

The Basics of Chassidus

A Comprehensive Anthology
of Chabad Thought

SPECIAL
|
HAKHEL
|
CHAPTER

HAKHEL: The Inside Story

EXCERPTED FROM VOLUME 7 — AROUND THE YEAR

RABBI NISSAN DOVID DUBOV
RABBI NAFTOLI HERTZ PEWZNER

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of Chabad Thought**

Hakhel:
The Inside Story

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SICHOS IN ENGLISH

THE BASICS OF CHASSIDUS

HAKHEL: THE INSIDE STORY

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SICHOS IN ENGLISH

788 Eastern Parkway | Brooklyn, New York 11213

718.778.5436 | Fax 718.735.4139

www.sie.org

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ISBN 978-1-9381-6321-0

5783 • 2022

Typography, template, and cover design by Spotlight Design

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FOREWORD

ב"ה

The Basics of Chassidus

Last year, Sichos in English was honored to debut a brand new series, *The Basics of Chassidus*. A revolutionary undertaking, this multivolume project sets out to create a comprehensive English collection of Chassidic thought. The goal of the series is to allow *Hafatzas HaMayanos* to reach new heights by making *Chassidus* accessible in a singular one-stop presentation.

The first volume, titled *Chabad: Its Origins, Principles, and Purpose* was released a few months ago, receiving much appreciation from a diverse audience. The first book of the series, this volume discusses many of *Chassidus*'s most primary ideas while exploring its origins and laying out its purpose.

Always moving forward, coauthors **Rabbi Nissan Dovid Dubov** of Wimbledon, England and **Rabbi Naftoli Hertz Pewzner** of Morristown, New Jersey have already begun writing future volumes. Next up is volume two, *The Building Blocks of Existence*, discussing the fundamental concepts relating to the study of G-dliness and the creative process. Following that will be volume three, *Seder Hishtalshelus Explained*, and volume four, *Torah, Mitzvos, and the Jewish People*. Farther down the line, the series will discuss the themes relating to daily life as a Jew and the unique dynamics offered by Shabbos, the holidays, and lifecycle events.

Across diverse age groups, religious backgrounds, and levels of knowledge, the book is already an influential work, bringing *Chassidus* to so many. As the book and the planned series con-

tinue to grow in popularity, we hope that the series will become a staple of Jewish knowledge, filling homes and lives worldwide with the light and warmth of *Chassidus*.

Hakhel: The Inside Story

For chassidim, *Hakhel* is of the utmost importance, and while there are many beautiful publications on the topic, there is no singular resource which provides *Hakhel* with a proper, comprehensive explanation. To fill this need, in the following booklet, *Sichos in English* has endeavored to make the message of *Hakhel* accessible to a global audience. Employing the style of *The Basics of Chassidus*, the themes of *Hakhel* have been brought together and the special significance of this year has been explained in its full depth. Based on a wide array of sources, *Hakhel's* backstory, significance, and purpose are presented in one comprehensive work.

Notably, in 5727, on Shabbos Parshas Noach, the Rebbe spoke about a unique form of *Hakhel* — *A Hakhel* of Torah. The Rebbe encouraged anyone and everyone to collect not-yet-published Torah writings and to send them in, to enable them to be printed. Additionally, on Simchas Torah of 5748, the Rebbe made a more specific request — to gather together Torah on the subject of *Hakhel*. This collection was to include both *nigleh* on the subject and particularly *Chassidus* which engenders the purpose of *Hakhel*, *Yiras Hashem*.

This message makes *The Basics of Chassidus, Hakhel: The Inside Story* even more relevant in this special year. As a true gathering of *Chassidus's* discussions and topics, *The Basics of Chassidus* is certainly a *Hakhel* of Torah. Moreover, the pages on *Hakhel* to follow are taking this to the next step, presenting a full collection of explanation and insight on *Hakhel*.

In honor of the *Kinus HaShluchim*, *Sichos in English* is honored to debut the latest chapter in the series, *Hakhel: The Inside Story*. Excerpted from a volume not yet published, this chapter addresses the subject of *Hakhel* like never before. It is our hope that inside you will find content to fill this special year with inspiration, insight, and — as the Rebbe instructed on Simchas

Torah of 5748 — increased *Yiras Hashem*. With this, may we merit to be brought together as a *kahal gadol* — in the *Beis Ha-Mikdash* with *Mashiach Tzidkeinu*.

Sichos in English

20 *Cheshvan*, 5783 (2022)
The Year of *Hakhel*

EXCERPT

Hakhel

1. WHAT IS HAKHEL?

Getting Together

Every single Jew, in one location, once in seven years. The young and the old, the rich and the poor, the elite and the simple. The entire nation, from near and from far, in the Holy Temple, before their king. In order that they hear, and in order that they learn.

Hakhel, the Hebrew word for “gathering,” is used by the Torah to describe a unique *mitzvah*: During the Temple-times, all Jews — men, women, and children, even babies — were to be gathered (*hakhel*) in the *Beis HaMikdash*, once every seven years.¹

At the gathering, the Jewish king would read to them particular sections from the Torah.² These portions were selected for their

1. *Devarim* 31:10-13.

2. *Sotah* 41a; *Mishneh Torah*, *Korbanos*, *Hilchos Chagigah*, 3:3. These passages are enumerated below, p. 17, fn. 74.

content, stimulating Jews in their observance of *mitzvos* and strengthening their faith.³ This event would make a profound impression on the people. It was reminiscent of the Revelation at Sinai, and the intention was for every Jew to feel as if they were hearing these messages from G-d Himself.⁴

Setting the tone of the entire year and the time to come, this awesome event carried much importance. It united the people, inspired lives, and cultivated an encompassing dedication to G-d and His commandments.⁵ In those ancient times, *Hakhel* must have been a real highlight of Jewish life.⁶

Because the biblical *mitzvah* of *Hakhel* can only be practiced when the entire Jewish people reside in the Holy Land,⁷ this ceremony has not been conducted in thousands of years.⁸ However, like all *mitzvos* of the Torah, it has constant and eternal relevance.⁹ *Hakhel's* themes of Jewish unity, education, and re-kindled inspiration are all integral to everyday Jewish life. So while the *Hakhel* ceremony does not take place in these times of exile, its messages are surely worth focusing on.¹⁰

Moreover, even without the Temple, the season and year of *Hakhel* is particularly auspicious. While the themes of *Hakhel* can be applied at all times, it is especially relevant in the year after *shmitah* — the time for *Hakhel* designated by the Torah. During this time, its themes and messages have the power to

3. *Mishneh Torah*, *ibid.*, 3:1.

4. *Mishneh Torah*, *ibid.*, 3:6.

5. *Devarim* 31:12-13. As will be discussed below, p. 18ff, *Hakhel* is unique in the sense that its lasting influence is integral to the *mitzvah* itself.

6. See *Sefer HaChinuch*, *Mitzvah* 612, which describes *Hakhel* as a strong pillar of Judaism and as a great honor for the religion.

7. See *Sefer HaChinuch*, *ibid.* Accordingly, being that the majority of Jews were not residing in Israel during the Second Temple period, it is possible that *Hakhel* was no longer a biblical obligation but a Rabbinic injunction. See *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 24, p. 201 and references there.

8. See below, p. 18ff.

9. All *mitzvos* have elements of thought, speech, and action. Therefore, even when a *mitzvah* cannot be practiced in action, it retains its original relevance on an inspirational level. See *Likkutei Torah*, *Bamidbar*, 75a, *Devarim*, 78c; *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 34, p. 215.

10. This idea will be discussed more broadly below, p. 55ff.

invigorate our daily life with a fresh sense of commitment, inspiration, and connection in a manner that can last for years to come.¹¹

In the forthcoming chapter, we will discuss *Hakhel*'s particulars and expand on its relevant messages. As will become apparent, the themes of *Hakhel* overlap with some of the most primary emphases of *Chassidus*. Utilizing the lens of chassidic teaching and instruction, we can gain a well-rounded appreciation of *Hakhel* and its practical relevance.

2. KEEPING IT FRESH

Why *Hakhel* Matters

To properly understand the role that *Hakhel* plays in Jewish life, let us preface with some general perspective.

For the Jew, Torah, *mitzvos*, and Jewish life in general are meant to be personally relatable and engaging. Judaism is more than an inherited religious doctrine which has been clung to for millennia; it is our personal identities.¹² The Jew is not merely obligated to practice Judaism; the Jew is Judaism.¹³

The most central Jewish prayer, the *Amidah*, begins with the words, “*Baruch Atah Hashem, Elokeinu Veilokei avo-*

11. This is founded on a teaching of the *Arizal* that by bringing the historical Torah virtue of a particular season into focus, the original spiritual energy is drawn down once more into our reality. See for example *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 34, p. 216.

As will be discussed below, the Rebbe repeatedly encouraged all Jews to utilize this auspicious time to assemble — men, women, and children — and encourage each other to increase in Torah observance and study, fostering an environment of fear of G-d.

12. Who a person truly is inside is reflected in their deepest wants and desires. Insightfully, the *Rambam* determines that the fundamental desire of every Jew is: “To be part of the Jewish people, to perform all of the *mitzvos*, and to avoid transgression.” *Mishneh Torah, Nashim, Hilchos Geirushin*, 2:20.

13. This perspective of Jewish identity is particularly associated with the *yechidah*, the core-element of the soul which is completely one with G-d. As was discussed at length in *the Basics of Chassidus*, Vol. 1, Chs. 5-6, the *yechidah* can have a permeating effect on one's entire personality. Also known as the *pintele yid*, “the Jewish dot,” this kernel of Jewish character has full conviction of its Jewish identity and seeks to direct all of the person's abilities and interests towards a single unified purpose.

seinu...," Blessed are You G-d, our G-d and G-d of our fathers...".¹⁴

Noticeably, although our forefathers lived well before us and we owe so much to them and their whole-hearted dedication to G-d,¹⁵ we first refer to G-d as “our G-d” and then as “the G-d of our fathers.” Would it not be more appropriate to address G-d in generational order? How does this possessive phraseology conform with the traditional reverence given to our illustrious forebears?

An explanation: The intention of this wording is to emphasize the importance of our first-hand connection with G-d. Therefore, we first highlight that He is **our** G-d in a current and personal manner. Then, building on the present, we then also evoke our predecessors’ merit.¹⁶ We recognize that our personal interaction with G-d is rooted in a tremendously rich heritage. He is accessible and relatable as “our G-d,” also because He is “the G-d of our fathers.” Ultimately, what matters most is that we approach G-d with the feeling that He is our own G-d, thus allowing our prayers and praises to flow from a deep place of personal connection.¹⁷

It is possible for a person to be fully religious without discovering this personal connection. They can fulfill their obligations, perhaps even getting passionate about it as well, with everything feeling like an act rather than an identity.¹⁸ The “ingredients”

14. This wording was codified by the *Anshei Knesses HaGedolah*, the Great Assembly of Sages and Prophets, at the start of the Second-Temple period. In the millenia since, this is the universally accepted text which appears in all *siddurim*. See *Megillah* 17b.

15. The Jewish people are referred to as “*maaminim bnei maaminim*,” “believers, the children of believers” (*Shabbos* 97a), indicating that an integral element of faith is received from our ancestors. See *Toras Menachem*, Vol. 2, pp. 262-263, for an explanation of the nature of this influence. See also *Tanya*, Ch. 18; *The Basics of Chassidus*, Vol. 1, p. 236ff., regarding our inherited “hidden love” for G-d.

16. See *Siddur Otzar HaTefilos*, beginning of the *Amidah*, in *Iyun Tefilah*.

17. *Toras Menachem* 5746, Vol. 2, pp. 346-347.

18. See *Likkutei Torah, Devarim*, 1a-b, as elaborated upon in *Toras Menachem, Sefer HaMaamarim Melukat*, Vol. 4, p. 138ff.

may all be in place, but a certain “flavor” is lacking. The individual is trapped in an exile of estrangement from their truest self.¹⁹

Unfortunately, such a disconnect is all too common. So often, Jewish practice can feel like a lifestyle of behaviors, not an experience of identity. The good news, though, is that the Torah has a built-in mechanism to heal this: *Hakhel*.

The importance of the *Hakhel* assembly is that it rekindles the Jewish spirit — every seven years.²⁰ It is not an ordinary event or public celebration; *Hakhel* is an unparalleled first-hand experience of Jewish identity and connection. By getting together as a single nation for a single, common purpose, every participant can walk away feeling more inspired, connected, and committed to the truths of Judaism.²¹

The magnitude of this national reawakening is designed to have long term results. It is structured to transform Judaism from merely being a carefully preserved tradition into becoming a **personal** reality. Ensuring that our observance does not become stale or impersonal, *Hakhel* brings an inner connection to the fore, one that can cause every Jew to realize that Judaism is “who I truly am.”²²

The Daily Refresh

The renewal of *Hakhel* exists within a broader context.

Throughout the Jewish calendar there is a lot of repetition. Year after year, the same *Yamim Tovim* are celebrated in the same seasons with the very same practices and observances. *Shabbos* is observed consistently every week, again and again. Regular weekdays also closely match each other. The same text of the

19. The primary identity of a Jew is that of their *nefesh haElohis*, the G-dly soul. However, the influences of the physical body and the animalistic soul can eclipse the soul's direct expression, causing an internal exile. See *Tanya, Iggeres HaKodesh*, Epistle 4.

20. For an explanation of the interval of seven years for this occasion of reconnection, see *Reshimos*, n. 7, pp. 43-48 (Kehot, 2012).

21. See *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 34, p. 192.

22. This reiterates the linkage of *Hakhel* to *Chassidus*. As was discussed extensively throughout *The Basics of Chassidus*, Vol. 1, the mission and purpose of *Chassidus* revolves around enabling Jews to experience the full extent of their soul-identity.

davening is repeated daily, and the general routine does not change from one day to another. It seems that we are always doing what we did yesterday, last week, or last year.

Importantly though, in the twice-daily recital of *Shema*, we read a life-molding instruction. The verse states: “*Vehayu hadevarim ha’eileh asher anochi metzavecha hayom al levavecha*,” “These words [of the Torah], which I command you today, shall be upon your heart.”²³

The perplexity of the wording is immediately apparent: Why does the Torah timestamp this directive?

Why is it that only the commandments taught on one particular day are meant to “be upon your heart”? Furthermore, which unspecified day is the verse referring to?

Our Sages clarify that “*hayom*,” “today,” does not refer to a specific date of Moshe’s instruction of the Torah. Instead, “*hayom*” refers to every day of our life, bearing relevance with its every recital.²⁴

It teaches us that we can — and should — take the Torah to heart as if it had been spoken to us by G-d on **this very day**.

By human nature, we constantly gravitate to new things. Be it towards the latest news bite or the most recent model gadget or car, whatever is freshest and most innovative is always grabbing our attention.²⁵

The verses of *Shema* teach that we are to approach our ever-present obligations of Torah and *mitzvos* with similar enthusiasm. Rather than viewing them as a “same-old, same-old” affair, we are meant to perceive the *mitzvos* as freshly-given directives. Our daily experience of these G-d-given commandments is meant to be as if they are brand new — delivered to us “*hayom*,” on this very day. No matter how many times we have already

23. *Devarim* 6:6.

