the future.]

The goal of the mitzvah of *hakhel* (on the king, who assembles the people and reads the various sections of the Torah to them) is that as a result of doing so, the **entire Jewish nation** should listen and learn....

[This thought is seemingly implied by Rambam’s wording:³⁸ “It is a positive commandment to assemble all of Israel, men, women and children... and to read before them sections of the Torah that encourage them in the performance of mitzvos, and strengthen their commitment to the true faith.” From these words, we understand the following:

- a) The mitzvah of *hakhel* does not fall on every Jew individually, obligating each one individually to participate. Instead, the mitzvah is **to assemble**³⁹ the people, and the obligation to do so is placed upon the king, or upon the *Beis Din*,⁴⁰ who has the authority to gather all the people.

³⁶ Bereishis 18:19.

³⁷ Devarim 11:21.

³⁸ “*Hilchos Chagigah*,” beg. of ch. 3.

³⁹ Likewise, in the preface to “*Hilchos Chagigah*” {in *Mishneh Torah*} the same wording is used: “**to assemble** the nation on the festival of Sukkos.” And in Rambam’s enumeration of the mitzvos at the beginning of *Mishneh Torah*, he writes that the 16th positive commandment is “**to assemble** the people.” A similar wording is used in *Sefer Hamitzvos*, positive commandment 16. (In the {Hebrew} Kapach translation, it says, “...that we were commanded that he assemble the people as a whole.”) However, according to the opinions of *Behag*, *Semag*, and *Yerayim*, op. cit., it is a mitzvah that is placed on the individual, that all should come to listen. See *Sefer Hachinuch*, mitzvah 612.

⁴⁰ Perhaps, for this reason Rambam does not write explicitly that it is a positive commandment on the king to assemble..., or something similar, because the mitzvah devolves on the one who has the power to assemble the people. The practical difference would arise in a situation when there is no king. In such a case, is there a mitzvah of *hakhel*?

b) The mitzvah of *hakhel* is a commandment incumbent on the king: He reads to the people and assembles them with the purpose for them “to hear,” etc. (Moreover, all this comprises a detail of the mitzvah on the king — he is responsible to assemble the people and to read to them in a manner that evokes the desired result.) Therefore, the king reads the Torah sections that “**encourage their performance of mitzvos** and strengthen their commitment to the true faith,”⁴¹ while he stands upon a platform.⁴²]

By assembling the men, the women, and the small children, the commandment incumbent upon the **one assembling** the people, viz., the king, is fulfilled. And (in the future) when the assembled people hear, and they learn to fear Hashem and observe His commandments, then the purpose and intent of the commandment on the king comes to fruition.

7.

A MITZVAH ON THE MEN TO PARTICIPATE

Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya clarifies the substance of the mitzvah of *hakhel* when he states: “If men come (it is in order) to learn; women come to hear.” He thereby teaches two new points:

a) The men and women are (also) themselves⁴³ obligated to come, to carry out personally the mitzvah incumbent upon the assembler, notwithstanding that the Torah places the obligation and the mitzvah on the one assembling the people⁴⁴ (the king).

⁴¹ *Mishneh Torah*, loc. cit., par. 6: “One who is unable to hear should focus his attention on this reading, for Scripture established it solely to strengthen the true faith.”

⁴² Accordingly, Rashi cites this detail in his commentary on Torah here, since it is part of the **simple meaning** of the verse, even though from a halachic perspective, this detail is not necessarily intended by the verse. (After all, we find no basis to support a contention that the platform is biblically mandated.)

⁴³ {In the original scholarly terminology, “*chiyuv gavra*”; lit., “an obligation on the person.”}

⁴⁴ This may also be the opinion of Rambam, who doesn’t specify this detail since Scripture already states explicitly that there is a positive commandment to assemble the people. Consequently, it is understood that everyone had to come. Alternatively, this detail may be understood from Rambam’s wording in par. 2, there, where he writes, “Whoever is exempt from “*re’eya*” {the pilgrimage to Jerusalem} is also exempt from the

[This is like the well-known reasoning of Rabbeinu Nissim⁴⁵ concerning the mitzvah to be fruitful and multiply. He explains that although the mitzvah to be fruitful and multiply is not incumbent on a woman, “nonetheless, she has a mitzvah since she assists her husband to fulfill his mitzvah.”

