

Hakhel - הקהל - The Gathering

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In this [study](study.html) I would like to examine the Hakhel (Gathering) and its goal to produce [awe](fear.html) of [HaShem](hashem.html). The achievement of this purpose involves Torah and the uniting of the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people, the [Mashiach](mashiach.html) ([Messiah](mashiach.html)), and [HaShem](hashem.html). The [mitzva](cmds613.html) ([commandment](cmds613.html)) of Hakhel is found in:

***Devarim (Deuteronomy) 31:9-13*** *And Moses wrote this* [*law*](law.html)*, and delivered it unto the* [*priests*](priests.html) *the sons of Levi, which bare the* [*ark*](ark.html) *of the* [*covenant*](covenant.html) *of* [*HaShem*](hashem.html)*, and unto all the elders of Israel. 10 And Moses commanded them, saying, At the end of every* [*seven*](seven.html) *years, in the solemnity of the year of release, in the* [*feast of tabernacles*](succoth.html)*, 11 When all Israel is come to appear before* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *thy God in the place which he shall choose, thou shalt read this* [*law*](law.html) *before all Israel in their* [*hearing*](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CSUCCOTH%5Cmashal.html)*. 12* Hakhel[*Gather*](gather.html) *the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and* [*fear*](fear.html)[*HaShem*](hashem.html) *your God, and observe to do all the words of this* [*law*](law.html)*: 13 And that their children, which have not* [*known*](daat.html) *any thing, may hear, and learn to* [*fear*](fear.html)[*HaShem*](hashem.html) *your God, as long as ye live in the land whither ye go over* [*Jordan*](stages.html) *to possess it.*

Rav Mordechai [Yosef](joseph.html), in the classic sefer *Mei HaShiloach*, points out that the [mitzva](cmds613.html) of Hakhel occurred only once every [seven](seven.html) years, on the [first](one.html) [Succoth](succoth.html) of the nascent [shmita](shmita.html) [cycle](cycles.html). Hakhel, which immediately follows the [Shmita](shmita.html) year, is but the [first](one.html) of the following [six](six.html) years.

The [Shmita](shmita.html) year prepares for the [mitzva](cmds613.html) of Hakhel in the [eighth](eight.html) year, when men, women and children [gather](gather.html) in the [Beit HaMikdash](mikdash.html) during the [Holiday](festival.html) of [Succoth](succoth.html). [Shmita](shmita.html) serves as a preparation for Hakhel very much like Friday prepares for [Shabbat](sabbath.html). The [Mishna](orallaw.html) details the procedure for the reading:

[***Sotah***](hair.html) ***41a*** *MISHNAH. WHAT WAS THE PROCEDURE IN* [*CONNECTION*](connection.html) *WITH THE PORTION READ BY THE KING? AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE* [*FIRST*](one.html) *DAY OF THE* [*FESTIVAL*](festival.html) *[OF* [*TABERNACLES*](succoth.html)*] IN THE* [*EIGHTH*](eight.html)*, I.E., THE END OF THE* [*SEVENTH*](seven.html)*, THEY ERECT A WOODEN DAIS IN THE* [*TEMPLE*](temple.html) *COURT, UPON WHICH HE SITS; AS IT IS SAID, AT THE END OF EVERY* [*SEVEN*](seven.html) *YEARS, IN THE SET* [*TIME*](time.html) *etc. THE* [*SYNAGOGUE*](synagog.html)*-ATTENDANT TAKES A TORAH-SCROLL AND* [*HANDS*](fourteen.html) *IT TO THE* [*SYNAGOGUE*](synagog.html) *PRESIDENT, AND THE* [*SYNAGOGUE*](synagog.html)*-PRESIDENT* [*HANDS*](fourteen.html) *IT TO THE [*[*HIGH PRIEST*](priests.html)*'S] DEPUTY. HE* [*HANDS*](fourteen.html) *IT TO THE* [*HIGH PRIEST*](priests.html) *WHO* [*HANDS*](fourteen.html) *IT TO THE KING. THE KING STANDS AND RECEIVES IT, BUT READS* [*SITTING*](mashal.html)*.*

It is interesting to note that the [Jerusalem](city.html) [Talmud](orallaw.html) in bringing the same Mishnah has a different version. Instead of stating that the ceremony of the hakhel should be on the second day of the [festival](festival.html) of [Succoth](succoth.html), it writes that the hakhel was on **“the day after the end of** [**Succoth**](succoth.html)**”.**[[1]](#footnote-1)

The purpose of Hakhel, in the words of the scriptures, is: "In order that you may hear and in order that you may learn to [fear](fear.html) the Lord your God". This, too, is cited as the purpose of Matan Torah[[2]](#footnote-2), where the entire [nation](nations.html) congregated to hear the words of [HaShem](hashem.html).

Were the [Temple](temple.html) [standing](mashal.html), we would observe the next [septennial](shmita.html)  Hakhel  assembly  in  5776.