24. *Sifri*, *Devarim* 6:6, quoted in *Rashi* on *Devarim* 6:6. See Rabbi David Pardo, *Sifri Dvei Rav* on *Sifri*, ad loc., who demonstrates this from the proper pauses in the cantillation of these words.

25. It is not just that old is boring. Rather, new is irresistibly attractive. For insight into this phenomenon, see *Sefer HaSichos* 5749, Vol. 1, p. 188ff. and fn. 41.

conducted a *Pesach Seder*, heard the shofar, or given *tzedakah*, our enthusiasm can be the same as if it was never done before.

True, it is the same unchanging Torah which was delivered by G-d to Moshe thousands of years ago.²⁶ However, the Sages instruct, “it should not appear to you as an antiquated royal edict.” Instead, it is always to be seen as a “new proclamation which everyone hastens to read.”²⁷ Despite the passage of time, we are to feel the repetitive excitement of doing yet another “brand-new” *mitzvah*.

Now, the obvious question is a practical one: How is this feeling of originality generated? Furthermore, how is it sustained day after day? How can we overcome the tendency to grow monotonous about the things we always do, day-in day-out?

The Explanation

A feature of creation is that we are all designed with needs which ought to be met on a regular basis. Food, water, and sleep are things which we rely on to sustain our health and function.²⁸ Somehow, despite the constant repetition, the interest and appetite for these basic provisions never cease.

Yesterday’s breakfast and last week’s cup of water do little to prevent hunger and thirst today. One cannot reason these needs away by saying “body, you ate, drank, and slept last week; you’re good.” There is nothing to grow indifferent or apathetic about as they remain essential to today just as in the weeks, months, and years past. Without letting up, the same bodily needs are relevant for every individual day of life.²⁹

26. As often phrased in *Chassidus*: “Another *Matan Torah* will not be.” See for example, *Toras Shmuel* 5640, Vol. 1, p. 284; *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5656, p. 356; *Hemshech* 5666, pp. 32, 719 (Kehot, 2010).

27. *Sifri* and *Rashi* *ibid*.

28. See *Mishneh Torah*, *Haflaah*, *Hilchos Shevuos*, 5:20.

29. True, people tend to seek variety in their diet and are not fond of repeating the same dish, meal after meal. However, when it comes to actual hunger, people are likely to show eager enthusiasm towards accessing food, regardless of repetition.

In this light, constant freshness in the observance of Torah and *mitzvos* is also fully accessible to the average person. The shift of perspective necessary is to simply recognize these activities as **current** needs of the soul. Just as the body's needs remain pertinent day after day without let up, the soul's constant welfare is likewise reliant on the present engagement in G-d's Torah and *mitzvos*.³⁰

Beyond being religious obligations, *mitzvos* are actually the soul's lifeline of connection.³¹ The soul may be holy and Divine, yet its relationship with G-d still needs to be cultivated. G-d is boundlessly infinite, and no measure of relatability can adequately bridge the gap between the soul and its Maker. Only by means of G-d's Torah and *mitzvos*, His Divine Wisdom and Will, can the soul find the wholesome connection it so desperately craves.³²

By carefully following G-d's "terms and conditions," His perfect Oneness is channeled into one's life and environment. This is the only means which allows the soul the opportunity to live in a completely G-d-centered reality — one truly unified with G-d.³³

Yesterday's *shema* or *tefillin* do nothing to satisfy the soul's present need for rejuvenating connection. Last year's *shofar* blasts or bites of *matzah* cannot satiate the hunger for this year's *mitzvah*. Every day is apart and unlike any other, thus requiring its own *mitzvah* connections to be made.³⁴

30. *Toras Menachem* 5744, Vol. 4, pp. 2156ff. Notably, this insight was shared by the Rebbe to provide a most accessible method to achieving novelty in *mitzvah* performance.

31. In this context, the Torah is termed "the life-force of the Jew," "*Ki heim chayeinu v'orech yameinu*"; *Ahavas Olam* preceding the evening *Shema* prayer. See *Brachos* 61b.

32. See *Toras Menachem, Sefer HaMaamarim Melukat*, Vol. 3, pp. 352-353, in explanation of *Devarim Rabbah*, 4:4.

33. See *Tanya*, Ch. 35. The virtue of such a worldview is discussed extensively in *The Basics of Chassidus*, Vol. 1, Ch. 7.

34. A deeper insight into the constant relevance of recurring *mitzvos* can be gained by paying notice to the dynamics of time. Although it may seem repetitive, each moment is actually unique. As a singular continuum, time never repeats itself; it is always fresh and brand new. No two years are alike, and neither are there two identical weekdays. Similarly, the time-related *mitzvos* which frame the Jew's life are not repetitive either.

Just as bodies are constantly growing hungry and thirsty, unsatisfied with past food and drink, the soul too needs to be regularly recharged. Breakfast is not a once in a lifetime accomplishment, and neither are Shabbos, kosher, or *tefillin*. Just as the body desperately pursues its repetitive needs, so does the soul. It starts each day desperate for spiritual nutrition,³⁵ doing routine *mitzvos* with the same enthusiasm as if never having performed them before.

By describing the *mitzvos* as being “commanded to you **today**,” the Torah is instructing and empowering every Jew to experience their day-to-day connection with G-d with a constantly renewing appetite. It teaches that we are not to let things become old or out of rote. We are to know that today’s *mitzvah* is a must-have connection never previously established.³⁶

Sinai All Over Again

While keeping Torah and *mitzvos* fresh is a constant obligation, *Hakhel* takes this to the next level.

The above presentation only explains how the **person** can arouse within themselves **fresh energy** and **vigor** in their daily observance, but the actual commandment of the *mitzvos* dates back to long ago at Sinai. One might say that the *mitzvos* can be performed as if they are new, but they are not **literally** new.

G-d, who is the Creator of all existence, transcends even the most basic parameters of our reality. To Him, the passage of time has no bearing and the thousands of years of history all coexist in a single transcendent reality. From

As the *Zohar* (III, 94b) teaches, “*kol yoma vayoma avid aviditei*,” “each and every day has its own Divine service.” Each day is unique and individual, therefore deserving its *mitzvos* to bear unique influence. These are not just vital actions and activities worth repeating, but moreover, the *mitzvos* linked to every new day, year, or stage of life are entirely new. See also *Toras Menachem* 5742, Vol. 1, p. 351.

35. See the previous footnote.

36. To apply this teaching, all that is necessary is for the person to accept the needs of the soul as legitimate despite not being tangibly felt as such. *Toras Menachem* 5744, Vol. 4, p. 2157.

His vantagepoint, now and Sinai are perceived as equally current.³⁷

However, for us on earth, the changes over the millennia and the generations all have tremendous bearing. We are far off from the time, place, and circumstances of the Revelation at Sinai. The reminder that Sinai is still taking place in G-d's reality may be somewhat inspiring, but it is much too abstract to become our personal reality.³⁸

Hakhel's unique quality is that it offers a refresher of the original Sinaitic experience. By the entire nation coming together to hear from the Torah and affirm their commitment to its commandments, Jews felt like they were getting a fresh start. It felt as though the barriers of time fell away and they were once again hearing the *mitzvos* anew.³⁹

This taste of Sinai revolutionizes Jewish observance. For the generations who did not witness the Giving of the Torah, this was a once-in-a-while opportunity to reconnect to G-d's commandment of the *mitzvos* in a live and current manner. Rather than sufficing with doing *mitzvos* — time and time again — as if they are new, *Hakhel* makes G-d's command itself feel like it is **happening now**. On this occasion, one can most easily internalize that Torah and *mitzvos* are current, personal, and **brand new**.

Every seven years, when the season of *Hakhel* approaches, a unique opportunity is presented. This is a time like no other to cultivate a fresh and constantly new enthusiasm around Torah and *mitzvos*. With *Hakhel's* inspiration, today's Torah and *mitzvos* are not performed as yesterday's same-old, or even like new. We can realize that “*Anochi metzavecha hayom*,”⁴⁰ G-d's com-

37. See also *Toras Menachem, Sefer HaMaamarim Melukat*, Vol. 2, p. 419ff.

38. See *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 34, p. 189ff.

39. See *ibid.*, p. 192. As explained there, a virtue of the Sinaitic experience was that it was visually witnessed by every Jew present. While hearing about something is distant, seeing it resonates deeply within the person. When the Jewish people saw the revelation, the notion of “I am G-d Your G-d” was internalized and authenticated deep within. Likewise, the renewal of *Hakhel* is also designed as a sensory experience, affording future generations a similar degree of internalization.

40. *Devarim* 6:6. See also *Rashi* on *Devarim* 11:13; 26:16.

mandment is real, relevant, and fresh today, as if it was given just now, for this current moment. Judaism can be not only what we do, but who we are.⁴¹

Now, with some context of *Hakhel's* influence, let us explore: What is, in fact, the power of *Hakhel*? What is in this gathering that can replicate Sinai? What are the goals of *Hakhel* and its core message? Lastly, what can be done in our times to welcome the influence of *Hakhel* into our lives and world?

3. THE EXPERIENCE

The Mitzvah

Towards the conclusion of the *Chumash*, in *Parshas Vayelech*,⁴² the Torah details how the *mitzvah* of *Hakhel* is meant to be fulfilled. It specifies the time, place, and proceedings of this gathering, while also establishing its purpose.

Time: During the festival of Sukkos following the *shmitah* year of agricultural rest and spiritual rejuvenation.⁴³

Place: At G-d's chosen place of revelation, the *Beis HaMikdash*.⁴⁴

41. The basis for the above presentation can be found in the Rebbe's Public Letter from "the Days of *Selichos*, 5726 (1966)," *Igros Melech*, Vol. 1, p. 54; *To the Sons and Daughters of Our People of Israel, Everywhere*, Vol. 1, p. 52; *Sichos Kodesh* 5741, Vol. 4, p. 658.

42. *Devarim* 31:10-13. Although this *mitzvah* was received by Moshe at Sinai along with the entire Torah, he did not teach it to the Jewish People until his final day on earth. This indicates the virtue of *Hakhel*, as the day a person passes is the pinnacle of their life, the climax of their life's work and achievements. At this time of personal completion, Moshe taught this *mitzvah* as it too brings every single Jew — men, women, and children, regardless of age — to a state of wholeness both on a personal and communal level. See *Sichos Kodesh* 5735, Vol. 1, p. 51f.

Additionally, this timing indicates *Hakhel's* pivotal role in renewing the experience of Sinai in the age after Moshe. As long as Moshe was present, there was no need for this *mitzvah*, but after his passing, *Hakhel* perpetuates his life's work by causing the Jewish People to wholeheartedly recommit to observing the *mitzvos* with fresh enthusiasm, as if presently experiencing Sinai. *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 34, p. 187ff.

43. "At the end of [every] seven years, at an appointed time, during the Festival of Sukkos, [after] the year of *shmitah*." *Devarim* 31:10.

44. As the verse states, "When all of Israel comes to appear before G-d, your G-d, in the place He will choose." *Devarim* 31:11. On a halachic level, this language can possibly include other spaces within the sanctified areas of *Yerushalayim*. (*Minchas Chinuch*,

Process: The entire people, men, women, and children of all backgrounds are to be gathered from throughout the country.⁴⁵ Once assembled, the Jewish king is to read select portions of the Torah in a manner that could be heard by all.⁴⁶

Purpose: So that the people hear and learn the Torah, each according to their level, in a manner which will cause them to fear G-d and increase their observance. The children are also a primary focus as this event will cause them to hear and learn to fear G-d in a long-lasting manner.⁴⁷

A Real-Life Description

For us to properly appreciate the significance of *Hakhel*, it is not enough to discuss the technicalities. Like any life-experience, in order to get the picture, one must visualize the scenes, imagine the feelings, and piece together what it must have been like. Likewise, by depicting the scenes and setting of *Hakhel*, we can connect more accurately to its messages and discover greater personal relevance.⁴⁸

First for some background: During the Temple-times, the vast majority of Jewish households were involved in agriculture. The people were settled on tribal territories where each family

Mitzvah 612). However, the *Mishnah* (*Sotah* 41a) states that *Hakhel* would take place in the [women's] courtyard of the Temple. Likewise, *Rashi* emphasizes that the gathering would be held within the Temple courtyard, as this accords with the straightforward meaning of the verse, "When all of Israel comes to appear before G-d." *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 19, p. 325. See also *Tosefta*, *Sotah* 7:8, which describes *Hakhel* being held on the Temple Mount outside the actual courtyard.

45. "Gather the nation: the men, the women, and the children, and your converts at your city gates." *Devarim* 31:12.

46. "When all of Israel comes to appear before G-d..., in the place He will choose, you shall read this Torah before all Israel, in their ears." *Devarim* 31:11.

47. "Gather the people... in order that they hear, and in order that they learn and fear G-d, your G-d, and they will observe to do all the words of this Torah. And their children, who did not know, will hear and learn to fear G-d, your G-d, all the days that you live on the land, to which you are crossing the Jordan, to possess." *Devarim* 31:12-3.

48. *Toras Menachem* 5748, Vol. 1, pp. 152-153.

owned their inherited portion of the land. They worked the soil, produced crops, and earned a livelihood.⁴⁹

Every seven years, in the year of *shmitah*, a dramatic shift would take place. The Torah commands that in parallel to the days of the week where six days are designated for work and the seventh is Shabbos, the Land of Israel is to be worked for six years and left to rest on the seventh.⁵⁰

This unique *mitzvah* would change the pace of life for the entire country. All farm work would cease, anything which grew was free for the taking by the general public, and life was clearly focused on a higher purpose. It was made obvious that the land belongs to G-d, and that He is the true source of blessing and sustenance.⁵¹

In their time off, the farmers would increase in Torah study, *mitzvos*, and prayer. Communities were transformed as the focus switched from the mundane pursuit of livelihood to holiness and spiritual growth. In a sense, it was like Shabbos all year long.

As the special year culminated, the preparations for *Hakhel* would begin.

Normally, Sukkos would mark the end of the busy harvest season when the last of the crops are gathered from the field.⁵² All adult men would then be obligated to make the trip up to *Yerushalayim* to celebrate this joyous festival in the presence of G-d's *Shechinah*.⁵³ Meanwhile, women and young children were not required to leave home and travel to the *Beis HaMikdash*.⁵⁴

49. *Toras Menachem* 5748, Vol. 1, p. 55, in relation to the fact that *shmitah* applies specifically to agricultural work.

50. *Vayikra* 25:4. "Six years you shall sow your field, but the seventh year shall be a complete rest for the land, a Shabbos for G-d" (*ibid.* 25:2).

51. See *Vayikra*, Ch. 25; *Sefer HaChinuch*, *Mitzvah* 328; *Seforno* on *Vayikra* 25:2-4.

52. See for example, *Devarim* 16:13. For insight into the spiritual significance of the agricultural harvest as a preparation for Sukkos, see *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 29, p. 232ff.

53. *Shemos* 23:17, 34:23; *Devarim* 16:16.

54. *Chagigah* 2a.