The difference {between *hakhel* and the mitzvah to have children} is only as follows: A woman is not {personally and directly} obligated to be fruitful and multiply, albeit, in the words of Rabbeinu Nissim, “she has a mitzvah.” Because when it comes to being fruitful and multiplying, a woman’s assistance and participation is mandated only out of {a necessity imposed by} the **reality**. In reality, without his wife, a husband cannot fulfill the mitzvah to **be fruitful and multiply** that devolves on him.

In our context {*hakhel*}, however, the participation of men, women (and small children) is not only on account of a necessity. Rather, it is also on account of the definitive parameters of the mitzvah. The men, women (and small children) also constitute the means by which the {king’s} commandment is fulfilled.⁴⁶ It is they who have to be affected by the assembly — to listen, to learn. As a consequence, attendance at the assembly becomes a personal obligation on every individual.³⁸ The rationale is analogous to the well-known idea espoused in *Sefer Chareidim*.⁴⁷ The author⁴⁸ says that there is a positive commandment on the Jewish people to be blessed by the *kohanim*.]

- b) “So that they will hear, and so that they will learn” is not just the purpose and outcome of the mitzvah; rather, it is the substance of the mitzvah: The obligation of men and women to attend the assembly is not just to be

mitzvah of *hakhel*, with the exception of women and *taf*..., because women are obligated.” And in par. 6, there, he writes. “They {the women} are **obligated** to prepare their hearts... are **obligated** to listen.”

⁴⁵ *Kiddushin*, beg, of ch. 2.

⁴⁶ {In the original, scholarly terminology, the “*chevtza*”; lit., “the object.”}

⁴⁷ Positive commandments... dependent on articulation... to be fulfilled daily, ch. 4, sec. 18; see *Haflaah* on *Kesuvos* 24b, on Rashi, s.v., “*d’issur asseh*” (quoted in *Shaarei Teshuvah*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 128, sub-par. 2.

⁴⁸ {Rabbi Elazar ben Moshe Azikri, (1533–1600) was a well-known Kabbalist, poet and writer, whose famous work *Sefer Chareidim* blends a halachic enumeration of the mitzvos with kabbalist ethics.}

present so that the king's mitzvah to “**assemble the people**” can be discharged (and thereby achieve the overall goal of the mitzvah then and in the future, as explained). Instead, the idea of learning and listening is (also) the substance of the mitzvah of men and women participating.

8.

THE SMALL CHILDREN — TO REWARD THOSE WHO BRING THEM

After Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya explains that the learning and the listening is the benefit intended for the men and women, and the mitzvah incumbent upon them, he asks what purpose is served by small children coming: **Aside** from the small children coming for the same reason as the others — i.e., to enable the assembler to fulfill his mitzvah, and to achieve the purpose of the assembly — what sort of obligation and purpose underlies the participation of small children, analogous to the participation of men and women?

To this question, Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya answers: “To reward those who bring them”: Since small children cannot be obligated, the utility and (additional) point of them coming is just “to reward those who bring them.”

9.

THE SMALL CHILDREN — TO REWARD THOSE WHO BRING THEM

In this light, we can understand the Gemara's statement, “Minors are obligated,” and that the thought was entertained that the obligation of women could be derived by means of a *kal vachomer* from small children:

In the **core mitzvah** of *hakhel*, men, women, and small children are all equivalent. That's because through the participation of them all, the mitzvah of the **assembler** is fulfilled. From the perspective of the mitzvah on the

assembler to gather them, the men, women, and small children all equally constitute the mitzvah “object.”⁴¹

[In this respect, there is no practical difference between the age of the children spoken about. Infants, too, are included in the rule that “minors are obligated.” After all, infants also serve as the means through which the assembler fulfills his mitzvah to “assemble the people — the men, and the women and the *taf*.”

