



# Likkutei Sichos

Volume 19 | Va'yelech | Sichah 4

## How to Gather

---

Translated by Mendel Greenbaum

**General Editor:** Rabbi Eliezer Robbins | **Editor:** Rabbi Y. Eliezer Danzinger

**Content Editor:** Rabbi Zalmy Avtzon

© Copyright by Sichos In English 2023 ◦ 5783

A note on the translation: Rounded and square brackets reflect their use in the original *sichah*; curly brackets are interpolations of the translator or editor. The footnotes in curly brackets are those of the translator or editors and do not correspond to the footnotes in the original. Words in bold type are italicized in the original text.

Considerable effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the translation while maintaining readability. As in all translations, however, the possibility of inadvertent errors exists.

**Feedback is appreciated — please send comments to: [info@projectlikkuteisichos.org](mailto:info@projectlikkuteisichos.org)**

The Mishnah and Gemara<sup>1</sup> present several laws concerning the mitzvah of *Hakhel*.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, in his commentary on our *parshah*, Rashi mentions only a few details on this subject, from which we can adduce the details of *Hakhel* that are essential according to *pshat*.<sup>3</sup>

Rashi comments on the words,<sup>4</sup> “you shall read this Torah” and explains: “The king would read from the beginning of ‘these are the words’<sup>5</sup> — as stated in tractate *Sotah* — upon a wooden platform that they built in the {Temple} courtyard.”

The details that Rashi mentions appear in the mishnah in tractate *Sotah*. However, the mishnah notes more details **not** recorded in Rashi’s commentary [such as the procedure for the Torah being handed to the king; the specific portions he reads; and the blessings the king recites after the Torah reading]. The reason { Rashi omits these details} is plainly understood, considering that the objective of Rashi’s Torah commentary is to explain the text according to its plain meaning and not to set forth all the legal details of the mitzvos. However, it is unclear why Rashi mentions **those** particular details, for one could ask: (a) What warrants Rashi mentioning these specific laws, according to *pshat*?; and (b) these laws seem not to have any bearing on **understanding** the text on the level of *pshat*!

---

<sup>1</sup> *Sotah* 41a ff.

<sup>2</sup> {The mitzvah of *Hakhel* (discussed in *parshas Vayelech*) is important for all Jews — men, women, and children. They are required to assemble in the Temple courtyard once every seven years, on the Sukkos immediately following the conclusion of the *shmittah* year, where they are to listen to certain portions of the Torah read aloud to them by the king. (*Devarim* 31:10-13).}

<sup>3</sup> {The straightforward meaning of Scripture. Rashi says in his commentary to *Bereishis* 3:8: “I have come only to explain the plain meaning of the Scripture.” Although there are many levels and depths of interpretation on the Torah, Rashi adopts a straightforward approach.}

<sup>4</sup> *Devarim* 31:11.

<sup>5</sup> {*Devarim* 1:1 — the beginning of the book of *Devarim*}.

The first part of Rashi's explanation — “The king would read from the beginning of ‘these are the words’” — is understood: {Rashi here is informing us of} the intent of these words said {by Moshe} “to Yehoshua” and the elders of the Jewish people: “You shall read this Torah.” {These words intimate the following:} a) “You shall read,” which is in the singular,<sup>6</sup> pertains to the same subject as that which immediately follows, “gather,” which is also in the singular. Rashi explains that the individual who has the power to gather together “the nation” is the king — {in Rashi's words} “The king would read”; and b) {Rashi explains that the phrase} “**this Torah**” {has the same} connotation as “{Moshe commenced to explain} **this Torah**, saying ‘Hashem, our L-rd...’”<sup>7</sup> — {in Rashi's words} “from the beginning of ‘these are the words.’”

However, when considering Rashi's continuation — “upon a wooden platform that they built in the courtyard” — **these** laws seem to have no connection to the interpretation of the verse.

## 2.

### IN TRACTATE SOTAH

Seemingly, we could explain that Rashi's intent here is to inform us of the *Hakhel* proceedings. Since *Hakhel* only occurred when the Temple existed, a novice Torah student<sup>8</sup> would not be fully aware of the procedures. Even when the Temple stood, *Hakhel* was held infrequently, occurring only once in seven years. Therefore, Rashi informs us that *Hakhel*'s details are “stated in tractate *Sotah*.” In other words, those details of the mitzvah of *Hakhel* not mentioned by Rashi are discussed (and may be studied by anyone who wishes) in tractate *Sotah*.