During *shmitah* though, the summer was not burdened with farm work, leaving the pilgrimage to the *Beis HaMikdash* for *Hakhel* to be the primary matter on people's minds.⁵⁵ Significantly, this time, no one was to be left behind. From across the entire land, every Jew — men, women, children, and babies — was preparing for the trip. As Sukkos approached, the roads and highways were flooded with people of all ages and backgrounds. Entire communities were traveling in groups, and as they all approached *Yerushalayim*, the Judean hills were covered in colorful seas of people.⁵⁶

The *Mishnah* describes the miracle of Jerusalem hospitality. Somehow there was always space, and “no one ever said there the place is too congested for me to lodge overnight in *Yerushalayim*.”⁵⁷ Sukkah huts were being built everywhere as everyone hurriedly prepared to spend the festival united as a nation.⁵⁸ In the *Beis HaMikdash*, preparations were also made to accommodate the overflowing crowds.⁵⁹

On the first night of Sukkos, the *Yom-Tov* would begin like any other year. The water was drawn for the *nisuch hamayim*,⁶⁰ the numerous Sukkos *korbanos* were brought in the morning, and the crowds joyfully assembled with their *lulavim* and *esrogim* in the Temple. The *mizbeiach* was circled in a special ceremony,⁶¹ and the sound of the *levi'im*'s singing reverberated through the entire Temple area.

After what was almost a routine day of Sukkos celebrations, everything would be transformed.⁶² After dark, a tall wooden

55. *Chizkuni* on *Devarim* 31:12.

56. The *Mishnah* (*Bikkurim* 3), provides rich detail for some of the pilgrimages to Jerusalem. See *Mishnah Rishonah*, ad loc. (3:2), which indicates that at least some of these details apply to the festival pilgrimages as well.

57. *Avos* 5:5. This was only possible by way of a miracle, *Avos* there.

58. See *Tosefta, Sukkah*, 2:2; *Yerushalmi, Sukkah*, 2:2, which mention the portable suk-kos often set up in *Yerushalayim* outside of windows for temporary use.

59. See also *Yerushalmi, Megillah*, 1:6.

60. The water libation which was poured daily on the *Mizbeiach* during Sukkos.

61. See *Sukkah* 45a, 43b; *Mishneh Torah, Zmanim, Hilchos Lulav*, 7:23.

62. The implication of many sources is that the *Hakhel* ceremony would preferably take place at night after the conclusion of the first day of Sukkos. This can be indi-

stage would be quickly built upon which the king would conduct the long-awaited *Hakhel* ceremony. It was designed to be high enough to allow the entire crowd to visually see the proceedings.⁶³ The platform was erected in the *Ezras Nashim*, “the woman’s courtyard,” where towering oil lamps were also positioned to illuminate the entire area.⁶⁴ This more external, public courtyard was relatively spacious and was outfitted with a surrounding balcony for the women.⁶⁵

Ahead of the appointed time, *kohanim* would disperse from the Temple vicinity to the far reaches of the city. In every square, intersection, and open area, they would blow golden trumpets announcing and encouraging the public to gather. To the sound of the trumpets, throngs of people would swarm towards the Temple mount.⁶⁶

cated from the straightforward reading of the *Mishnah*; *Tosafos* on *Sotah* 41a; *Kiryas Sefer*’s understanding of the *Rambam*. See *Reshimos*, n. 168. For insight into this timing as it relates to the general Chassidic perspective of *Hakhel*, see *Likkutei Levi Yitzchak*, *Igros Kodesh*, p. 246; *Toras Menachem* 5747, Vol. 4, p. 389.

63. See *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 19, p. 321ff, in explanation of *Rashi*’s commentary on *Devarim* 31:11. A platform or stage is meant to draw attention, highlighting the significance of what is placed on it. Yet the king read from atop a wooden platform, a temporary organic material — as opposed to metal, stone, or other long-lasting materials that symbolize permanence and endurance. This was to teach that pride is to be employed in a very restricted and limited fashion. It is not always positive and is therefore used minimally. When is it appropriate? Only within the Holy Temple — when it is used exclusively for the service of G-d. Drawing on the theme of a platform, we should view ourselves with prominence when serving G-d, with strength “like a lion” to overcome our evil inclination, to withstand peer pressure and scoffers, and to better succeed at our important mission. *Likkutei Sichos*, *ibid.*, p. 328.

64. *Sukkah* 51a.

65. *Sukkah* 51b.

66. *Tosefta*, *Sotah*, 7:8. It was of utmost importance that every *kohen* participate in this public declaration of *Hakhel*, to the point that if one failed to do so, his priestly lineage was cast into question.

The significance of this practice can be derived from a teaching of the *Maggid* of *Mezritch* who explained that the Hebrew word for trumpet, *chatzotzrah*, can also be read as *chatzi tzurah*, “half of a form.” This applies to the relationship between the Jew and G-d, in which the two are depicted as two halves of a single entity that are complete only when united. In this light, the role of the *kohanim* was to inspire the Jewish People to connect and become closer to G-d. When they blew the trumpets, they were sending a message to every Jew that the time of *Hakhel* is an opportunity to renew our relationship with G-d. *Hakhel* is about becoming one with G-d in a manner which is reflected in mind, heart, and practice. See *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 14, p. 127ff.

The designated leader of the *Hakhel* ceremony was the Jewish king.⁶⁷ He would be the first to arrive at the Temple courtyard and take his place on the top of the erected platform.⁶⁸ As the crowds began to flow into the Temple, all eyes were on the nation's sovereign leader. Visible to all, he sat bedecked in royal robes and wearing his crown. The sight of the king's grandeur and majesty would draw the masses closer to his podium where he was to serve as G-d's messenger to address the people, reading to them the words of the Torah.

Before long, the *Beis HaMikdash* was packed with inconceivable crowds, accommodated only by a miracle. Somehow, there was room for every Jew in G-d's home that night.⁶⁹

Temple officials brought out the Torah scroll, copied from the original Torah written by Moshe before his passing.⁷⁰ The *Kohen Gadol* would take the Torah from the officials and present it to the king.⁷¹ Upon his platform, the king had the choice to either sit or stand as he began the ceremony.⁷²

The massive crowd was diverse. Everyone was there, shoulder to shoulder. Revered sages and teenage students, simple laborers and dignitaries, infants and elderly, were all gathered at the same time, in the same place, for a single purpose: to hear the words of G-d Almighty's Torah.

Receiving the Torah from the *Kohen Gadol*, the king would open the scroll at the start of *Chumash Devarim*, Moshe's final address to the Jewish People. The king's voice would be heard as he recited the

67. See below, p. 25.

68. *Mishneh Torah, Korbanos, Hilchos Chagigah*, 3:4.

69. See *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 19, p. 325, fn. 29.

70. See *Tzafnas Panei'ach, Devarim*, 31:9, which explains this to be the consensus of almost all opinions. See *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 19, p. 327, fn. 46, which references sources that the king's personal Torah scroll was used. For an opinion which holds that the original Torah written by Moshe was read (when possible), see *Shitah Mekubetzes on Bava Basra* 14b in citation of the *Raavad*.

71. As an expression of respect towards the king, the transfer involved many people. First, the Torah was passed from the *Chazzan*, the attendant of the Temple synagogue, to the *Rosh HaKnesses*, the official in charge of the synagogue. In turn, the *Rosh HaKnesses* passed it to the *Segan Kohen Gadol*, the Deputy High Priest, who handed it to the High Priest. The king then rose and accepted the Torah from the High Priest.

72. Although it was fully permissible for the king to sit during the reading, it is praiseworthy for the king to read the Torah while standing. *Mishneh Torah, ibid.*, 3:3.

standard blessing always said before the Torah reading — which recognizes the Torah as G-d's personal gift to His chosen people — and began the reading.⁷³

Select portions of the Torah were read. The themes emphasized were the importance of staying true to the Torah, the Oneness of G-d, a selection of practical *mitzvos*, and the binding covenant between G-d and the nation.⁷⁴

The Torah was read in the original Hebrew,⁷⁵ which not everyone in the crowd was necessarily fluent in. However, even those who did not understand the words of the Torah reading were obligated to be there and listen with “awe, reverence, and joyful trepidation as on the day that Torah was given at Sinai.”⁷⁶

At the same time, even great scholars already versed in the entire Torah were obligated to listen with great concentration as well. *Hakhel* is not about learning new information as much as it is about the experience of current connection with G-d. Everyone was to feel like they were currently being commanded regarding the Torah, hearing it from the Al-mighty.

After the conclusion of the reading and the standard blessing recited after an *aliyah*, the king would recite seven blessings aloud. The first three are taken from the prayers and have a set text, while the next four were to be said in the king's own words. First, the king would recite the blessings of *Retzei* and *Modim* from the daily *Amidah* and *Atah Vechartanu* from the festival *Amidah*. Then, he would beseech G-d that the Holy Tem-

73. This blessing emphasizes that the Torah is G-d's Torah and thus indicates that the pervasive sense of Divine connection should be felt within one's Torah study and *mitzvah* observance. Thus, this reiterates a key theme of *Hakhel*. *Toras Menachem* 5746, Vol. 1, pp. 230-231.

74. There are several versions of the Mishnaic text in *Sotah* 41a which discuss the exact order of the king's reading. According to *Rashi's* version, The king would read the following sections from the book of *Devarim*: 1:1-6:9 (this section concludes with the *Shema*); 11:13-21 (the second section of the *Shema*); 14:22-27 (a section that discusses the obligation to tithe produce — especially relevant at the start of the new agricultural cycle); 26:12-15 (another section discussing the tithes); 17:14-20 (a brief section discussing the laws pertaining to a Jewish king); he concludes with 28:1-69 (the blessing and curses). See *Mishneh Torah, Korbanos, Hilchos Chagigah*, 3:4.

75. *Sotah* 32a; *Mishneh Torah*, *ibid.*, 3:5.

76. *Mishneh Torah*, *Ibid.*, 3:6.

ple should remain standing, ask for the wellbeing of the Jewish monarchy, recite a prayer that G-d should favorably accept the priestly service, and lastly, a personal prayer and supplication beseeching G-d to provide the needs of His people Israel.⁷⁷

At the conclusion of this electrifying ceremony, the people rejoiced. Most would remain in *Yerushalayim* for the remainder of the eight-day holiday,⁷⁸ celebrating this “season of joy” with greater intensity than usual.⁷⁹

Invigorated and inspired, they would then return home, heading back to work the soil and pursue their livelihood. Spread across the land, Jews were filled with the awareness that they are members of a united people. Together, they are all bound in an everlasting covenant with the ultimate King, G-d Al-mighty.⁸⁰ As the new agricultural cycle began, Jews would know with clarity and conviction that even the mundane serves a G-dly purpose and they can “know Him in all their ways.”⁸¹

4 . THE LASTING FEELING

The Reaction-Oriented *Mitzvah*

A unique feature of *Hakhel* is the emphasis placed by the Torah on its lasting influence. The verse states: “*Hakhel es ha’am... lemaan yishmeu ulemaan yilmedu veyaru es Hashem Elokeichem...*” “Gather the people... **in order** that they hear and that they learn, and they will fear G-d, your G-d, and observe to do all the words of this Torah; and their children, who know not [as yet], should hear and learn to fear G-d, your G-d.”⁸²

The wording *lemaan...*, “in order that...,” is unusual for a *mitzvah*. Throughout the Torah, most *mitzvos* are commanded without any justifying purpose provided. In select instances,

77. *Sotah* 41a; *Mishneh Torah, Korbanos, Hilchos Chagigah*, 3:4.

78. See *Sukkah* 47a and *Tosafos* ad loc.

79. See *Toras Menachem* 5748, Vol. 1, p. 102.

80. See *ibid.*, p. 421.

81. *Mishlei* 3:6. See also *Reshimos*, n. 7, p. 43ff. (Kehot, 2012).

82. *Devarim* 31:12-13.

such a phrase is used, but as a **supplementary intention** of the *mitzvah*.

For example: The *mitzvah* of dwelling in the sukkah is first mentioned in the Torah without any justifying reason. Only in a subsequent verse does the Torah explain that dwelling in the sukkah serves to remind future generations “that I sheltered the Jews in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt...”.⁸³ While the basic fulfillment of the *mitzvah* is of primary importance, the associated significance and intention is an additional component of it.⁸⁴

Here though, the Torah places no divide between the actual *mitzvah* of the public assembly and the resulting inspiration. With this unusual wording, the Torah indicates that the people’s reaction is integral to the *mitzvah*. *Hakhel* is not just about the event; instead, it is targeted at creating a long-term effect on the Jewish People’s study and connection so that they “fear G-d.”⁸⁵

Inspired living is important in Judaism, and it is beautiful when a *mitzvah* cultivates a greater sense of connection. However, feeling inspired afterwards is usually not an integral element of the *mitzvah*; it is just a positive result of it. With *Hakhel* though, the *mitzvah* itself is to **gather** — to be **inspired**. The resulting inspiration is part and parcel of what the *mitzvah* is about.⁸⁶

83. *Vayikra* 23:43.

84. See *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 34, pp. 212-214 and fns. there.

85. *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 34, p. 211ff. See there, where this is also explained to be the intention of the *Rambam* who immediately introduces the *mitzvah* as an occasion when select Torah passages are read to “encourage the Jewish People to perform *mitzvos* and strengthen them in the true faith.” *Mishneh Torah, Korbanos, Hilchos Chagigah*, 3:1.

86. This definition of *Hakhel* is relevant to determining the manner in which it can be commemorated in our times. Rather than focusing on our inability to properly mimic the Temple gathering’s ceremonies, it is the message of *Hakhel* which, as the substance of the *mitzvah*, can be highlighted and put into practice. *Toras Menachem* 5748, Vol. 1, p. 369; *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 34, p. 215; See also fn. 38 there, regarding the bittersweet opportunity presented by our current inability to participate in the actual *Hakhel* ceremony.

Love vs. Awe

Human character and personality allow for various feelings and expressions. A person is capable of love, fear, joy, awe, trepidation, excitement, and so on. Notably, many facets of human personality parallel the numerous dynamics of the person's relationship with G-d, making it appropriate for all positive feelings to be utilized in connecting to G-d.⁸⁷

As was explained in a previous volume, *yiras Hashem*, or fear and reverence for G-d, is considered to be most foundational. *Tanya* establishes it to be “the beginning of Divine service, as well as its core and root.”⁸⁸

As explained, this designation is because it is of first importance to recognize G-d's authority. *Yiras Hashem* is not the personal fear of punishment as much as it is the recognition of G-d's supremacy.⁸⁹ He is the ultimate Master, and His Will is meant to be obeyed. Therefore, before the person focuses on cultivating personal feelings of motivation and interest in serving G-d, one is to internalize that we are in G-d's domain. Whether or not we find ourselves inspired, we are His servants.

Despite the importance of *yirah*, *ahavas Hashem*, love of G-d is typically seen as more advanced. Building on the Jew's submission and subservience to G-d, *ahavah* is meant to involve the person's entire psyche in serving G-d. You are what you love,⁹⁰ so by cultivating love for G-d one's internal world is realigned.⁹¹ Love happens when the other truly matters to you, when the loved one becomes part of who you are. To love G-d is for the person to become G-d-focused internally, successfully solidify-

87. See for example *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5679, pp. 476ff.

88. Ch. 41. This is also reflected in the verse (*Tehillim* 111:10), “*Reishis chochmah yiras Hashem*,” “The beginning of wisdom is the fear of G-d.” See also *Zohar* I, 11b, where this verse is interpreted to mean that fear of G-d is the “entry gate” to the “home” of Divine service.