And since “minors are obligated” in the core mitzvah of *hakhel*, it would have been possible to derive that women were also included in this obligation (even if they hadn’t been explicitly mentioned by the verse). It’s just that the obligation resting on women is also a personal one³⁸ (since they are intellectually capable)⁴⁹ — an additional responsibility that is conferred on the women themselves (which is not feasible for children).

10.

THE MITZVAH OF *HAKHEL* AWAKENS THE JEWISH SPARK

Why is it that we find specifically concerning the mitzvah of *hakhel* that on the one hand, everyone is obligated — men, women and children — yet on the other hand, the obligation rests upon the assembler, the king, or the *Beis Din*? The deeper explanation will be understood in light of Rambam’s phraseology.

Rambam says the mitzvah of *hakhel* is intended to “strengthen the true faith.”⁵⁰ Or, as *Sefer Hachinuch* puts it:⁵¹ “This mitzvah is a strong pillar and contributes great glory to the religion.”

The explanation is that the mitzvah of *hakhel* brings to the surface the nucleus of faith⁵² in every Jew. And this is a foundation and pillar that bolsters

⁴⁹ {In the original, “*bnei deiah*.”}

⁵⁰ Loc. cit., par. 6; and similarly, at the beginning of the chapter, as discussed.

⁵¹ Mitzvah 612.

⁵² {In the original, “*nekudas ha’emunah*.”}

the true religion. {As Rambam also says:} “...and strengthen their commitment to the true religion.”⁵³ The nucleus of faith is fortified and revealed by the king convening all the Jewish people in the *Beis Hamikdash* and then reading to them from the Torah. {Why does this affect them so profoundly?} The king is the heart of the Jewish people,⁵³ and he inculcates in them all a feeling of self-abnegation to Hashem, complete submission to the yoke of Heaven, and reverence for Hashem.⁵⁴ By gathering the Jewish people, the king reveals the nucleus of a person’s Jewishness, which expresses itself in belief and reverence for Hashem.

[Therefore, the sections⁵⁵ of “*Hear, O Israel*, שמע ישראל,”⁵⁶ and “*And it will be, if you diligently obey*, ויהיה אם שמוע,”⁵⁷ are also read, since the message of these sections is for a person to subordinate himself to Hashem and to His commandments. And the section,⁵⁸ “*I will set a king over myself*,”⁵⁹ is also read, as all this awakens in the Jewish people their faith in Hashem and their reverence for Him, for all time — “all the days that you live upon the earth.”⁶⁰]

For this reason, the mitzvah of *hakhel*, as recorded in the Written Law:

(a) applies equally to all Jews. For the nucleus of a person’s Jewishness that manifests itself through a resurgence of faith in Hashem, and so forth, is the same for every Jew. It makes no difference whether a Jew is one of the most illustrious or one of the most humble — even infants are “believers, descendants of believers”⁶¹ — because this nucleus depends not on understanding nor intellectual comprehension. Rather, it is rooted in the quintessence of every Jewish soul.

(b) The mitzvah was not addressed to every individual but rather to the assembler — the king. Because the real **reinforcement** and invigoration of the

⁵³ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Melachim*,” ch. 3, par. 6.

⁵⁴ *Sefer Hamitzvos* of Tzemach Tzedek, “Mitzvah of Appointing a King,” at length.

⁵⁵ Mishnah in *Sotah* 41a; *Mishneh Torah*, loc. cit., par. 3.

⁵⁶ {*Devarim* 6:4.}

⁵⁷ {*Ibid.*, 11:13-21.}

⁵⁸ Rashi, Mishnah in *Sotah* 41a.

⁵⁹ {*Ibid.*, 17:14.}

⁶⁰ {*Ibid.*, 12:1.}

⁶¹ *Shabbos* 97a.