---

<sup>6</sup> {The prefix ‘ה’ alone turns a verb into direct singular, (‘תקרא’ ‘tikra’ translates as “you (sing.) shall read”) and requires an additional suffix ‘ו’ to pluralize it (‘תקראו’ ‘tikre’u’ would be “you (pl.) shall read.”)}

<sup>7</sup> {*Devarim* 1:5-6.}

<sup>8</sup> {In the Hebrew original, “ben chamesh lemikra.” Meaning, “a five-year-old beginning to study Scripture.” This term, borrowed from *Pirkei Avos*, teaches that the appropriate age for a child to begin studying *Chumash* is five. Rashi wrote his commentary on *Chumash* to solve problems that a 5-year-old student would encounter in understanding the simple meaning of a verse.}

This explanation, however, is untenable, due to {the following difficulties}:

- a) The mitzvah of *Hakhel* is much more straightforward than many other mitzvos that are contingent on being performed in the Temple, such as offering sacrifices and the like.
- b) According to this explanation, Rashi would only have needed to conclude with the words “as stated in tractate *Sotah*.” Why does he quote the details “upon a wooden platform that they built in the courtyard”?
- c) Rashi should have placed the words “as stated in tractate *Sotah*” at the beginning or end of his comment — not in the middle. Rashi’s wording, when taken at face value, implies that the reference to tractate *Sotah* is only a citation for the previous statement, “The king would read from the beginning of ‘these are the words’” (but not of the subsequent details, despite them also having been stated there).

### 3.

#### WHAT DOES HE READ?

The beginning of Rashi’s explanation also needs to be clarified: How Rashi derives from the verse that “the king would read” according to *pshat* is clear, either as explained above or as explained by commentators:<sup>9</sup>

The previous verse says that “Moshe commanded **them**” using a plural pronoun, whereas the subsequent verse says, “**You** shall read (this Torah)” in singular.<sup>10</sup> We must say {to address this discrepancy} that Moshe was now focusing on one prominent individual, and since in the preceding verses it says that “Moshe called to **Yehoshua**,” it makes sense that this was {also} directed at

---

<sup>9</sup> See *Be’er Mayim Chayim*; *Devek Tov*; *Maskil L’David*; see as well *Chizkuni*, loc. cit.; *Iyun Yaakov* on *Ein Yaakov*, *Sotah* ibid.

<sup>10</sup> See, however, the {Aramaic} translation by *Yonason Ben Uziel*, loc. cit.: “**Tikrun** yas Oraysa” {“You (pl.) shall read the Torah.”}

Yehoshua, who, as Rashi said two verses earlier, was the “leader of the generation”<sup>11</sup> — a king.

The source for the continuation of Rashi’s commentary {that the reading was} “from the beginning of ‘these are the words’” is also understood, as discussed above. Additionally, {the need for Rashi to convey this information is also understood, for} Rashi wishes to preclude {an alternative interpretation of “this Torah”}: The same wording had been used just two verses earlier,<sup>12</sup> “Moshe wrote this Torah.” However, it refers there to how Moshe had just concluded the entire Torah.<sup>13</sup> Rashi precludes interpreting our verse similarly, emphasizing that the phrase “this Torah” **here** refers (not to the entire Torah, but) to *Mishneh Torah* {that is, *Devarim*} only.

However, this raises some questions:

- a) From where does Rashi derive, based on *pshat*, that “this Torah” is only “from the beginning of ‘these are the words’”? [We cannot say that Rashi says, “as stated in tractate *Sotah*,” to indicate that although based on *pshat* we would not know this, nonetheless, it is so stated in tractate *Sotah*, for the question would remain — why would we not learn, **based on pshat**, that the connotation of these words {i.e., “this Torah”} is consistent with their meaning two verses earlier — the entire Torah?]<sup>14</sup>
- b) Since the term used by the verse is “this Torah,” Rashi should have said {using a comparable expression} “the king would read *Mishneh Torah*,” or, “**this** book,” or the like, corresponding to the wording of the verse, “this Torah,” rather than indicate where the king **commences** {the reading}.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> As well as in Rashi’s comment earlier (*Devarim* 29:12): “From leader to leader — from Moshe to Yehoshua.”

<sup>12</sup> *Devarim* 31:9.

<sup>13</sup> See Rashi on *Devarim* 31:9; see also Ramban, loc. cit. and *Tur Ha’aruch*, loc. cit.

<sup>14</sup> In the *Devek Tov* on Rashi’s commentary: “By saying “this {Torah}” it implies specifically *Mishneh Torah*.” However, this explanation requires further consideration as the word “this” is just beforehand ascribed to the entire Torah, as mentioned (see, however, fn. 20 in the original). Note, as well, that in the second ed. of Rashi and numerous manuscripts, the word “this” does not appear in the header of this comment {which indicates that it is relevant to the explanation}.

<sup>15</sup> In the first ed. of Rashi: “From ‘these are the words’ — from the beginning of the book.”

We cannot say that Rashi writes, “from the beginning of ‘these are the words’” to (be congruent with the *halachah*<sup>16</sup> and to) replicate the *Mishnah*’s wording because the objective of Rashi’s commentary is (not to apprise us of the details of the halachos, as mentioned above, but) to clarify the words and plain meaning of the verse.