89. See *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5659, pp. 18-19.

90. *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5681, p. 326.

91. Fear or reverence are reactionary and almost impulsive, while love stems from within.

ing that only He matters.⁹² With *ahavah*, G-dliness becomes the person's passion.⁹³

The importance of love for G-d is also expressed in the *Shema*. Making no mention of fear, it states: "And you shall love G-d, your G-d, with **all** your heart, with **all** your soul, and with **all** your might."⁹⁴

Love of G-d may not be the "foundation of Divine service" as the submission to G-d's authority, but that does not reduce its value. *Ahavah* has the formative ability to engage the entire person in Divine service with energy and enthusiasm. Not only do the person's behaviors become aligned with G-d's instructions, but Torah and *mitzvos* also become who the person is inside.⁹⁵

Why Yirah?

As discussed throughout this chapter, *Hakhel* is meant to cause lasting inspiration and dedication to G-d in a personal manner. At *Hakhel*, the people are meant to be rejuvenated in their connection to our faith and its observance. It is meant to be so momentous that the effect remains long term, or at least till the next *Hakhel*. As stated, the feelings that result from *Hakhel* are integral to what this unique *mitzvah* is all about.

So, what does *Hakhel* feel like? One can only imagine the electrifying energy and excitement accompanying such a remarkable event. It is held on Sukkos, the festival associated with unity and joy. A heart who has not actually experienced *Hakhel* in the Temple is probably incapable of describing the extent of the jubilation and connection felt there.

92. Importantly, love for G-d is not intended to be an extension of one's self-love. It is not about the enjoyment of being around G-dliness or a casual appreciation of His kindness. One's love for G-d should not be due to personal benefit. Such love is self-centered, the antithesis of what *avodah* is about. *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5708, p. 82ff. *Derech Chaim*, 88c-d. See *The Basics of Chassidus*, Vol. 1, p. 250.

93. In this light, the *Zohar* teaches, "*leis pulchana kepulchana derachimusa*," "no element of Divine worship equates to the love of G-d." *Zohar* II, 55b, III, 267a, as cited in *Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar*, 42c.

94. *Devarim* 6:5.

95. See *The Basics of Chassidus*, Vol. 1, pp. 248ff.

That being said, it is utterly surprising that the Torah mentions only one feeling to be internalized — fear of G-d. The verses clearly state: “Gather the nation” so that, “*veyaru es Hashem Elokeicheim*,” “they fear G-d, your G-d,” and “*leyirah es Hashem kol hayamim*,” “to fear G-d, your G-d all the days...”⁹⁶

The obvious question presents itself: Seemingly, an event with such energy ought to foster a personal sense of love for G-d rather than obedient fear. Why then does the Torah establish fear of G-d as the takeaway from *Hakhel*?

The Baseline of Observance

A possible explanation: The Torah’s specification that fear of G-d is the emotional result of *Hakhel* is justified when one considers the vast differences between its participants. The *mitzvah* of *Hakhel* requires that the entire nation be gathered as one. There are no exemptions made based on level of education or observance, and no one is excluded due to class or denomination. The greatest sages and servants of G-d stood alongside people at the very beginning of their spiritual journeys.

Taking the diverse nature of the crowd into account, one can explain the Torah’s mention of fear of G-d as finding the lowest common denominator.

As mentioned above, *yiras Hashem*, the internal recognition of G-d’s authority, is considered to be an elementary foundation for all Divine service. It is the rung of G-d-oriented feeling attainable by all.⁹⁷ Therefore, rather than the Torah instructing about a degree of spiritual experience which would be possible only for some, a universally relevant level is listed.

In terms of ensuring Torah observance, fear of G-d is a wholly appropriate baseline. Can *Hakhel* be more? Of course it can, but this is just what is most inclusive. For the more “advanced” servant of G-d, *Hakhel* should inspire higher rungs of passionate

96. *Devarim* 31:12-13.

97. See *Devarim* 10:12, and *Berachos* 33b, which classifies *yirah* as a basic level and a “small matter” of Divine service. See *Tanya*, Ch. 42.

connection. The emphasis on fear of G-d is simply to establish a basic benchmark for *Hakhel's* lasting effect.

A Deeper Perspective

The conclusion of the above explanation is that the inspiration of *Hakhel* is not one-size-fits-all. It is an event which is an assembly of the entire Jewish People, but they each walk away with varying degrees of commitment. Everyone gathered with a single purpose of enhancing their connection with G-d, but the actual effect differs from person to person.

While this explanation is fully reasonable, it tarnishes our understanding of the unity experienced during *Hakhel*. It tells us that even during the most poignant moments of Jewish togetherness, we each maintain our individual standing. We are individuals coming together, but we are not a single whole.

Chassidus, however, explains that *Hakhel* is far more profound. The gathering of our people is not an assembly of individuals who share common ground; instead, it is the experience of our shared identity as a nation. We are a single unit; we are all part of an indivisible whole.⁹⁸

This concept of unity is reflected in the Torah's wording of this fascinating *mitzvah*. Rather than saying "*Hakhel es Bnei Yisrael*," "Gather the Children of Israel," it says, "*Hakhel es ha'am*," "Gather the nation." The "Children of Israel" are a unified family of brothers and sisters with one Heavenly Father,⁹⁹ but "the nation" is a simple whole.¹⁰⁰

Hakhel is not a time of **generating** togetherness, as much as it is the discovery of our innate **identity** as a nation.¹⁰¹

98. See *Toras Menachem* 5747, Vol. 4, pp. 376, 387ff; *Toras Menachem* 5748, Vol. 1, pp. 70-74.

99. See *Malachi* 2:10.

100. Furthermore, *Hakhel* causes the Jewish People to become united as one *kahal*, one congregation, a new, unified entity which transcends the pluralism of a standard community. See, for example, the Rebbe's Public Letter from "the Days of *Selichos*, 5740 (1980)," *Igros Melech*, Vol. 1, p. 220; *To the Sons and Daughters of Our People of Israel, Everywhere*, Vol. 1, p. 191ff.

101. See *Toras Menachem* 5748, Vol. 1, pp. 239-240.

Accordingly, what is truly amazing about the *Hakhel* gathering is that it is intended to be impactful and inspiring **in the same manner** for all its attendees. The Torah's instruction for *yiras Hashem* to be the chief result of *Hakhel* does not highlight our differences; it causes us to dig deeper into our shared identity. The fact that *Hakhel* is meant to cause fear of G-d indicates that there is a unique dimension of *yirah* which is indeed relevant to all.¹⁰²

Aside from the basic submission to G-d's authority which precedes passionate feelings of connection to G-d, there must be a deeper layer of *yirah* which is attainable specifically during *Hakhel*. Paradoxically, this outstanding *yirah* is a life-altering upgrade for the greatest amongst the crowd, while also being fully relevant to those who are just beginning their spiritual journeys.¹⁰³

Thus, the question becomes: What is this *yirah*? What is this feeling of awe, reverence, or fear towards G-d which is stimulated during *Hakhel*? Lastly, how can this feeling be so universally shared across the diverse Jewish community?

These questions can be resolved by understanding another element of the *Hakhel* ceremony. As described above, the gathering was presided over by the Jewish king, which is somewhat surprising considering that he was not a religious leader per se.¹⁰⁴ By appreciating the king's role as explained in *Chassidus*, we will gain much deeper insight into *Hakhel* in general and its lasting *yiras Hashem*.

102. See similarly in *Derech Mitzvosecha*, 108a-b; *Reshimos*, n. 7, p. 61 (Kehot, 2012).

103. See *Mishneh Torah*, *Korbanos*, *Hilchos Chagigah*, 3:6, which seems to compare the experience and take-away of the illiterate beginner to that of the greatest scholars. See *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 34, p. 190; *Toras Menachem* 5748, Vol. 1, pp. 73-74.

104. See below, p. 27 and fn. 118, from *Mishneh Torah*, *Shoftim*, *Hilchos Melachim*, Ch. 4.

5. WHY THE KING

The *Hakhel* Leader

The *Hakhel* ceremony is defined by the public reading of the Torah in the presence of the entire nation.¹⁰⁵ This reading is meant to inspire the people, reconnect them to their faith, and arouse a lasting sense of commitment similar to the Giving of the Torah at Sinai.¹⁰⁶

In several instances, the day which the Jewish People gathered at Mount Sinai to accept the Torah is referred to as the “*yom hakahal*,” “the day of congregation.”¹⁰⁷ This is when G-d told Moshe, “*Hakhel li es ha’am ve’ashmi’eim es devarai...*,” “**Assemble the people** before Me, and I will let them **hear** My words, that they may learn to **fear** Me all the days that they live on the earth and that they may teach their children.”¹⁰⁸

In this light, *Hakhel*, the **gathering** of the people to **hear** the Torah and arouse lasting **fear** of G-d and enhancement of observance, is a direct parallel.¹⁰⁹

Of course, on an experiential level, there is a major difference between the two events. At Sinai, the Giving of the Torah took place with tremendous Divine revelation, and G-d Himself addressed the people.¹¹⁰ At *Hakhel*, however, although they heard primary sections of the Torah, it was read by a human being of flesh and blood.¹¹¹

105. The reading of the Torah is the first detail of the *mitzvah* emphasized, mentioned even before the instruction to gather the nation. “When all of Israel comes to appear before G-d..., in the place He will choose, you shall read this Torah before all Israel, in their ears.” *Devarim* 31:11.

106. *Mishneh Torah, Korbanos, Hilchos Chagigah*, 3:1,6.

107. *Devarim* 9:10, 10:4, 18:16.

108. *Devarim* 4:10.

109. *Midrash HaGadol, Devarim*, 31:11; *Sichos Kodesh* 5741, Vol. 1, p. 287.

110. As mentioned in the above-cited verse (*Devarim* 4:10), “I will let them **hear My words**, that they may learn to fear Me all the days...” Seemingly, the greatest factor of causing lasting fear of G-d is the fact that the entire nation heard G-d’s voice directly, something unparalleled throughout history.

111. See below, p. 54, regarding another distinction between *Sinai* and *Hakhel*.

Significantly though, *Halachah* determines that the two events are not entirely different. Although the crowds gathered in the Temple would not merit to hear G-d's voice as our ancestors at Sinai did, *Hakhel's* Torah reader would nevertheless act as "the emissary of G-d to transmit His words."¹¹²

On a legal level, an emissary is "equipped with the power of the sender."¹¹³ In other words, an appointed agent is viewed as an extension of whom they represent and can conduct personal business on their behalf. In this manner, *Hakhel's* Torah reading mimicked the Divine voice at Sinai. Because this Torah reader was G-d's agent, these Torah passages were heard with the same intensity as if it was indeed spoken by G-d Himself.¹¹⁴

Accordingly, *Hakhel's* Torah reader is of the utmost significance. His appointment is not only to lead a national ceremony,¹¹⁵ but it is his responsibility to address the nation on G-d's behalf. As stated above, the designated appointee for this position was the Jewish king.¹¹⁶

In the words of the *Rambam*: "The king is the agent to make known the word of G-d."¹¹⁷

112. *Mishneh Torah*, *ibid.*, 3:6.

113. Not only does the emissary carry out the bidding of the sender, but his actions are considered as if they were done by the "extended hand of the sender." An appointed agent is viewed as an extension of the party who they represent and can buy, sell, marry, and divorce on behalf of their sender. This relationship is described in Talmudic language as "*shlucho shel adam kemoso*," "the agent of a person is like himself." *Kiddushin* 41b; *Berachos* 34b, et al. See also *Lekach Tov*, 1; *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 33, p. 113ff.

114. See *Toras Menachem* 5748, Vol. 1, p. 35, for insight into the distinction between this idea and our Sage's statement that "the *Shechinah* spoke through Moshe's throat" (*Zohar* III, 232a; *Shemos Rabbah* 3:15; *Vayikra Rabbah*, 2:3; *Mechilta*, *Shemos* 18:19).

115. See *Tiferes Yisrael* on *Sotah*, 7:8.

116. *Mishnah*, *Sotah* 41a. See also 32a, which refers to the *Hakhel* Torah reading as *Parshas Hamelech*, "the [Torah] portion of the king." Meanwhile, in the verses of the Torah describing *Hakhel*, there is no direct mention made of who is meant to read the Torah at this significant national assembly. Commentaries address this issue and offer several approaches of derivation. See *Encyclopedia Talmudis*, Vol. 10, pp. 443-444; *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 19, p. 321ff; Vol. 34, p. 189, fn. 20.

Notably, if there was no king capable of reading the Torah for whatever reason, another great leader of the time would read the Torah in his stead. See *Ralbag and Abarbenel* on *Devarim*, ad loc. *Minchas Chinuch*, *Mitzvah* 612. See also *Toras Menachem* 5747, Vol. 4, p. 389, fn. 110.

117. *Mishneh Torah*, *Korbanos*, *Hilchos Chagigah*, 3:6.

One can easily wonder about this appointment: As the ruling monarch, it was the king's responsibility to manage the country, collect taxes, set public policy, and tend to the issues of the time. Occasionally, the king would also act as a judge and hear cases of law. However, a superficial examination does not see the king as filling any active educational or religious role.¹¹⁸

In the Temple times, the protection and development of religious life was the responsibility of the nation's highest court, the *Sanhedrin*. The leader of the *Sanhedrin* was the country's highest rabbinical authority, and it was his constant duty to ensure that Israel lived as a G-dly people, observant of the Torah and *mitzvos*.¹¹⁹

Seemingly, it would be most appropriate for the head of the *Sanhedrin* or another senior Torah sage to address the nation, rather than the king, a governmental leader.¹²⁰ What is to be understood about *Hakhel* from the fact that the king is chosen as its designated leader? What could be the aspect of the king's character that makes him appropriate for this role?

The Purpose of Monarchy

To understand the role of the king at *Hakhel*, it is important to preface that it is actually a biblical *mitzvah* for the Jewish People to crown a king.¹²¹ However, the Torah qualifies that this appointment be done in a uniquely Jewish manner. The verse states that upon entry to the Land of Israel, "*Som tasim alecha melech asher yivchar Hashem Elokecha*," "You shall surely ap-

118. See *Mishneh Torah, Shoftim, Hilchos Melachim*, Ch. 4. Notably, as the leader of a G-dly people, his objectives must not be out of pure political interests. Rather, as the *Rambam* writes (*ibid.*, 4:10), "In all matters, his deeds shall be for the sake of Heaven. His purpose and intent shall be to elevate the true faith and fill the world with justice, destroying the power of the wicked and waging the wars of G-d." See *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 23, p. 195.

119. See *Mishneh Torah, Shoftim, Hilchos Mamrim*, Ch. 1; *Tanna D'vei Eliyahu Rabbah*, Ch. 11.

120. *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 19, p. 301, et al.