Jewish person's nucleus — the nucleus of faith that endures “all the days” — is not attained by dint of one's own power. It can be attained only through the king,⁶² who serves as the comprehensive soul of the whole nation.⁶³

In view of the above explanation, a wondrous quality of the mitzvah of *hakhel* comes to light: The influence of *hakhel* is felt not just for a specified period, as is the case regarding the festive pilgrimages to Jerusalem.⁶⁴ Rather, the influence of *hakhel* endures for “all the days that you live upon the earth.” The unflagging persistence of its influence derives from this mitzvah's connection to the *yechidah*⁶⁵ of the soul, which is insusceptible to any changes.

11.

BY BRINGING THEIR CHILDREN, PARENTS ARE ELEVATED

In addition to above, the Oral Law (Gemara and Rashi), which uncovers that which is “wondrous, concealed, recondite, and hidden” in the Written Law,⁶⁶ explains that along with the king revealing the faith {of the people} and strengthening it, the nucleus {of Jewish people — their faith} must also be revealed, and it must influence and awaken their soul's inner faculties. This step is carried out by one's personal *avodah*. In this respect, no longer is everyone equal. Each person must proceed in his own way — “men come to learn....”

Afterwards, the Gemara goes on to say that by taking along the youngsters and including them in the mitzvah of *hakhel* together with the king, a “reward” (an additional elevation) is generated within the deeper powers of “those who bring them.” Quite possibly, the results exceed those obtained by dint of the self-directed *avodah* of those who bring them.

⁶² See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 6, p. 219.

⁶³ See also *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 4, p. 1050, et passim

⁶⁴ See *Likkutei Torah*, “*Brachah*,” 98b: “until the *regel* {pilgrimage} that follows.”}

⁶⁵ {*Yechidah*, the fifth and loftiest level of the soul, connotes the essence of the soul — its unity with its source, the singular Essence of G-d.}

⁶⁶ *Iggeres Hakodesh*, “epistel” 29 near the end (150b, et passim).

12.

HAKHEL NOWADAYS

From the above discussion, a practical lesson can be gleaned: Although the mitzvah of *hakhel* is not presently observed — as long as the *Beis Hamikdash* hasn't been built — the Torah, nonetheless, is eternal. Thus, in a Jew's spiritual service, this mitzvah is also in force nowadays and in all places.

One should see to it, especially during the days of the Sukkos festival, that as many Jews as possible should gather. The personal situation of a Jew is immaterial. *Taf* are to be included, and all the more so Jews who are obligated in all the mitzvos but are children in terms of their Torah knowledge and observance of mitzvos. They, too, ought to be included in these Jewish gatherings.

True, the knowledge of these *taf* may not qualify them as having reached the age of education; they may not even be equipped to appreciate the import of Torah, mitzvos, and Judaism. Nonetheless, participating in a gathering of Jews — concerning which it says,⁶⁷ “The *Shechinah* rests over every convocation of ten Jews,” especially, gatherings whose purpose is to awaken reverence for Hashem — helps to uncover the nucleus of Jewishness and faith that is always intact in a Jew.⁶⁸ And the one who brings this person merits to be uplifted and rewarded in his *avodah*.

As far as the children are concerned, their nucleus of faith will totally suffuse them so that their inner faculties will also change. They will be able to listen and to learn, until they fulfill what the verse says,⁶⁹ “and they will fear Hashem your L-rd, and they will take care to perform all the matters of this Torah.”

⁶⁷ *Sanhedrin* 39a; see *Iggeres Hakodesh*, epistle 23.

⁶⁸ *Tanya*, end of ch. 24.

⁶⁹ {*Devarim* 31:12.}

And we will thus merit fulfillment of the promise,⁷⁰ “a great assembly will return here,” with the true and consummate redemption through Moshiach, our righteous one. We will then observe the mitzvah of *hakhel* together with King Moshiach in the Third *Beis Hamikdash*.

— Based on talks delivered on Shabbos *parshas Bereishis* (2nd *farbrengen*) 5734 (1973);
Purim 5727 (1967); *Simchas Beis Hashoeva* 5713 (1952)

⁷⁰ *Yirmiyahu* 31:7.