#### 4.

##### READ FROM THE BEGINNING — BUT NOT EVERYTHING

The preceding can all be explained by prefacing with an inference based on Rashi’s nuanced wording: “the king **would** read....” Since Rashi’s objective is not to provide halachic instruction but to elucidate the meaning of the verse, he should have simply said, “*You shall read* — the king.” By saying, “the king **would** read,” Rashi (not only elucidates the verse but) apprises us of the law of the mitzvah of *Hakhel* (and their application).

The explanation: According to the straightforward narrative in *parshas Vayelech*, after Moshe declared, “I am one hundred and twenty years old today”<sup>17</sup> and instructed the Jewish people concerning their conduct immediately following his passing<sup>18</sup> when they would cross the Jordan River, “Moshe summoned Yehoshua and said to him... ‘Be strong and courageous! For you shall come with this people... and cause them to inherit....’”<sup>19</sup> In continuation of this, “Moshe wrote this Torah and gave it to the kohanim,”<sup>20</sup> and only then did Moshe give the directive: “Moshe commanded them {regarding *Hakhel*}, saying, ‘At the end of seven years... when all Israel comes... gather....’”<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> {The king only read selected portions of *Devarim*; he started from the beginning but then he skipped parts.}

<sup>17</sup> *Devarim* 31:2.

<sup>18</sup> *Devarim* 31:3 ff.

<sup>19</sup> {*Devarim* 31:7.}

<sup>20</sup> {*Devarim* 31:9.}

<sup>21</sup> {*Devarim* 31:10-12.}

Understood simply, this command {to gather} would presumably be {understood as} a continuation from the previous passage<sup>22</sup> — a directive to “this nation” and to “the kohanim, sons of Levi” to whom he had given the Torah. “You shall read this Torah,” in singular, is an instruction to **Yehoshua** that at the end of seven years after they enter into the land of Israel (following Moshe’s passing),<sup>23</sup> there should be a “*Hakhel*-gathering” at which the Jews will inspired so that “they shall fear Hashem, your L-rd, and they will be careful to perform all the words of this Torah” through Yehoshua reading “this Torah” before them — all of the Torah<sup>24</sup> — which Moshe had given to the kohanim, the sons of Levi.

In order to forestall this interpretation,<sup>25</sup> Rashi says that “the king would read from the beginning of ‘these are the words.’” With this remark, Rashi clarifies: (a) This {directive} is for any point in time when there is a king — a mitzvah for **all future generations** and not {just a one-time event,} seven years after their entry into the land.<sup>26</sup> (b) This directive was given to Yehoshua, not in his capacity as the leader of the Jews into the land<sup>27</sup> but as their **king**. (c)

---

<sup>22</sup> According to this explanation, it would be well understood why he waited to inform them of this mitzvah and directive of Hashem’s until the end of the forty years and the very day of his death. However, one could say that he was unable to instruct them {of the mitzvah} beforehand, as the command was to read from *Mishneh Torah*, which was not concluded (and especially — its transcription) until the very day of his death.

<sup>23</sup> Note the supposition refuted in *Sotah* (end of 41a) that the count {of seven years} was to begin immediately, and Rashi’s explanation, ad. loc.: “From the fortieth year onwards.”

<sup>24</sup> And note the wording used in describing the opinion of “others” in *Sifrei*, “*Shoftim*” (17:18) that it was necessary to exposit that “the **only** thing that was read on the day of *Hakhel* was *Mishneh Torah* alone.” And see at length the explanation of Harav Y. P. Perla on Rav Saadia Gaon’s *Sefer HaMitzvos*, par. 10, that in the view of the first opinion cited there {in *Sifrei*} and others (as well as in the view of those who learn this from our *parshah*), they would read the entire Torah at *Hakhel*; see there at length.

<sup>25</sup> Note *Lekach Tov*, ad. loc.: “*Moshe commanded them, saying* — to enjoin them for generations regarding this mitzvah of the *parshah* of the king.”

<sup>26</sup> We can posit that the necessity to explain it this way also according to *pshat* is based on the beginning of the verse, “When all of Israel comes to appear before Hashem, your L-rd, in the place that He will choose.” The obligation applies (a) when they make the Yom Tov pilgrimage, which is (b) in the place He will choose — in the Temple. And according to *pshat*, the “the place that He will choose” refers to the Temple in *Yerushalayim* (Rashi on *Devarim* 12:11) — see *Pnei David* (by *Chida*) ad. loc.; and even if one explains that this refers to the {*Mishkan* in} *Shiloh* as well (see *Mizrachi*, et al., on Rashi *Devarim* 12:5), and as is explicitly taught in *Sifrei* (*Devarim* 16:2; *Devarim* 26:2; as well as *Sifrei* on the two above verses), that *Shiloh* is also considered “the place that He will choose, to which they would also make pilgrimage (see *Ramban* on *Devarim* 16:9; 12:8; see also *Har HaMoriyah* on *Mishneh Torah*, beg. of “*Hilchos Beis HaBechirah*”), at the very least, we do not see this {term ever applied to the *Mishkan*} in the 14 years that it stood in *Gilgal* (at which point private altars were permitted — *Zevachim* 112b).