121. *Sanhedrin* 20b; *Mishneh Torah, Shoftim, Hilchos Melachim*, 1:1; *Ramban on Devarim* 17:14; *Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah* 497.

point a king over yourself [but he must be] one whom G-d, your G-d, chooses.”¹²²

The role of this king was not identical to those of the other nations of the world. The Jewish People are founded upon the Torah and its observance rather than on nationalistic ideology. This religious nation could have operated well with rabbinical leadership who would teach and enforce the rule of Torah law. Therefore, it follows that when the Torah allows for the appointment of a ruling monarchy, its purpose is to fulfill a unique G-dly objective.¹²³

Models of Leadership

A unique feature of monarchy is the king’s exalted status and exclusive authority. The king is granted royal power, and the people submit themselves unquestionably to his rulership. In every regard, the king is granted absolute control and authority. Defiance towards the king, even in the most insignificant matter, is treated with the most severe punishment.¹²⁴

This differs drastically from other models of leadership. Typically, a person in charge is only given the resources required to do their job along with the necessary authority to carry it out successfully. Respect is important, but only within reason. Additionally, public appointees must always be accountable to some form of oversight, and leaders have no right to exert their influence beyond their granted jurisdiction. Authority is subjective and specific, not absolute and all-encompassing.¹²⁵

However, while other leaders focus on accessibility and communication, kingship is built on superiority and detachment.¹²⁶

122. *Devarim* 17:15.

123. In fact, this was the case during the period of the *Shoftim*, “the Judges,” who governed the Jewish People for several centuries. See *Shmuel* I 8:5-7, and commentaries there. See also *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 24, p. 104ff.

124. See *Sanhedrin* 49a; *Mishneh Torah*, *Shoftim*, *Hilchos Melachim*, 3:8; *Encyclopedia Talmudis*, Vol. 43, p. 26ff.

125. See *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 4, pp. 1050-1051. See there for how this is reflected in the type of respect accorded to a king versus that of a Torah teacher.

126. See *Toras Menachem*, *Sefer HaMaamarim Melukat*, Vol. 3, p. 188f.

The king lives in a palace, removed from the nation. At public appearances, he dresses in dazzling royal clothing with a gem-studded crown and is surrounded by officers who prostrate themselves before him.¹²⁷ The average citizen is completely overwhelmed by the king's glamor and majesty, and his decrees and royal edicts are simply accepted without question or reason. Every step is taken to make the king exalted, imposing, and majestic, causing the masses to submit themselves to his sovereign rule.¹²⁸

Meanwhile, other community leaders or people of influence use none of these techniques. They gain public trust by working for the people with dignity, humility, and compassion.¹²⁹ The open communication causes citizens to feel understood by their government and inspires them to join together for the betterment of the community.¹³⁰

It is fair to say that monarchy was most successful in societies where the masses were uneducated or unprincipled. In such environments, it was impossible to rule by public consensus, and the totalitarian monarchical leadership was required to keep lawlessness at bay.¹³¹ More recently, the advancement of education and technology brought knowledge and empowerment to the people, making it unnecessary for them to be controlled by authoritarian rulers. Instead, nations could be governed by elected citizens who act out of public consensus. In this light, the global deviation from authoritarian monarchy can be seen as important progress in societal development.¹³²

127. See *Mishneh Torah*, *ibid.*, 2:5.

128. This is consistent with the integral element of kingship defined by the Talmud, "The awe of the king must be upon you." *Sanhedrin* 22a. See *Reshimos*, n. 7, p. 51ff. (Kehot, 2012).

129. See for example *Mishneh Torah*, *Shoftim*, *Hilchos Sanhedrin*, Ch. 25; *Shulchan Aruch*, *Yoreh Deah*, 257.

130. See also *Sefer HaSichos* 5751, Vol. 1, p. 404f.

131. See *Avos* 3:2.

132. Moreover, the birth of democracy can be seen as important progress in preparation for *Mashiach*. When diverse populations come together to elect a unified body of upstanding public representatives, the people are unified in their choice of living by moral and G-dly ideals. This is a preparation for the time when "all nations will unite to serve G-d with one purpose" (*Tzephaniah* 3:9). See *Sichos Kodosh* 5740, Vol. 2, pp. 45-55,

In this light, the Torah’s warning not to appoint a king “like the other nations around you”¹³³ is readily understood. G-d expects more of His beloved people than them resorting to an imposing authoritarian ruler to keep them in line. However, there is a deeper meaning to the Jewish monarchy which can justify its all-encompassing authority and majestic reign.¹³⁴

Meaningful Supremacy

The core disadvantage of a typical monarchy is that the ruling king’s exaltedness and supremacy are unsubstantiated. Regardless of his royal lineage, the king is a human being just like the rest of us. There is no inherent validity to his aloof bearing.¹³⁵

What elevates royalty from their civilian status is the people’s subservience and submission towards them.¹³⁶ A king depends on the public to lower themselves before him to generate a sense of superiority. Hence, the more a monarch exerts his authority over the masses, the greater he becomes. This model of leadership is surely not ideal, as the esteem of the king relies on the suppression of the people.¹³⁷

A Jewish king, on the other hand, is granted supremacy with a deeper intention in mind.

Appointed by the instruction of the Torah, the Jewish king is metaphorically compared to the moon.¹³⁸ Just as the moon’s light

335-342; *Chabad.org*/4929828/.

133. *Shmuel I* 8:5-18.

134. *Derech Mitzvosecha*, p. 108ff. et al.

135. *Besha’ah Shehikdimu* 5672, Vol. 1, p. 478ff.

136. This is expressed in the adage, “*ein melech belo am*,” meaning, “Without subjects, there is no king.” *Rabbeinu Bachya on Bereishis* 38:2.

137. *Besha’ah Shehikdimu* 5672, Vol. 1, p. 473ff. This model of kingship is referred to as *hisnasus al am* — superiority which is dependent on the nation — and is therefore without true substance.

138. See *Shemos Rabbah*, 15:26; *Zohar I*, 225b; *Rashi* on *Rosh Hashanah* 25a. This is the basis of the custom to announce “*David Melech Yisrael chai vekayam*” during *Kiddush Levanah*. *Rema, Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim*, 426:2. *Ohr HaTorah, Bamidbar*, Vol. 3, p. 815.

is not its own, but a reflection of the sun, the Jewish king is not perceived as the end-all supreme leader of the land. His superiority is a mere reflection of He Who grants him his reign. G-d is the ultimate king, and it is a glimmer of His radiance which shines forth from the Jewish king. The purpose of the Jewish monarch's earthly kingship is meant to remind the people of G-d's all-encompassing kingship and authority.

Accordingly, a Jewish king is selected on account of his **humility** and subservience to G-d.¹³⁹ Although humble submission and dedication to G-d may seem antithetical to royal behavior, this is the true virtue of the Jewish king. He does not perceive the rulership to be his own, but rather as a reflection of G-d's ultimate authority. Therefore, his exalted conduct and all-encompassing power have validity as he is simply a conduit of G-d's kingship.¹⁴⁰

This awareness shapes the day-to-day dynamics of the Jewish king's reign. He constantly lives with the realization that his majestic grandeur, charisma, and power all truly belong to G-d. His sole purpose is to reflect G-d's authority and greatness. Thus, in place of using his exalted office to arrogantly impose his royal decrees upon the people, his humble sovereignty inspires the nation and strengthens their faith in G-d. The people appreciate his influence, not viewing his supremacy as self-promoting, but as a reflection of G-d's ultimate exaltedness.¹⁴¹

The King and *Hakhel*

This deeper insight into the character of a Jewish king is our first step in understanding his role at the *Hakhel* gathering.¹⁴²

139. See *Kesubos* 103b; *Mishneh Torah, Shoftim, Hilchos Melachim*, 1:7. This humility before G-d is reflected in the *halachah* regarding the posture of a Jewish king during prayer. Although a commoner is meant to express their subservience before G-d by bending the knee and bowing four times during the prayers, a king is required to kneel for the entire *Amidah* prayer. *Berachos* 34b; *Mishneh Torah, Ahavah, Hilchos Tefillah*, 5:10. See *Toras Menachem*, Vol. 18, pp. 48-49; Vol. 71, p. 217.

140. This is especially true in regard to kings from the house of David, whose kingship is granted by G-d. See *Mishneh Torah, Shoftim, Hilchos Melachim*, 1:7. See *The Basics of Chassidus*, Vol. 1, p. 152, fn. 16.

141. See *Derech Mitzvosecha*, 108a ff.

142. See, for example, the Rebbe's Public Letter from "the Days of *Selichos*, 5726 (1966),"

Considering the above, the Jewish king is indeed a person of religious influence. His dedication to G-d inspires the people with the awareness of G-d's supremacy, making his active presence appropriate for the ceremony which is meant to cause long lasting inspiration.

From the Jewish leaders, sages, and rabbis, the king is chosen, not for his power and prestige, but for Who he represents. With his every move – and particularly the honor he gives the Torah¹⁴³ – the people realize that his kingship is a reflection of G-d's ultimate sovereignty. Seeing their monarch read the Torah is a reminder to the Jewish People that G-d is their true king and that His Torah is entirely relevant and personal.

In the words of *Rabbeinu Bachya*: “The inner meaning of the *mitzvah* of *Hakhel* is that all are gathered to appear before G-d, the ultimate King. For this reason, this commandment was fulfilled by the Jewish king, for it was he who had the obligation to read the Torah.”¹⁴⁴

As will be explained, this reveals a profoundly deep bond between the nation of Israel and their ultimate King, G-d. This newfound depth of connection is integral to the *Hakhel* experience, and becoming aware of its dynamics will significantly enhance our appreciation of *Hakhel* and its relevance today.

6. DIVINE ROYALTY

G-d As King

To the Jew, G-d is known by many titles and descriptions. He is our Heavenly Father,¹⁴⁵ our revered Master,¹⁴⁶ and the Creator

Igros Melech, Vol. 1, p. 55; *To the Sons and Daughters of Our People of Israel, Everywhere*, Vol. 1, p. 53.

143. See *Reshimos*, n. 7, p. 51ff (Kehot, 2012).

144. *Rabbeinu Bachya* on *Devarim* 31:10.

145. See for example *Devarim* 32:6; *Yeshayahu* 63:16, 64:7; *Malachi* 2:10.

146. This is the meaning of G-d's name “*Adnai*.” See also *Yeshayahu* 51:22; *Nechemiah* 8:10, 10:30.

and Director of existence.¹⁴⁷ We, in turn, are His handiwork,¹⁴⁸ His servants,¹⁴⁹ and His beloved children.¹⁵⁰ The awareness of these relationships shapes our understanding of who we are and guides us in fulfilling our mission here on earth.

Each of these dynamics brings a unique flavor and dimension to our connection with G-d and enhances our lifelong Divine service.

The father-child bond reminds us of the virtue of the soul and the deep attachment we have with G-d.¹⁵¹ He cherishes us and loves us, and deep within, we possess the most profound love and dedication to Him as well.¹⁵²

The fact that He is also our Master informs us that we are obligated to serve Him. Just as a servant puts aside personal self-interests to conduct their master's business, we too can prioritize G-d's Will over our own impulses. We must recognize His authority and submit ourselves to fulfilling His instructions. As His servants, we can embrace this identity and carry out our duties with conviction and resolve.¹⁵³

The awareness that G-d is the Creator also shapes our ongoing relationship with Him. We recognize that the world exists for a Divine purpose and every iota of existence is ultimately meant to serve this goal.¹⁵⁴ On a personal level, life is lived best when the guidance of its Creator is

147. See *Mishneh Torah, HaMada, Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah*, 1:1, which describes the knowledge of this as “the foundation of all foundations.”

148. *Yeshayahu* 60:21, 64:7

149. “For the children of Israel are servants to Me; they are My servants.” *Vayikra* 25:55.

150. *Devarim* 14:1, *Shemos* 4:2.

151. See *Tanya*, Ch. 2, which explains that all souls are an “actual part of the Divine” similar to the way a biological child is an extension of the parent because their elemental beginnings are rooted “in the brain of the father.”

152. See *Hemshech* 5666, p. 81ff (Kehot, 2010). See also *The Basics of Chassidus*, Vol. 1, p. 282ff.

153. See *Tanya*, Ch. 41; *Hemshech* 5666, p. 410ff (Kehot, 2010).

154. See *The Basics of Chassidus*, Vol. 1, pp. 8-14.

followed.¹⁵⁵ Also, because we are created from total nothingness and non-being, the Creator can never step away or disengage from creating. Existence relies on the constant flow of G-d's creative energy and has no true substance or stability without Him. Therefore, we can internalize that G-d alone is the only factor of our being.¹⁵⁶

Earlier, we explained that the purpose of the Jewish monarchy is for more than governmental leadership. The aloof nature of the king's behavior and glorious supremacy makes a significant impression upon the people, reminding them of G-d's exalted Kingship. In this light, the Torah's commandment that the Jewish People crown physical kings is a means of enhancing their relationship with G-d. It emphasizes the importance of internalizing that G-d is our ultimate and true King.¹⁵⁷

The reference to G-d as King is well-founded in Scripture and Jewish tradition.

After the crossing of the *Yam-Suf*, the fledgling Nation of Israel sang "*Hashem yimloch leolam va'ed*," "G-d will reign for all eternity."¹⁵⁸ In *Tehillim*, G-d is praised that "*Malchus'cha malchus kol olamim*," "Your kingdom is a kingdom of all times,"¹⁵⁹ and "*Umalchuso bakol mashala*," "[G-d's] kingdom rules over all."¹⁶⁰ Furthermore, the time of the Redemption — the ultimate goal of all creation — is described as the perfect revelation of G-d's kingship, as stated, "*Vehaya Hashem lemelech al kol haaretz*," "[Then] G-d shall be King over all the earth."¹⁶¹

155. See *Kuzari*, 2:49.

156. *Tanya*, *Shaar HaYichud VehoEmunah*, Ch. 1-6; *The Basics of Chassidus*, Vol. 1, pp. 192-203.

157. See also *Toras Menachem* 5742, Vol. 1, 290ff.

158. *Shemos* 15:18.

159. *Tehillim* 145:13.

160. *Tehillim* 103:19.

161. *Zechariah* 14:9.

Beyond being *Melech HaOlam*, “the King of the World,”¹⁶² G-d is even referred to specifically as “*Melech Yisrael*,” “the King of Israel.”¹⁶³

This begs the question: What is the meaning of this description? In worldly terms, a king is a supreme leader who has executive power, but relative to G-d, the Creator and Master of all existence, what is added by portraying Him as King? What is unique about kingship which is not understood from any other Divine title?

Describing the Undefinable

To understand the portrayal of G-d as King, it is important to preface a basic principle of Jewish faith.¹⁶⁴ Although G-d is referred to as a Father, Master, Creator, and so on, G-d is ultimately beyond any definition. He is perfectly self-contained and does not require any creations, servants, or even children to be Himself. He need not be engaged in any projects or bound to any familial bond. He just is.

Accordingly, the descriptive terminology which we commonly employ is not intended to measure G-d’s Essence. These titles are not intrinsic to who He is; they are simply reflective of our limited vantage point of connection. We know G-d by His chosen engagements and relationships, not as He is unto Himself.

To be the Creator is something that G-d chose to do, to be our Master is something that G-d “lowered Himself down” to become, and to be our Father is how G-d attached Himself to us in a manner that surpasses logic. Each of these roles are acquired by His choice, but they give little insight into who G-d truly is.¹⁶⁵

This idea clarifies a perplexing *Midrash*.

162. The standard text of blessings.

163. *Yeshayahu* 44:6.

164. See *Rambam’s* Thirteen Principles of Faith, Principle 3, *Rambam’s* preface to his commentary on the chapter of *Sanhedrin* entitled *Chelek*, as explained in *Derech Mitzvosecha*, pp. 56b-57a.

165. *Ohr HaTorah, Devarim*, Vol. 2, p. 784f; *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 28, pp. 179-181; *Toras Menachem, Sefer HaMaamarim Melukat*, Vol. 1, pp. 37-38.

The verse in *Koheles* states, “There is one, and there is no second; he also has no child or brother.”¹⁶⁶ The *Midrash* explains this passage to be referring to G-d.¹⁶⁷ It is He Who is One and to whom “there is no second,” as He has no partner in directing His world. Likewise, the words, “He also has no child or brother,” denote that G-d is beyond any familial bond of being a father of children or a companion to a sibling. He is inherently alone, beyond any attachment or companionship. “Nevertheless,” the *Midrash* continues, “the Holy One, blessed be He, was fond of Israel and called them children, as it is stated: ‘You are children unto G-d, your G-d.’”¹⁶⁸

It is clearly apparent from this *Midrash* that while G-d is our Father and we are His children, this is an assumed relationship rather than an inherent one. Intrinsically, G-d has no children. Although He chose to cherish us and grant us the dynamics of this loving attachment, in His ultimate Essence, G-d is beyond being a father. It is a title He assumes by virtue of His descent into the realms of *Hishtalshelus*. Here, in the defined realms of existence, an unwavering loving relationship is formed and the Jewish People are called “children unto G-d.”¹⁶⁹

This is where the phenomenon of Divine Kingship comes in. It is not a loose attempt to apply elements of human governmental leadership to the Creator of heaven and earth. Instead, it is the Torah’s choice portrayal of G-d’s ultimate greatness and our most profound connection to Him. As will be explained, the fascinating bond which the Jewish People share with G-d’s very Essence is conveyed specifically with this type of connection.

166. *Koheles* 4:8.

167. *Koheles Rabbah*, 4:8.

168. *Devarim* 14:1. Likewise, G-d calls the Jewish People brothers, as it is stated: “For the sake of my brothers and neighbors.” *Tehillim* 122:8.

169. The above is gleaned from *Ohr HaTorah*, *Devarim* Vol. 2, p. 784f.; *Toras Menachem*, *Sefer HaMaamarim Melukat*, Vol. 1, p. 37-38. See also *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 28, p. 181, fn. 73, for profound insight into this idea.

Detached Connection

The defining feature of royalty is its tone of superiority and exalted detachment. The king is staged as being head and shoulders above the masses,¹⁷⁰ and the people subject their entire lives and property to his absolute authority. While other leaders seek to connect with their constituents through **accessibility** and communication, the king forges a significant bond with his subjects all while remaining **detached** from them. The king's jurisdiction is pervasive and all-encompassing despite being founded on supremacy and distance.

It is this dynamic of counterintuitive connection which is relevant in G-d's role as *Melech Yisrael*, King of Israel.

As was discussed extensively in a previous volume, the Jewish soul is entirely bound to G-d's very Essence.¹⁷¹ Although G-d Himself is beyond all definitions or limitations, the soul's deepest core is entirely one with Him¹⁷² and is described as "an actual piece of G-d."¹⁷³ This intrinsic bond is at the very basis of the Jew's self-identity and is the most fundamental element of one's relationship with G-d.¹⁷⁴

This deep soul connection with G-d's Essence is mysterious. How can any entity, regardless of how sublime or holy it may be, be fused with G-d's undefinable Essence? Relationships are built on closeness and relatability, but no being or entity can possibly share any relation with G-d. How can *Yisrael* be "entirely one with G-d" at this level?

This mystery is clarified when we consider the fact that G-d, in His most transcendent Essence, is the true and ultimate King. As stated, the defining characteristic of

170. When King Shaul was anointed, the verse refers to him being "head and shoulders above everyone," indicating his great spiritual stature (*Shmuel I* 10:23-24).

171. See *The Basics of Chassidus*, Vol. 4.

172. See *Zohar* III, 73a.

173. *Tanya* Ch. 2, in citation of *Iyov* 31:2, with the added emphasis *mamash*, translated here as "actual."

174. This bond is the basis of the *yechidah* connection discussed extensively in *The Basics of Chassidus*, Vol. 1. See there, p. 169ff.

kingship is supreme exaltedness, and G-d's Essence is exalted in an unparalleled manner. He is beyond and pre-eminent, not due to any external features or suppression of any "other," but by virtue of His very Being. He just is — incomparable to anything that could ever exist.¹⁷⁵

Relevant to our discussion, the idea that G-d is King explains the Jewish soul's bond with G-d in a manner that defies closeness and attachment. Nothing can be close to *Atzmus*, but the soul need not be **close** to be **connected**. Just as a king is fused with his people by virtue of his **detachment** and exaltedness from them, so too, G-d is entirely one with *Yisrael*, His nation, by virtue of His ultimate exaltedness and distance.

While father and child, Master and servant, and Creator and creation rely on relatability and attachment to be connected, *Am Yisrael* and *Melech Yisrael*, the Jewish Nation and G-d their King, are fused on the very premise of His exalted detachment. Counterintuitive as it may sound, the soul need not overcome the distance between G-d and all defined beings to cultivate its relationship with *Atzmus*; it simply ought to embrace the detachment. The Jew realizes that as a subject of the ultimate King, the lack of relatability to G-d is actually a factor of ultimate connection.¹⁷⁶

The Jewish King's True Purpose

In light of the above, the role of the Jewish king as a reminder of G-d's Kingship is vitally important. Surpassing all boundaries, the dynamic of Kingship represents the most profound dimension of Divine connection. By the Jewish King fostering the awareness of G-d's sovereignty over His beloved nation, the Jewish People are led to experience an unparalleled sense of Jewish identity and devotion to G-d.¹⁷⁷

The idea that G-d is King means that we have the ability to connect to Him on **His terms**. Not only do we share relationships

175. See *Besha'ah Shehikdimu* 5672, Vol. 1, pp. 475-476.

176. See *Toras Menachem, Sefer HaMaamarim Melukat*, Vol. 1, p. 37-38.

177. See *Sefer HaSichos* 5748, Vol. 1, p. 230 and fn. 14 there.

with G-d through Him **lowering** Himself towards the realms of created definition, but we can also approach Him as He is **exalted** and removed. Instead of being disenchanting or alienating by the boundless gap between G-d's undefinable Essence and our reality, we can rethink this distance as a medium for a deeper connection.

To be beyond and detached are not ideal conditions for a parent and child, teacher and student, or creator and creation, but are entirely appropriate for a king and his subjects. With the superior connection, we are able to devote ourselves to Him alone, being absorbed in the boundless and all-relevant authority of the King of kings.

Importantly, this dynamic of the Jew's relationship is not only more profound than other connections, but also especially life-changing. As explained in a previous volume, a most primary element of Divine service is the personal shift of perspective from being self-centered to G-d-centered. Generally, this is accomplished by the study and internalization of *Achdus Hashem*, the principle of encompassing Divine Oneness. On a primary level, this means that G-d is recognized as the only true existence and the fundamental substance of all that is. Life is attuned to this reality, and priorities are shifted to fulfilling G-d's Will.¹⁷⁸

The appreciation that G-d is our king and we are His nation significantly enhances this G-d-centered perspective. The usually emphasized dynamics of G-d being our Creator, Master, and Father all relate to a somewhat **external** revelation of the Divine which lends various degrees of self-importance to existence. These terms describe G-d's engagement with His creations, and the closeness to G-d is used to validate a retained sense of self.

The title of king, however, lends no room for self-preoccupation to be retained. The Divine King is detached from created existence, and His subjects' connection to Him entirely transcends their own limitations. From this per-

178. See *The Basics of Chassidus*, Vol. 1, Ch. 7.

spective, there is truly nothing that matters aside from G-d.¹⁷⁹

Indeed, the Jewish King's purpose is drastically different from the monarchs of other nations. Their designed role is less of a model of government as much as it is life-changing religious inspiration and connection. It is the humble leadership of the Jewish king which reflects G-d's Kingship and facilitates the greatest sense of connection to G-d to be experienced by all Jews.¹⁸⁰

The Nation's Heart

The insight into the king's spiritual role offers important perspective into the bond between the king and the nation. More than the king is a leader who directs the nation, he fosters their identity as G-d's people. Managing the country is a key **responsibility** of the king, but on a deeper level, the king carries a defining role in the very **character** and soul of the people.

Relevantly, the Jewish king is described as "the heart of the entire Jewish people."¹⁸¹ In human anatomy, while the brain is the organ which dominates the body and directs its every move, it is the heart that sustains the body's very life. Certainly, as the country's chief executive leader, there are many ways in which

179. G-d is our king not because He is creation-focused, but because we can be G-d-focused.

In the lexicon of *Chassidus*, this is the virtue of G-dly revelation in a manner of "zeh," "this," rather than of "ko," "like this." Within the context of created existence, all revelation is measured according to the appropriate dynamics for the specific relationship with G-d. Thus, all revelation is in a manner of "ko," a calculated revelation based on the coordinates of the circumstances. However, the revelation caused by the recognition of G-d's kingship is unmeasured and expresses the truth of G-d's boundless Essence. Therefore it can be referred to as "zeh," "this is it." *Toras Menachem, Sefer HaMaamarim Melukat*, Vol. 1, p. 29ff. This ideal will be fully revealed in the future redemption. *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 28, pp. 180-181 and references in fn. 63 there.

180. See *Toras Menachem* 5747, Vol. 4, p. 389; *Sefer HaSichos* 5748, Vol. 1, p. 230 and fn. 14 there.

181. See *Mishneh Torah, Shoftim, Hilchos Melachim*, 3:6, as explained in *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 19, p. 165, fn. 6. See there for additional references where the king is compared to the heart.

the king acts as the head or brain of the people, yet most intrinsically, he is the nation's heart.¹⁸²

What can be understood from this portrayal is that the king is not there to impose himself or his rulership over the people. Just as the heart sustains the body by **maintaining its life**, so too, the Jewish king simply allows the nation to be **their truest selves**. Life is not feasible without the heart,¹⁸³ and likewise, the king's role in revealing the depths of the soul is essential to our Jewish identity. The Nation of Israel can never truly be themselves without such an influence,¹⁸⁴ and the people and the king are essentially "one and the same."¹⁸⁵

Chassidus explains that the king is granted absolute and all-encompassing authority because of the existential nature of his influence. In the body, all of the limbs and organs are equally reliant on the heart's circulation of life-giving blood. Similarly, as a nation, **all** facets of life must be in accordance with the king's authority and influence. As discussed, the king's sovereignty is a conduit for G-d's ultimate sovereignty, which is, in turn, the basis of Jewish identity. Therefore, to disobey the king's instruction and deny his authority runs contrary to who the Jew is inside.¹⁸⁶

The *Hakhel* Moment

As elaborated upon above, the Jewish king would carry the primary role during *Hakhel*. The crowds would enter the Temple to the sight of their king awaiting their arrival. He was the host of the national gathering, and his presence urged the people to gather as one unified nation.¹⁸⁷ Furthermore, he was G-d's rep-

182. *Sefer HaSichos* 5748, Vol. 1, p. 348f, 222f.

183. See also *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5687, p. 116, fn. there.

184. See *The Basics of Chassidus*, Vol. 1, p. 290ff, regarding the similar role of a Rebbe as the collective soul of his generation.

185. See *Rashi on Bamidbar* 21:21; *Midrash Tanchuma, Chukas*, 23; *Bamidbar Rabbah* 19:28.

186. See *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 4, pp. 1050-1051; Vol. 8, p. 25.

187. See below, p. 52, fn. 232.

representative to address the people, to deliver His Divine word by reading from the Torah.

In light of the above explanation of the king's general purpose, this appointment is clearly understood. It contributes so much to *Hakhel* to understand that it is the core of Jewish identity which is accessed at this significant moment. *Hakhel* can refresh our commitment to G-d and His Torah — in the most powerful and lasting manner — considering that it is the experience of the deepest element of the Jewish soul which is facilitated by the Jewish king.

Most inspiration ebbs and wanes with time, but the Torah describes *Hakhel's* effect as something permanent: “*Leyirah es Hashem Elokeichem kol hayamim asher atem chayim al haadamah,*” “to fear G-d, your G-d, **all the days** that you live on the land.”¹⁸⁸

Typically, an inspiring episode or experience stimulates one's emotions, and its memory evokes some residual feeling. The *Hakhel* gathering, however, is not just a temporary tug on the heartstrings; it is the ideal setting to uncover our true identities. It lasts long term as it is a crystallizing experience of who we truly are. Due to the king's involvement, *Hakhel* is the personal encounter with one's *etzem haneshamah*, the essence of the soul. This unparalleled discovery of self fosters lasting change where the person's entire life is pulled into correct focus.¹⁸⁹

The depth of this experience is indicated in the *Rambam's* definition of *Hakhel's* purpose. He writes, “Scripture established it with the sole intention of strengthening ‘*das ha'emes*,’ the true religion.”¹⁹⁰

This unusual expression is not intended to praise Judaism for being the only legitimate religion as much as it provides deeper meaning into *Hakhel's* function. *Emes*, usually translated as truth, denotes substantive authenticity which is experienced with full conviction and

188. *Devarim* 31:13.

189. *Toras Menachem* 5748, Vol. 1, p. 153.

190. *Mishneh Torah, Korbanos, Hilchos Chagigah*, 3:1.

realness.¹⁹¹ *Hakhel's* success is that it uncovers the inner soul and cultivates the most powerful experience of Jewish identity. The Jew is empowered with an indisputable sense of clarity in their connection to G-d, commitment to Torah and *mitzvos*, and in inspiring the next generation. It is not only Judaism's religious structure which is strengthened by *Hakhel*, but it is also its truth and realness which are brought to life.¹⁹²

7. Y I R A H

The Ultimate Connection

Earlier, we discussed *Hakhel's* lasting influence of causing *yiras Hashem*, fear of G-d. In preface to explaining the virtue of this *yirah*, we discussed the deep meaning of the Jewish king's participation in the *Hakhel* ceremony. Now, having concluded that the king exposes the core of the Jewish soul for all of *Hakhel's* participants, we can revisit the Torah's emphasis on *yiras Hashem*.

Although commonly presented as the elementary foundation of Divine service, fear of G-d can also be understood as the ultimate rung of Divine connection.¹⁹³ Indeed, recognition of G-d's authority is a prerequisite for all Jewish observance, but *yirah* goes far beyond this basic submission to G-d.

Above, we discussed the advantage of *ahavas Hashem*, love for G-d, as a personal transformative exercise. Ultimately, however, *yirah* can surpass even the highest forms of love. Dedication fueled by passion and love has its limits, but the devotion caused by *yirah* can know no bounds.¹⁹⁴ So, while *ahavas Hashem*, love

191. See also *The Basics of Chassidus*, Vol. 2.

192. See *Toras Menachem* 5746, Vol. 1, p. 231ff. See also *Toras Menachem* 5748, Vol. 1, p. 177, regarding the unity of existence fostered by the revelation of this G-dly truth.