And they were not then aware of exactly how many years would pass until {the *Mishkan*} would come to *Shiloh*, how long it would stand there, etc. — But they *did* know (**even according to *pshat***) that some time would elapse until they would come to *Shiloh* and then onto the Temple, as Rashi explained **earlier**. (*Devarim* 12:11).

<sup>27</sup> As it is not **so** clear how the reading of the one to lead the Jews into the land specifically would inspire the people “to fear and to do...”

Yehoshua was to read {only} “from the beginning of ‘these are the words’” — not the entire Torah (which Moshe had {just} given to the kohanim, the sons of Levi).

## 5.

### SOTAH TEACHES US WHICH PASSAGES TO READ

The necessity to say that the king doesn’t read the entire Torah is understood **simply**:<sup>28</sup>

Since the purpose of *Hakhel* is “so that they will hear, and so that they will learn, and they shall fear Hashem, your L-rd, and be careful to perform...,”<sup>29</sup> the most pertinent portions {to read} are those that inspire and motivate the people so that “they shall fear Hashem, your L-rd, and be careful to perform....”

Therefore, Rashi says {that the king would read} “from the beginning of ‘these are the words...’” and not “*Mishneh Torah*,” or the like, because the clause, “these are the words,” emphasizes that what follows are the words of admonishment<sup>30</sup> spoken by Moshe in proximity to his passing to encourage the Jews<sup>31</sup> to fulfill and observe the mitzvos faithfully. Similarly, Moshe mandated that the king (representative of Moshe), at the end of every seven years, for all future generations, should read these exact words of admonishment before the Jews.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Based on the *Maskil LeDavid* on Rashi (*Devarim* 31:9), we can posit that the meaning of “Moshe wrote this Torah” is a reference to *Mishneh Torah* alone (see *Seforno*, loc. cit.). On this basis, this would be the plain meaning of, “you shall read this Torah” in this verse — which comes as a continuation of the previous one; see Rashi’s commentary on *Yehoshua* 1:8.

<sup>29</sup> On this basis, we could posit that when Rashi quotes {in his caption}, “you shall read this Torah,” his intention is to present a commentary on the entire *parshah* {of *Hakhel*}.

<sup>30</sup> As Rashi explains at the beg. of *parshas Devarim*; see *Shach al HaTorah* on the verse here.

<sup>31</sup> See *Paneach Raza* at the beg. of *parshas Devarim*.

<sup>32</sup> We may add that, according to *pshat*, since women and children are also required to attend *Hakhel*, there is no room to suggest they would read the whole Torah at *Hakhel*, in addition to those portions that would motivate the fulfillment of Torah and mitzvos. Reading the whole Torah would be too exhausting because it is long (it takes a long time to read); additionally, they would not learn from it to “fear Hashem, your L-rd, and be careful to perform...”; see *Abarbanel*, loc. cit.



However, we could ask: There are many passages and verses within {the book of} *Devarim* that do not have any (or at any least direct) pertinence {to inspiring the Jews} so that “they shall fear Hashem, your L-rd, and be careful to perform all the words of this Torah”!

Rashi, therefore, emphasizes {that the king read} “**from the beginning of ‘these are the words’ as stated in tractate Sotah.**” The king commenced his reading with “these are the words...,” and then continued to read in accordance with what is explained in tractate *Sotah*, where it outlines which portions of {the book of} *Devarim* the king read and which were skipped.<sup>33</sup>

## 6.

IN THE COURTYARD, ON A WOODEN PLATFORM

However, a question yet remains: If the aim of *Hakhel* is {to gather all Jews} so that “they **listen**...,” the following is unclear: When they entered the land, the Jews numbered more than 600,000 combat-eligible men,<sup>34</sup> in addition to children under the age of twenty, etc., and women. All the more so {their population would have swelled} after spending some years in the land of Israel. How would it be possible for **all** the Jews to hear the king’s words?

Although we find numerous times in the Torah instances in which Moshe addressed all the Jews: (a) It does not say that women and children also attended;<sup>35</sup> (b) it does not say that it was necessary for everyone to hear every word spoken by Moshe and at the same time.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> We could explain that Rashi notes {the source} “*tractate Sotah*” in order to negate a statement made in *Tosefta Sotah* (7:9), which presents the opinion of Rabbi {Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi} that “he was not required to commence the reading from the beginning of the book,” which does not fit according to *pshat*.

<sup>34</sup> {Men from twenty years of age and above.}

<sup>35</sup> **Rashi** does not mention {regarding any of those assemblies} at the beginnings of the *parshas Vayakhel*, *Kedoshim* or *Devarim* that (women and) children were present.

That which the *Zohar* (195a) {regarding those present by the assembly at beg. of *parshas Vayakhel* references the verse about *Hakhel*} “men, women and children” is explained by the *Or HaChamah* on the *Zohar* that “R. Abba’s reply... is only to adduce the presence of all 600,000 men, but not that of children”; this is implied as well by Ramban on the beg. of *parshas Vayakhel*.