193. See *Sefer Halkarim* 3:31.

194. In *Shema*, the greatest form of love for G-d is called *bechol meodecha* (*Devarim* 6:5). In this state, the individual transcends their personal limits in a supra-rational love for G-d. However, despite the boundless nature of this love, the very fact that it is experienced as love confines it to have relatability to the psyche's limitations. See

for G-d, is implied in some sources to be the greatest achievement of Divine service, there is an aspect of *yirah* that is even more profound.¹⁹⁵

This explains the Torah's statement of the purpose of *mitzvah* observance.

The verse states, "If your child will ask" about the various categories of commandments which G-d gave us, "tell them about our enslavement in Egypt and the miraculous redemption by G-d, leading up to Him settling us in the Land of Israel."¹⁹⁶ Then explain, says the Torah, that "G-d commanded us to perform all these laws so that we fear G-d, our G-d, for our good all the days..."¹⁹⁷

Here, the objective of *mitzvah* observance is not described to be the *mitzvos* themselves. Instead, the resulting *yiras Hashem* carries the ultimate virtue. Clearly, fear of G-d is not only an effective mechanism to **ensure observance**, but also the **objective** of all religious practice.¹⁹⁸

What is the superior dimension of fear of G-d which is so lofty and important? In common conception, fear has at least some negative or unpleasant connotation. When we think of fear, a serious, overbearing, and heavy feeling comes to mind. How can we understand fear in a more positive context? According to the above presentation, *yirah*, the goal of *Hakhel*, is a raw expression of the boundless soul, but how is this found on an emotional level?

Understanding Fear

To appreciate the virtue of fear, it is important to point out that *ahavah* and *yirah* are not opposites; they are two distinct, but similar, languages of connection.¹⁹⁹

Torah Ohr, 39d.

195. See also *Ohr HaTorah (Yahel Ohr)*, *Tehillim*, pp. 116, 122, 436.

196. Paraphrase of *Devarim* 6:20-23.

197. *Devarim* 6:24.

198. See *Tanya*, Ch. 23.

199. Instead, the opposite of love is disdain or disgust. *Tanya*, Ch. 10.

Ahavah has a straightforward translation in the language of today. It is known as love, a bonding feeling of connection, admiration, and closeness.²⁰⁰

Yirah is more complex. It represents an **emotional connection** with something or someone which is, at least currently, **unlovable**. Why is it unlovable? Not necessarily because it is threatening or dangerous, but perhaps because it is too amazing, glorious, or awesome to love. Fear, awe, reverence, dread, and trepidation all belong to this family of emotions. Some of these feelings are negative, while others are positive; their common denominator is that they are emotional interactions with something that one cannot love.

In the Jew's relationship with G-d, *yirah* has two roles:

- 1) It is the **introductory** basis for connection to G-d when love is not yet cultivated,
- 2) It is the **climax** of connection when love is not enough.²⁰¹

The first, preliminary rung of fear of G-d is known as *yirah tata'a*, the lower fear, and the advanced level is termed *yirah ila'a*, the higher fear.²⁰²

To arouse feelings of love towards G-d means that the person has already overcome their inborn sense of self-preoccupation and *yeshus*.²⁰³ Their foundation of *yirah tata'a*, the submission to G-d's authority, readied them to appreciate G-d for Who He is. Various degrees

200. See *Sefer HaArachim Chabad*, Vol. 1, p. 222ff.

201. These two levels of fear can explain the Talmud's two contradictory statements regarding *yiras Hashem* (*Shabbos* 31a-b):

"Rabba bar Rav Huna said: One who possesses Torah knowledge but does not have fear of Heaven is like a treasurer who was given the keys to the inner doors but not the keys to the outer door. With what key will he enter?" This indicates that fear is a requisite to study.

The second statement contrasts by saying: "Rabbi Yannai would proclaim: Woe unto one who does not have a dwelling and [still] makes an entryway for the dwelling, [i.e., a person who lacks fear of Heaven and is nevertheless involved in Torah study. *Rashi* ad loc.]" This statement indicates that fear of Heaven is the interior space which Torah study is meant to serve as a portal towards. See *Tanya*, Ch. 23.

202. See *Tanya*, *ibid.*, et al.

203. See above, p. 21, fn. 92.

of closeness to G-d are established, leading the person to devote their passion and energy to Divine service. *Ahavas Hashem* is a multistage journey with the Jew growing ever closer and more in love with G-d.²⁰⁴

The higher rung of fear, *yirah ila'a*, happens when the Jew connects with G-d on a most lofty soul level. The Jew feels close and connected to G-d, but realizes that no degree of loving attachment can adequately encompass G-d's grandeur and greatness. The soul feels more connected than it can muster feelings for; it feels more attached than attachment provides. G-d is boundless, and the soul wants nothing else but to allow for His Will to be fulfilled. The whole person becomes absorbed in a reality of G-dliness where nothing else matters.

There is no emotion that can express a connection which surpasses normative attachment as much as *yirah*. This family of feelings all connect to something which is bigger than oneself. The person is daunted by the stature, might, or ability of something or someone. At times, proximity feels safe, leading to positive fear, awe, and reverence. In other instances, danger is sensed, triggering negative fear, repelling trepidation, or demobilizing fright.

As explained above, in the Jew's relationship with G-d, **reliability** is not the only premise of connection. The fact that G-d's Essence is boundless and unrelatable does not limit the Jew. The core of the Jewish soul is fused with G-d in a manner which surpasses the normative parameters of attachment. Therefore, for the Jew, G-d is not only Someone to feel attached to with love; He is also the One to fear.

This depth of the *yirah* connection surpasses *ahavah*. While love can define the character of the psyche, *yirah* portrays the identity of the soul.²⁰⁵ *Ahavah* encapsulates the relationship of the Jew with G-d as a Father and son, Creator and creation, but

204. See *Torah Ohr*, 40d, 41c; *Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar*, 73d; *Devarim*, 31a.

205. See *Kuntres HaAvodah*, Ch. 3.

yirah is the emotive feeling which expresses the undefinable: how G-d's Essence is linked with the Jewish soul.²⁰⁶

During *Hakhel*, this inspiration is caused by the influence of the Jewish king. As explained, his participation reveals the depths of the soul, accessing the limitless connection found between G-d, King of Israel, and His Nation.²⁰⁷

A beautiful element of *yirah* is that it has equal relevance to all Jews. The appreciation that G-d is beyond, but yet we are still connected to Him, is a feeling that all Jews have access to. There is no notable distinction between a scholar's "sophisticated" recognition of this fact and the simple Jew's uneducated awareness of it. G-d's Essence is equally beyond — and paradoxically relatable — to them all.²⁰⁸

Joyful Fear

A vital detail in understanding the element of fear of G-d caused by *Hakhel* is to appreciate the timing of this ceremony. The Jewish new year begins with the "Days of Awe," Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. That is a time that some of the deepest layers of Jewish identity are accessed as we crown G-d as our King and return to our inherent state of connection with Him. One may consider these holy days to be the perfect time to revitalize the Jewish People's commitment to G-d and acquire a lasting sense of *yiras Hashem*.²⁰⁹ However, this is not the case. Instead, *Hakhel* is held during Sukkos, *zman simchaseinu*, "the season of our rejoicing."²¹⁰

The obvious question is how do fear and joy overlap? Why is Sukkos the ideal time to instill lasting fear of G-d? What is the harmony between these differing emotions?

206. See *Toras Menachem* 5748, Vol. 1, p. 73f.

207. Ibid. In this light, *Hakhel*'s life-changing influence, arousing the people to "fear G-d and observe His Torah," is not only on account of the Torah messages read at this national assembly, but also on account of **who** reads them.

208. See *Toras Menachem* 5748, Vol. 1, p. 226ff.

209. See also *Likkutei Levi Yitzchak, Igros Kodesh*, p. 246.

210. Holiday liturgy.

The explanation for this overlap can be found by considering the two approaches by which that fear is developed and the resulting degree of lost self-definition:

1) By personal initiative: To employ the analogy of a physical king, the person may choose to attend a royal parade and then become overwhelmed by witnessing the king's majesty and grandeur. The person may now have awe of the king, but their experience was defined by the king coming out to the public and arriving on the citizen's own turf.

Better yet, the fear-pursuing citizen will book an appointment in the palace. Meeting the king in his own space is yet more overwhelming, and the person loses reference with their own self and coordinates — they simply get lost in a moment that is not about themselves. However, a vestige of self still remains as the person invited themselves over to the palace, looking forward to the awe-inspiring experience.²¹¹

2) An unexpected invitation: A citizen summoned by the king. Never having ever fancied a visit to the royal residence, the person finds themselves ushered into the throne room and is overwhelmed by being in the king's presence. There are no preconceived notions about what this experience is meant to be like; it is the king who's aura shapes the effected emotions. In these moments, the subject experiences a bond with his king which surpasses any personal self-evaluation.

Likewise, in the Jew's development of fear of G-d, there are these two modalities. In the first, the person takes the steps to develop fear of G-d. Some experiences are more intense than others, and the person can achieve *yirah tata'a* and then advance to *yirah ila'a*, gaining in the degree of immersion into G-dliness. However the person can never leave behind the fact that this is what "I" was working to achieve.²¹²

211. See *Biurei HaZohar*, p. 81a-b.

212. See sources in following footnote regarding this self-initiated *yirah ila'a* vs. the *yirah ila'a* which comes from Above.

Contrastingly, the second type of *yirah* comes from Above. It is G-d who takes the first step and summons the person into a place of overwhelming closeness. There, devotion to G-d is the only reality, and nothing else has any presence whatsoever.²¹³

In the first process to develop fear, the person creates the image of what fear looks like in their mind. This becomes their destination, the point towards which they strive. In the second circumstance, the fear is formless. It does not follow a self-imagined style or theme as it came from above, not from below. In this state, the *yirah* is beyond typical definition and can embrace opposing possibilities.

Hakhel is a time when fear of G-d is highlighted, not as a personal endeavor, but rather as a revelation from on High. It is G-d who summons the people to the Temple, and it is his agent to inspire fear, the Jewish king, who reads the messages of the Torah. The resulting fear does not follow the normal pattern of how fear works. Instead, it is boundless and also embraces joy.²¹⁴

This is indicated in the verse, “*yiras Hashem lechaim*,” “fear of G-d brings vitality.”²¹⁵ Since when is fear enlivening? Since when does fear not limit the person, curbing their enthusiasm? Rather, it is specifically this fear which results from complete surrender to G-d that can enliven the person. They are given over to G-d, and endless possibility awaits as a result. Thus, in this state of dedication, the resulting feelings can be of joy and happiness.²¹⁶

Looking for More

This provides insight into another facet of *Hakhel*'s lasting influence. The verse states that through *Hakhel*, “*veyaru es Hashem Elokeicheim veshamru la'asos kol divrei haTorah hazos*,” “they will fear G-d, your G-d, and they will safeguard to do all the

213. See *Toras Menachem, Sefer HaMaamarim Melukat*, Vol. 4, p. 210. See also *Ohr HaTorah, Shir HaShirim*, Vol. 2, p. 647.

214. See also *Sifri on Devarim* 6:5.

215. *Mishlei* 19:23.

216. See *Toras Menachem* 5748, Vol. 1, p. 329; *Sefer HaSichos* 5748, Vol. 1, p. 350. See also *Ohr HaTorah, Shir HaShirim*, *ibid*.

words of this Torah.”²¹⁷ Upon reflection, the words “safeguard to do,” seem redundant. One can either “safeguard the Torah” or “do the Torah’s instructions,” but what does it mean to safeguard to do the Torah and its *mitzvos*?

An explanation given relates to the broad-ranging embrace of *Hakhel’s yiras Hashem* just mentioned. The result of *Hakhel* is not just an increase in obligatory observance. Instead, the verse describes that **beyond** doing the *mitzvos* as instructed, the Jew will also be **safeguarding** them, meaning, they will be standing on the **lookout** for more *mitzvah* opportunities.²¹⁸ The fostered *yiras Hashem* has an upbeat, energetic spirit to it. This discovery and experience of Jewish identity which embraces both fear and joy has the Jew not sufficing with having fulfilled their religious obligation. Instead, they are actively anticipating yet another chance to do a *mitzvah*.²¹⁹

8 . U N I T Y

Discovering Togetherness

A vitally important feature of the Jewish People is the ideal of unity. Although we are extremely diverse as a people — with a wide range of opinions, cultures, and personalities — our oneness is nevertheless the foundation of who we are.²²⁰

Known as *achdus Yisrael*, this concept of a cohesive Jewish identity appears prominently at the Giving of the Torah. At this event which defined our people, shaped our beliefs, and charted

217. *Devarim* 31:12.

218. See also *Rashi* on *Bereishis* 37:11; *Tzavaas HaRivash*, sec. 1.

219. See the Rebbe’s Public Letter from “Beginning of Marcheshvan, 5734 (1973),” *Igros Melech*, Vol. 1, p. 111ff; *To the Sons and Daughters of Our People of Israel, Everywhere*, Vol. 1, p. 408ff.

220. See *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 21, p. 257. This is reflected in the practice taught by the *Arizal* that before one approaches G-d in prayer for their personal needs, one should first take upon themselves to fulfill the *mitzvah* to “Love your fellow as yourself.” By including oneself in the Jewish People, one’s prayers will be accepted and bear fruit. See opening of *Shaar HaKavanos*; *Derech Mitzvosecha*, p. 28b.

our destiny, all Jews were present.²²¹ We are taught, “if there had been one individual Jew missing at Sinai, G-d would not have given the Torah.”²²²

G-d waited for each and every Jew to arrive at the foot of Mount Sinai, not just because He cared that no one should miss out, but also because we are a single unit. He is the **One** G-d, who gave His **one** Torah, to His **one** nation. In this context, we are more than individuals; we are a collective organism.²²³

Arriving at Sinai, Jews discovered a sense of unity not previously known to human society. Not only did they reject division and disunion by focusing on a common goal,²²⁴ but moreover, they truly saw themselves as one.

In the words of our Sages: “Israel camped at Sinai as **one person with one heart**.”²²⁵

After Sinai, the *mitzvah* to “love each and every Jew as oneself”²²⁶ was taught as the “primary principle of the Torah.”²²⁷ This indicates that the cohesive unity of the Jewish People, which justifies loving another in an equal manner to oneself,²²⁸ is forever most integral to any experience of G-dliness and Jewish identity.²²⁹

While this cohesive identity is true at all times, one cannot compare the abstract connection felt towards a Jew on the other side of the globe to the palpable energy of all Jews filling a single space. To be at an event with all living Jews is a reunion like no other. Such a setting kindles the inner discovery of what it means to be a Jew and the realization that we are all inherently one. This happened at Sinai when the millions of Jews who left

221. In fact, all souls which would be born in later generations as well as the souls of future converts were present at Sinai. *Shevuos* 39a; *Midrash Tanchuma, Yisro*, 11.

222. *Devarim Rabbah*, 7:8.

223. See *Toras Menachem* 5748, Vol. 1, p. 240. See also *Panim Yafos* on *Vayikra*, 18:2.

224. See *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 21, p. 102ff.

225. *Rashi* on *Shemos* 19:2, based on multiple Midrashic sources (listed in *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 21, p. 100, fn. 4).

226. *Vayikra* 19:18.

227. *Sifra* and *Rashi* on *Vayikra* 19:18; *Yerushalmi, Nedarim*, 9:4.