<sup>36</sup> See *Or HaChamah*, *ibid.*: “at other times, however, only those who wished would assemble”; see, as well, *Sefer Zikaron*, beg. *parshas Kedoshim*: “by all other portions... not necessarily to all of them, but only to those who

In contrast, in our case — where (a) it says “gather the people — the men, the women, and the children”; and (b) the mitzvah is that “you shall read this Torah... in **their ears...**” — how would it have been possible for **all** of them to have been able to hear?<sup>37</sup>

To address this, Rashi is compelled to add that the king would read “**upon a platform**” — a high vantage point, so that all<sup>38</sup> can (see<sup>39</sup> and) hear him.<sup>40</sup>

Having said, “on a platform,” it is immediately necessary for Rashi to forestall {certain difficulties} by saying that it was “a wooden {platform} that they built in the courtyard.” Rashi thereby forestalls the following questions which arise on account of information **previously** learned in *Chumash*:

a) Scripture says that the command, “you shall read this Torah” should be fulfilled “when all Israel comes to appear אָתָּה־פָּנֶיךָ, **before Hashem, your L-rd.**”<sup>41</sup> This implies that *Hakhel* was held in the place {that was considered} “אָתָּה־פָּנֶיךָ, {lit.,} **inside** {the house of} **Hashem, your L-rd**” — **inside** {the

---

held the words of Hashem dear and wished to learn and listen”, and how he proves this from the Rambam’s Introduction to his *Commentary on Mishnah*; the *Gur Aryeh*, beg. *parshas Kedoshim*: “in the whole Torah... not all Jews were obligated to come; if they were otherwise occupied, they would not come” [and *Mizrachi*, ad loc. regarding the teaching procedures, “Moshe would teach them group by group”].

Seemingly, we must say that Rashi’s understanding of *pshat* is the same for “is it possible that he was able to speak to 600,000 men at once?” (in the words of the *Kli Yakar*, on beg. *Devarim*), and in *Sefer Hazikaron*, mentioned above, “if you do not say so, it would be a great miracle for Moshe’s tent to accommodate them all.” In the *Lekach Tov*, beg. *Devarim*: “This teaches that he would speak, and his voice was broadcast throughout the entire encampment”, and the *Paneach Raza*, ad loc. writes similarly (also see *Jerusalem Talmud, Pesachim* ch. 5 par. 5: “extra strength was given to Moshe’s voice, and it was broadcast throughout the entire Egypt, a distance of forty days travel”). However {to assume that Rashi learns like this} there would (at least) need to be some indication of this in *pshat*.

<sup>37</sup> Note the *Lechem Mishnah* on *Mishneh Torah* “*Hilchos Chagigah*” chap. 3, par. 6, when explaining the words “one who is unable to hear should focus his attention on this reading” — that “he is distant {from the king} in a position from which he cannot hear.” However, this explanation is not according to the verse — “**in their ears.**”

<sup>38</sup> Seemingly, a miracle is anyways needed so that all men, women, and children be able to fit in the courtyard. See *Alshich* on these verses; and *Meiri* on *Megillah* 5a. However, the courtyard size is not discussed in *pshat*; therefore, Rashi is not obliged to explain this.

<sup>39</sup> {By having the king in sight} one would be able to (easily) focus his attention on the reading (see above, fn. 37).

<sup>40</sup> As stated by the Rambam as well {that the reason the king would read from atop a platform is} “so that they will be able to hear his reading”.

<sup>41</sup> Presumably, this is Rashi’s source for asserting that it took place in the courtyard and not like the opinion of Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov in *Tosefta, Sotah* (ch. 7, par. 8) that it took place on *Har Habayis* {the Temple Mount plaza}. See *Kiryas Sefer* on *Mishneh Torah*, *ibid*.

*Heichal*<sup>42</sup> — {all Jews standing} inside {this small area}, a tremendous miracle! And how may one even construct a platform within the Temple {structure} itself? Therefore, Rashi says that this took place in the courtyard, as we find countless times<sup>43</sup> that “the glory of Hashem” {is described as appearing} by the entrance of the *Ohel Moed*.

- b) We have learned, regarding the *Mishkan*, that all furnishings of the *Mishkan* were used daily<sup>44</sup> (and understandably, the same was true in the Temple). How was it possible for there to be a platform standing in the Temple that was used only once in seven years? Also, such a platform would presumably obstruct the regular service in the Temple the rest of the time.<sup>45</sup>

To address this, Rashi adds that it was a “**wooden {platform} that they built.**” It was a temporary, wooden structure<sup>46</sup> **built** {solely for this purpose}, made right at that time of *Hakhel* (every seven years).

---

<sup>42</sup> {The *Heichal* was the actual structure that housed the *Aron*, *Shulchan*, *Menorah*, and Golden Altar. The courtyard surrounded the *Heichel*.}

<sup>43</sup> *Bamidbar* 16:19; 20:6; et al.