228. See *Tanya*, Ch. 32; *The Basics of Chassidus*, Vol. 1, p. 253, and fn. 194 there.

229. See *Derech Mitzvosecha*, p. 28a ff.

Egypt stood at the foot of the mountain, and this happened again at every *Hakhel* pilgrimage.²³⁰

As discussed above, the once-in-seven-years event of *Hakhel* serves as a refresher of the original Sinaiitic experience. Like Sinai, *Hakhel* fosters Jewish identity, connection to G-d, and the enhanced observance of Torah and *mitzvos*. Most relevantly, just like Sinai, *Achdus Yisrael*, Jewish unity, is the integral theme of *Hakhel*.

The name *Hakhel* denotes that the very definition of this occasion is the gathering as a *kahal*, a unified congregation.²³¹ This is not just about countless individuals from various backgrounds showing up for an extraordinary event; rather, *Hakhel* has a figurative “magnetic pull” which draws the entire organism of Jews together.²³²

The diverse multitudes of Jews are brought together in a cohesive setting because **together** is where we all **belong**. It is a time like no other to feel, think, and act, like “one person with one heart.”²³³

Layers of Oneness

To better understand the element of Jewish unity expressed at *Hakhel*, it is valuable to first unpack the words of our Sages describing the Jewish People as “one person with one heart.”

While a body has many limbs, organs, and functions, it has a cohesive, unified sense of self. A healthy body is not subdivided into separate units which compete with each other. Only

230. See *Toras Menachem* 5746, Vol. 1, p. 233.

231. See for example the Rebbe’s Public Letter from “the Days of *Selichos*, 5740 (1980),” *Igros Melech*, Vol. 1, p. 220; *To the Sons and Daughters of Our People of Israel, Everywhere*, Vol. 1, p. 191ff.

232. This accords well with an intriguing detail of *Hakhel*. According to many authorities, the *mitzvah* of *Hakhel* is not directly incumbent on every individual as an instruction to gather. Instead, it is the obligation of the king and *Beis Din* to gather every Jew. The assembled Jews are not fulfilling a personal mandate by showing up, but are rather serving as vital components of a *mitzvah* bigger than themselves. See *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 19, p. 366ff and fns. there extensively. See also *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 6, p. 217ff.

233. See *Toras Menachem* 5748, Vol. 1, p. 240.

when the **entire** body is intact and healthy can the rest of the person feel truly at ease and themselves.²³⁴

Furthermore, in the human body, there is a close interplay between the various systems, organs, tissues, and cells. Each limb and body part offers some contribution to the person's overall wellbeing and function.²³⁵ There is no part of the person which does not have a unique contribution to offer.

The depiction of Jewish unity as a **single body** indicates that not only are the Jewish People **incomplete** if even one Jew is **missing**, but moreover, every Jew offers a **unique contribution** to our people. Like the diverse elements of the body which each offer some benefit to the entire person, every last Jew has something significant to share, making them a benefactor of our entire nation. In a sense, every Jew is the most significant member of our people as their positive influence cannot be replicated by anyone else.

The message that the Jewish People is like one heart takes unity a step deeper.

When pumping blood to vitalize the body, the heart does not evaluate worth and contribution. The heart does not factor virtues; it gives indiscriminately to the entire person as a whole.

Similarly, when we take the true nature of Jewish identity into consideration, we can appreciate that a Jew is a Jew — not by their contribution to the community, but by their very essence. The Jewish soul's worth surpasses its personality strengths and beneficial influences. All souls are G-dly, and G-d is one and indivisible. Therefore, every Jew is not meant to be viewed by their individual strengths and impact. Their very being is meant to be cherished and embraced, regardless of their talents or flaws.²³⁶

In other words:

234. See *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 30, p. 218, where this is reflected in Jewish unity.

235. The feet's mobility does wonders in bringing the entire person, including the head, to one's desired destination. See *Likkutei Torah, Devarim*, 44a.

236. See *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 4, p. 1141ff.

“United as one person’ indicates that all Jews complement each other, forming a harmonious and balanced community.

“United as one heart’ sees every Jew for their kernel of Jewish identity, “the *pintele Yid*,” therefore, the entire Jewish People are appreciated as a single indivisible whole.²³⁷

Abstact vs. Relatable Oneness

At *Hakhel*, the Jewish people are gathered as one indivisible unit. In fact, the term *kahal*, which characterizes this assemblage, denotes a new, unified entity which transcends the pluralism of a standard community.²³⁸ However, this degree of unity is not meant to be confused with the higher level of unity described by “as one heart” above.

The disadvantage of the loftier level of unity is that it remains unrelatable to day-to-day life.²³⁹ *Hakhel* is meant to provide the proper inspiration as the Jewish People returned to work during the new agricultural cycle, and its message of unity must have relevance to the diverse nature of the community. To say that *Hakhel* is about a recognition of unity which looks only at the core of the soul is a deficiency rather than an advantage.

Despite the comparison of *Hakhel* to Sinai, the display of unity was different.²⁴⁰ When the Torah tells of the Jewish People who gathered at Sinai to receive the Torah it provides the number of heads of households: Six-hundred-thousand men, without enumerating their families. Meanwhile, at *Hakhel*, all segments of Jewish society receive individual attention. The Torah enumerates, “Gather the nation, the **men**, the **women**, and the **children**, the **converts** at your gates.”²⁴¹

237. These two levels of unity correlate with *Likkutei Torah, Devarim*, 44a; *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 4, p. 1141ff. See *Toras Menachem, Sefer HaMaamarim Melukat*, Vol. 1, p. 204; *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 31, p. 75, fn. 51.

238. See, for example, the Rebbe’s Public Letter from “the Days of *Selichos*, 5740 (1980),” *Igros Melech*, Vol. 1, p. 220; *To the Sons and Daughters of Our People of Israel, Everywhere*, Vol. 1, p. 191ff.

239. See *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 4, p. 1142f.

240. See *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 26, pp. 262-271. See there, for the significant feminine contribution to *Hakhel*.

241. *Devarim* 31:11.

This indicates that while *Hakhel* was an experience where the core of the Jewish soul and identity was expressed, it did not **override the details**. Rather than causing us to ignore our diverse strengths and capacities, *Hakhel* teaches us to embrace them as part of our wholesome, indivisible oneness.²⁴²

Here, once more, we find that *Hakhel* defies the normative definitions of terms. Absolute oneness and diverse contributions would seem contradictory, but not for *Hakhel*. This is a time when the boundless relationship between G-d and His people comes to the fore and even the diversity of the Jewish People expresses nothing but unity.²⁴³

9. HAKHEL IN OUR TIMES

***A Mitzvah's* Eternal Relevance**

The above presentation of *Hakhel's* significance as an ultimate opportunity of Jewish connection, identity, and observance draws the soul to yearn for this unparalleled occasion. In the almost two thousand years since the Second *Beis HaMikdash* was destroyed, the national *Hakhel* ceremony has not been held. In this span of time, the Jewish People have sorely been lacking its beneficial influence. However, although our Sages instituted Rabbinic commemoration of several key Temple practices, a re-enactment of *Hakhel* was never established.²⁴⁴

While several reasons for this have been offered,²⁴⁵ the above-presented perspective of *Chassidus* into *Hakhel* allows clear insight into its absence.

242. See also *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 21, p. 258.

243. See *Toras Menachem, Sefer HaMaamarim Melukat*, Vol. 1, pp. 200-201.

244. Relevantly, the *mitzvah* that comes just before *Hakhel, shmitah*, only applies while the *Beis HaMikdash* stands. However, our Sages instituted that it be observed during exile as a commemoration of the Temple times.

245. For example, some suggest that this was due to historical concerns that an assembly of all Jews of an area would be perceived as a rebellion against the local government. See *Sefer HaSichos* 5748, Vol. 1, p. 17, fns. 84, 85.

Hakhel is simply unreplicable. Any remake would not be anything like it. The goals of *Hakhel* would not be met, and the ceremony would stand as a hollow imposter, claiming to be something that it cannot be.

There is no way that a gathering of several hundred thousand Jews would feel anything like the get-together of our entire people. The palpable experience of the soul's core in the Temple courtyard would not be the same in a public park or arena. Perhaps the technical details can be somehow met, but the aura of the true *Hakhel* is sure to be lacking. Any such instituted commemoration would devalue what *Hakhel* is truly about.²⁴⁶

However, as stated above, although the actual practice of *Hakhel* is not currently possible, the *mitzvah's* relevance lives on. In all times and particularly during the year when *Hakhel* is most tangibly felt, we can tap into its message and invite its influence in our lives.²⁴⁷

Making It Personal

As one is sure to notice from this presentation of *Hakhel*, its themes all surpass the common perception of basic Jewish ideas. The bond between G-d and His people, between Jews and each other, and the religious observance of the individual are all taken up a notch. With *Hakhel*, nothing remains ordinary. Outshining the reality of the present, *Hakhel* is a taste of the future, and all of its accomplishments are reminiscent of the Final *Geulah*.²⁴⁸

In our times, as we stand on the threshold of *Mashiach's* arrival, living *Hakhel* has never been more important. In the words of the Rebbe, *Hakhel* is meant to become the overarching theme of the year. Every positive activity can be enhanced by bring-

246. See *Toras Menachem* 5748, Vol. 1, p. 370.

247. See for example, *Sefer HaSichos* 5748, Vol. 1, p. 17.

248. See *Toras Menachem* 5748, Vol. 1, p. 83ff.

ing it through this “gateway,” being saturated with the spirit of *Hakhel*.²⁴⁹

In a previous volume, we discussed that *Mashiach*’s true virtue is his unifying “*yechidah*-effect.”²⁵⁰ In the effort to bring *Mashiach*, each person is encouraged to uncover the “micro-*Mashiach*” within them, their personal *yechidah*. Doing so, bringing *Mashiach* becomes not just an important project; it is what I am truly about.²⁵¹

This idea applies similarly to *Hakhel* which is also about the revelation of the core of the soul’s bond with G-d. In this year, we are encouraged to not only be active in *Hakhel*-related activities or learn about *Hakhel*, but we can become *Hakhel*. The discovery of Jewish identity which we are capable of in this season is such that our entire being is pulled into cohesive focus surrounding the mission of *Hakhel*. *Hakhel* is the time when every Jew can become a “*Hakhel* Jew.”²⁵²

How to *Hakhel*

Over the years, the Rebbe provided numerous applications of *Hakhel* in our times. There are several publications which present comprehensive listings of these instructions, and here we will just trace a general outline of these *Hakhel* practices:

Getting Oneself Together: *Hakhel* has application within the person as an individual. First, the person is meant to reflect on the message of *Hakhel* and increase in their sense of Jewish togetherness, fear of G-d, and commitment to Torah and *mitzvos*. Second, within the person, there are opposing voices or tendencies. *Hakhel* within is defined by creating an inner sense of harmony between the various facets of personality to be unified in expressing the soul’s internal submission to G-d Al-mighty.²⁵³

249. *Sefer HaSichos* 5748, Vol. 1, p. 9.

250. See *The Basics of Chassidus*, Vol. 1, p. 155ff.

251. *Ibid.*, pp. 172, 431ff.

252. *Toras Menachem* 5748, Vol. 1, pp. 205-206, 222.

253. See for example the Rebbe’s Public Letter from “6 Tishrei, 5748 (1987),” *Igros Mel-ech*, Vol. 1, p. 416; *To the Sons and Daughters of Our People of Israel, Everywhere*, Vol.

Sharing *Hakhel*: When one imagines *Hakhel* taking place in the Temple and seeks to envision their own participation, it is only natural to think of oneself as just another person in the crowd. However, the Rebbe taught that every Jew is also meant to view themselves as a king and envision *Hakhel* with themselves as the leader of the proceedings. One is meant to think: “If I were the king of Israel, and I was in charge of gathering the people and inspiring them, what would I do? What would I say?”

At *Hakhel*, it becomes more possible for every person to discover the spark of the Jewish king, the *yechidah* within themselves.²⁵⁴ Therefore, it is incumbent on every Jew to not only be inspired at *hakhel*, or be *Hakhel*, but also to share *Hakhel* at every opportunity.

Regardless of age, station, or level of influence, every Jew has the personal responsibility to gather as many other Jews as possible and use the opportunity to promote Torah and *mitzvos*. Along with this, there are various directives of how to better enhance *Hakhel* and display its relevance at every occasion possible.²⁵⁵ In all, the year of *Hakhel* is a time of unrelenting activity to bring the Jewish People together, strengthening them in all matters of Judaism.

10. IN CONCLUSION

The Time Is Now

Hakhel is truly a golden opportunity for connection, inspiration, and growth. As individuals, communities and a nation, the messages of *Hakhel* can be truly life-changing even in our current time. This occasion allows us access into our truest selves, where we can all find the voice of our inner “king,” our inner G-dly spark, waiting to convey to us the Torah’s words. When we share *Hakhel*, this spark becomes aflame and permeates our lives and surroundings with unparalleled light and warmth.

1, p. 320ff.

254. *Sefer HaSichos* 5748, Vol. 1, p. 115.

255. See *HakhelNation* (Merkos L'inyonei Chinuch 2022).

Doing so, we reshape our current moment to be fully appropriate for the true and complete *Geulah*, the ultimate *Hakhel*,²⁵⁶ may it be now, *Amen*.

256. One of the most significant accomplishments of *Mashiach* in ushering in the era of Redemption is the “ingathering of exiles.” (See *Mishneh Torah, Shoftim, Hilchos Melachim*, 11:4 where this is listed as the final step in *Mashiach* confirming his status as the certain *Mashiach*, the final redeemer of our people.)

Significantly, the verse describes this as time when all Jews will come together from around the entire globe (*Yirmeyahu* 31:7): “Behold I will bring them from the north country and gather them from the uttermost ends of the earth... as a great congregation (*kahal gadol*) shall they return here.”

לזכות

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אבצן

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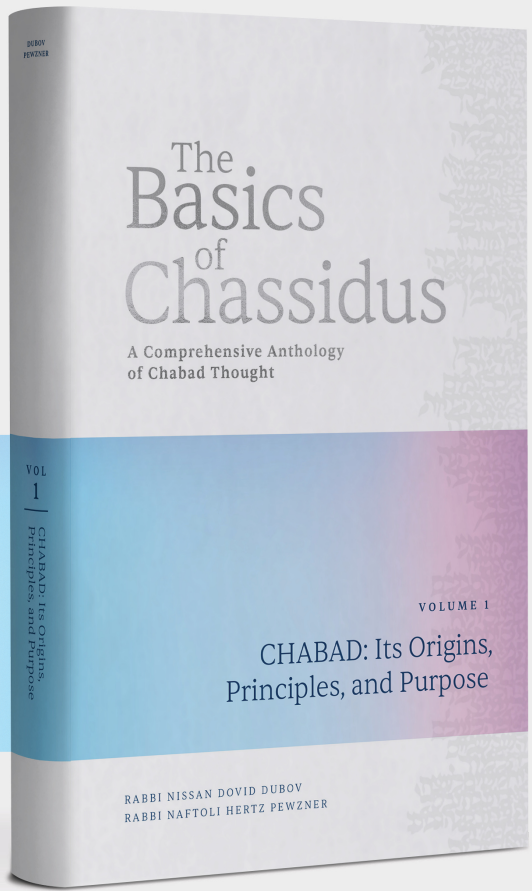


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