<sup>44</sup> Except the *Kodesh HaKodashim*, **about which it is explicitly stated**: “He should not come at all times” (*Vayikra* 16:2).

<sup>45</sup> Not so if it were placed on the Temple Mount. However, were the reading to take place there, there may not have been as much need for a platform altogether, as its surface was not entirely level (as within the *Cheil* {space immediately surrounding the courtyard} were twelve steps, etc. *Middos*, ch. 2 mishnah. 3; *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Beis HaBechirah*,” beg. ch. 6).

<sup>46</sup> Another possible reason for {Rashi} explaining that it was made of wood {is that Rashi wishes} to answer how it was permissible for them to build the platform, especially for *Hakhel*, and afterward have it removed when considering the explicit {command} (*Devarim* 12:4) “You shall not do so to Hashem, your L-rd.” Rashi explains that this “is a proscription against one who erases Hashem’s Name or demolishes a stone from the altar or from the courtyard.”

Therefore, Rashi must detail that it was “of wood” since, concerning wood, the verse mentions no prohibition. However, in truth, there may not be an issue altogether {even if it were made of stone} as {the platform} was not fixed as part of the building. Further analysis is required to ascertain whether the prohibition of demolishing the courtyard applies if one demolishes the platform afterward. Further discussion, however, is beyond the scope of this work.

## CATEGORIZING HAKHEL

From among the wondrous halachic implications emerging from this comment of Rashi:

There are two schools of thought regarding the king's obligation to read these portions of *Mishneh Torah* {the book of *Devarim*}:<sup>47</sup> Does it fall under the rubric of the laws concerning a **king**, meaning that a king must read these portions of the Torah before the nation at *Hakhel*? Or does it fall under the rubric of *Hakhel*, meaning that {when all Jews gather for *Hakhel*,} certain portions should be read to them by the king?

We can similarly assess the platform made for *Hakhel* — was it for the king's sake, as part of his honor (or the like), that they needed to build a platform for him to read from? Or is the platform considered part of the laws and mitzvah of *Hakhel*?

Simply understood, this (the first question) depends on what the source is for the obligation of the king to read the Torah.<sup>48</sup> Rashi, in his commentary on the mishnah, says:<sup>49</sup> “This reading was performed by the king, as taught in *Sifrei* on the *parshah* of the **king**.<sup>50</sup> “Te *Mishneh*<sup>51</sup> of this *Torah*”<sup>52</sup> — only *Mishneh Torah* was read on the day of *Hakhel*.” In other words, it is derived from a verse in the *parshah* of the king,<sup>53</sup> for the apparent reason that this is one of the laws

---

<sup>47</sup> Regarding the forthcoming discussion, see the explanation of R. Y Perla on Rav Saadia Gaon's *Sefer HaMitzvos*, sec. 1, positive mitzvah 16, sec. 3, par. 10; see *Encyclopedia Talmudis*, under the entry of *Hakhel* and the sources cited there; *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 19 p. 366 ff, vol. 34 p. 188 ff and fn. 20.

<sup>48</sup> A practical difference in halachah {between these two views} would be whether the king's reading (as well as the platform) is necessary to the extent of impeding *Hakhel* when lacking — see R Y Perla's explanation, *ibid*; see as well the *Minchas Chinuch*, end. et al.

<sup>49</sup> Rashi's Mishnah commentary, “*Sotah*,” loc. cit., s.v., “*shene'emar*.”

<sup>50</sup> {The portion which discusses the appointment and obligations of a king (*Devarim 17:14-20*).}

<sup>51</sup> {Lit. “a reiteration of this Torah”; The *Sifrei* provides various interpretations as to what is derived from this curious terminology. On the *pshat* level, the Torah commands the king to have two Torah scrolls written (Rashi, ad loc.).}

<sup>52</sup> {*Devarim 17:18*.}

<sup>53</sup> This applies as well to the other opinion {that the obligation for the king to read} is derived from an alternative interpretation taught in *Sifrei* as to {why the Torah written for the king is} termed *Mishneh Torah*, meaning a

and obligations that apply to the king.<sup>54</sup> If, however, one derives this {obligation to read the Torah} from the verse in our *parshah*, “**you shall read** this Torah,” as discussed above, it would be understood that this is considered part of the laws and mitzvos of *Hakhel*.

In light of this, seemingly, it turns out that Rashi, in his commentary on the Torah (according to *pshat*), learns that these procedures are obligations and details in the laws of the mitzvah of *Hakhel*, which are derived from the verse in the *parshah* of *Hakhel* “you shall read this Torah.” This applies both to what “the king would read,” as well as to the building of the platform, {the purpose of which is} so that all Jews would be able to hear {the reading of} these portions of the Torah, as explained above.<sup>55</sup>

In contrast, in Rashi’s commentary on the Talmud, Rashi explains the plain meaning of the mishnah, where the mishnah calls {the portion that is read itself} the “***parshah of the king***.”<sup>56</sup> The entire continuation of the mishnah emphasizes (several times) the honor that was shown to the king, as it says, “he sits on it {the platform}, the attendant of the assemblage takes the Torah scroll and passes it to the head of the assemblage, the head of the assemblage passes it to the deputy *Kohen Gadol*, the deputy passes it to the *Kohen Gadol*, and the *Kohen Gadol* passes it to the king (and “all this is for the king’s honor”),<sup>57</sup> who **reads it while seated....**”<sup>58</sup> (The same applies to the platform {meaning, the

---

Torah that will be later taught from {*mishtanen*}, that this teaches that the king expounds the *parshah* of *Hakhel*; see *Meiri* on *Sanhedrin* 21b.

<sup>54</sup> R. Y Perla (ibid.) writes similarly, though he explains that {it is because of his obligation to read that} he, therefore, is commanded to have a Torah scroll written (for himself) — {this Torah scroll itself being called in the verse} *Mishneh Torah*.

<sup>55</sup> The relevance of these details to *Hakhel* — the objective of *Hakhel* is “so that they will listen, and so that they will learn, and they shall fear Hashem, your L-rd, and be careful to perform...” which will be increased by the Jews hearing there reading from the king, while looking at him, etc. (as above fn. ). See *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Chagigah*,” ch. 3, par. 6: “{he should consider as if he} had heard it from the Almighty, for the king is an agent...”. See *Abarbanel*, ad loc.: “The greatest amongst the nation, who is the king, reads with great publicity... so that they hear and their hearts be inspired from the words, and from the honour of the speaker and reader...”.

<sup>56</sup> Note the *Tosfos Yom Tov* on the mishnah, ad loc.: “The {portion read by the king} is called the *parshah* of the king, unlike {the previously discussed portions read on Yom Kippur} by the *Kohen Gadol* which is not called {the *parshah* of the *Kohen Gadol*}.

<sup>57</sup> *Sotah* 41b.

<sup>58</sup> Which is also for his honor — see *Sotah*, ibid.

king's glory is emphasized} — the wording is,<sup>59</sup> “they make **for him**<sup>60</sup> a wooden platform”).

Therefore, in his Talmud commentary, Rashi learns “as is taught in Sifrei in the *parshah* of the king”<sup>61</sup> — this falls under the rubric of the laws pertaining to the king.

## 8.

### HAKHEL TODAY

From the “wine of Torah”<sup>62</sup> in Rashi's commentary:

We have discussed many times that the Torah is eternal.<sup>63</sup> Despite the current inability to physically perform the mitzvah of *Hakhel* in the Temple, we still have its counterpart<sup>64</sup> in spiritual *avodah*.<sup>65</sup> This *avodah* is executed in the individual *Mishkan* and *Mikdash*<sup>66</sup> within every Jew.<sup>67</sup>

The idea of *Hakhel* as it applies to each Jew is the marshaling and gathering of all of his soul's faculties, as well as his thought, speech, and action, bringing them all “inside” and deploying them within his inner Temple —

---

<sup>59</sup> {*Sotah* 41a, in the mishnah.}

<sup>60</sup> See as well Rashi's wording on *Megillah* 5a. Note that in the second edition and many manuscripts of Rashi, it says {in the comment under discussion} “that they make **for him** in the courtyard.”

<sup>61</sup> Based on this, we can better understand Rashi's comment on *Sotah* and the version he has of the mishnah, which lists {as one of the portions read by the king} the *parshah* of the king, and that he read this portion last, “from there he turns back and reads {*Devarim* 17:14}, ‘I will set a king over myself...’” (Rashi, ad loc.) which is unlike how Rambam learns in his *Introduction to Mishnah*, ad loc. or *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Chagigah*,” ch. 3, par. 3 (as well as in the *Sefer Mitzvos Gadol* and *Chinuch*) where the *parshah* of the king is not listed separately, consistent with the version of the mishnah found in the *Jerusalem Talmud*; see the *Shinui Nuschaos on Mishnah*; see *Tosfos Yom Tov* and *Melech Shlomo* on this mishnah.

<sup>62</sup> {The deeper ideas in Torah.}

<sup>63</sup> *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” beg. of ch. 17.

<sup>64</sup> For a detailed explanation of *Hakhel* according to Kabbalah, see *Likkutei Levi Yitzchak*, “*Igros*,” pp. 239 ff; pp. 245 ff.

<sup>65</sup> {Divine service.}

<sup>66</sup> {Temple.}

<sup>67</sup> See also *Michtav Klali* of Erev Shabbos, Chai Elul 5740 (1980) and the sources listed there (published in *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 19, pp. 611 ff.).

And there then needs to be {a counterpart in *avodah* to} “the king would read” — the calling forth and the downflow of the soul’s faculties conducted by “the king,” which, in terms of the faculties of the soul, translates into *bittul*<sup>68</sup> and accepting the yoke of the **kingdom** of Heaven that is found within every Jew.

(This is similar to the Tzemach Tzedek’s<sup>69</sup> explanation<sup>70</sup> regarding an actual king — he explains that a king fosters within Jews the acceptance of the Heavenly yoke and fear of Hashem<sup>71</sup>).<sup>72</sup>

And concerning this, {Rashi’s wording} “the king would read” pertains to, and is under the rubric of, the laws of the mitzvah of *Hakhel*: {The objective of *Hakhel* is} “so that they will hear, and so that they will learn **and they shall fear Hashem**” — this will be accomplished precisely when {the *Hakhel avodah*} is performed with total surrender to Hashem. Conversely, when the *Hakhel avodah* is motivated by a person’s pleasure and enjoyment, his *avodah* is tainted with a sense of self. In turn, this impedes the absolute fulfillment of the intention of *Hakhel* — that “**they shall fear Hashem.**”

---

<sup>68</sup> {*Bittul* connotes submission to Hashem, self-nullification, humility, and the negation of ego.}

<sup>69</sup> Whose birthday falls out on the 29th of Elul (5649).

<sup>70</sup> *Derech Mitzvosecha*, “*Mitzvas Minui Melech*.”

<sup>71</sup> See *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Chagigah*,” ch. 3, par. 6: “He should see himself as if he was just now commanded regarding the Torah and heard it from the Almighty, for the king is an agent to publicize the word of Hashem.”

<sup>72</sup> Note that the beginning of the king’s reading is “he reads from the beginning of ‘these are the words’ until *Shema*, the *Shema*, *Vehaya Im Shamo’a*” (*Mishnah*, *Sotah* 41a) — *Shema* contains the acceptance of the Heavenly yoke and *Vehaya Im Shamo’a* contains the acceptance of the yoke of mitzvos; see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 24, p. 106.

Additional details then follow {in Rashi's commentary}. A person's acceptance of the Heavenly yoke and fear of Hashem must be like a "platform." Were a person's *avodah* based just on the acceptance of the Heavenly yoke and fear, they may affect him with a sense of *bittul* {whereby he perceives himself} as a "threshold to be tread upon." If this were the case, the person wouldn't be able to perform his *avodah* appropriately.<sup>73</sup> His *avodah* must, therefore, resemble a "platform" — characterized by toughness, {in fulfillment of the directive to} "be strong like a lion."<sup>74</sup> This approach will also enable a person to elevate himself and transcend his evil inclination — "One should always **incite** his good inclination against his evil inclination."<sup>75</sup>

This elevation and loftiness, accompanied by submission to Hashem, smooths the way for the person to truly absorb the "reading of the king." It has a lasting impact on all the faculties of a person's soul — and his thoughts, speech, and actions — over the entire year.

We must ensure, however, that this "platform" must be (a) made **of wood**; and (b) that it is **built** in the courtyard:

This sentiment of (being like) a "platform," of elevation and loftiness, should only be temporary, {such as a platform made} of **wood**, and the person should only use such feelings for holy purposes "in the courtyard" (to perform one's *avodah* of "*Hakhel*" — gathering all the faculties, etc.). However, when he finds himself **outside** the Temple courtyard — when he is not in a sublime state in {terms of} holiness and *avodah* — such feelings may produce a sense of loftiness that contradicts the {Divine} objective.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>73</sup> See *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch* (and the Alter Rebbe's *Shulchan Aruch*, the second ver.), beg. of "*Orach Chaim*"; see *Torah Or*, 91b, 119c ff.; *Likkutei Torah*, "*Bamidbar*," 15c; et al.; see also *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 14, pp. 255 ff.

<sup>74</sup> Beg. of *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch*, "*Orach Chaim*"; "The lion is the king of the beasts" (*Chagigah* 13b).

<sup>75</sup> *Berachos* 5a (beg.); see *Tanya*, "*Likkutei Amarim*," ch. 29 (37a); *Likkutei Torah*, *ibid*.

<sup>76</sup> See Alter Rebbe's *Shulchan Aruch*, "*Orach Chaim*," first ver., ch.1, par.3 (as well as *Beis Yosef*, loc. cit.): "{The concern} lest he acquire the habit of acting insolently even **when this is not done in His service**."



And especially during these **preparatory** days preceding the year of *Hakhel*,<sup>77</sup> every Jew is bestowed with the means and ability to accomplish the objectives of *Hakhel* within his personal *Mikdash*. And by fulfilling *Hakhel* on a spiritual level, we will merit to fulfill the mitzvah of *Hakhel* in actuality — in the Third Temple. We will then hear the Torah read by King Mashiach in this coming year of *Hakhel*. May it materialize for us and all of Israel for the good.

— From a talk delivered on Shabbos *parshas Vayelech*, 5735 (1975)

---

<sup>77</sup> {This *sichah* was published initially in honor of Shabbos *parshas Nitzavim-Vayelech* 5740 (1980), less than a week before the onset of the year 5741, a year of *Hakhel*.}