Hakhel, is the penultimate [mitzva](cmds613.html)of the [taryag](taryag.html)[mitzvot](cmds613.html) ([number](nchart.html) 612),[[3]](#footnote-3) as counted by the Sefer HaChinuch. The Sefer HaChinuch also writes, concerning any person who neglects this [mitzva](cmds613.html) (for example a [Jew](gen-jew.html) who fails to attend or a King who fails to read the Torah) "...their punishment is very great, for this [command](cmds613.html) is a fundamental pillar of the religion…”

This [mitzva](cmds613.html) was the last [mitzva](cmds613.html) to be given over explicitly (as opposed to the [mitzva](cmds613.html) of writing a Seifer Torah which is only alluded to in the p’sukim) to the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people by Moshe Rabbeinu. As a matter of fact, it was given to the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people on the day of the passing of Moshe.

The [Talmud](orallaw.html) also speaks of the Hakhel [mitzva](cmds613.html):

***Chagigah 3a*** *"'Assemble the entire* [*nation*](nations.html)*: men, women, and children' - men, to learn; women, to hear; and children, to give reward to those who brought them [to the assembly]."*

The [Mishna](orallaw.html) in Masekhet Sota 32a establishes that the Torah reading at hakhelwas conducted specifically in [Hebrew](hebrew.html), by the King, while seated in the courtyard of the women.. As we shall se, Hakhel was a reenactment of the [Sinai](stages.html) [experience](experience.html). We [know](daat.html) that at [Sinai](stages.html), [HaShem](hashem.html) [spoke](mashal.html) simultaneously in all [seventy](seventy.html) languages and that the whole [world](worlds.html) heard [HaShem](hashem.html) [speak](mashal.html). This suggests that Hakhel may have produced a similar [experience](experience.html) whereby all those who attend will hear and understand.

In general, Talmudic and Midrashic sources[[4]](#footnote-4) see the magnitude of the expression of the Divine presence as increasing in proportion to the amount of [Jews](gen-jew.html) [gathered](gather.html). This suggests that as we have a greater attendance of people, we get a greater manifestation of the Divine Presence. Note the following growth in the [number](nchart.html) of [Jews](gen-jew.html) who can attend the [Temple](temple.html) services:

1. We have all the males commanded to attend on the [three](three.html) pilgrimage [festivals](festivals.html).
2. We would expect greater atendance at the pilgrimage [festivals](festivals.html) during a [Shmita](shmita.html) year when no [one](one.html) could work the land.
3. We would expect an even greater atendance at the pilgrimage [festivals](festivals.html) during a [Yovel](yovel.html) year when no [one](one.html) could work the land for a second year.
4. We see every man, woman, and child commanded to attend Hakhel. (We also saw every man, woman, and child attending at [Sinai](stages.html).)

This suggests a form of crescendo which grows throughout the year and throughout the years, whereby the [number](nchart.html) of [Jews](gen-jew.html) increases, which causes a corresponding increase in the Divine presence. We would, therefore, reach the apex at the Hakhel of a [Yovel](yovel.html) year in the days of [Mashiach](mashiach.html).

The Hakhel was the culmination of [seven](seven.html) years of [mitzvot](cmds613.html) which were used as preparation for this final [event](feasts.html). To begin to understand how these [mitzvot](cmds613.html) fit into the Hakhel it is necessary to understand that there were [three](three.html) principle parts to the Hakhel:

1. The Torah was to be read by the King. The focus is on the [head](body.html).
2. The Torah was to be heard by every man, woman, and child of the [Jews](gen-jew.html) and of those Gerim (proselytes and Noachides) in the land. The focus is on unity.
3. The Torah was to be read in the courtyard of the women, in the [Beit HaMikdash](mikdash.html), the [Temple](temple.html). The focus was on the nearness to [HaShem](hashem.html).

With these [three](three.html) parts in mind, lets examine the other [mitzvot](cmds613.html) which preceded Hakhel and see how they contributed to these [three](three.html) things.

# In [Creation](bara.html)

The [mitzva](cmds613.html) of Hakhel can best be understood by examining the ideal which [HaShem](hashem.html) created in [Gan Eden](eden.html) (the [Garden of Eden](eden.html)). [Adam](adam.html) HaRishon was a single human composed of [male](male%2Bfemale.html) and [female](male%2Bfemale.html) parts. In his loins were the souls of every human being who would ever live.

[Adam](adam.html) HaRishon was created on [Tishri](feasts.html) 1, [Rosh HaShana](teruah.html)h. In a sense, the [Sinai](stages.html) [experience](experience.html) is a recreation of the [Gan Eden](eden.html) [experience](experience.html). There are many similarities. Additionally, [Gan Eden](eden.html) has always been, and continues to be located on the [Temple](temple.html) mount in the place of the [Beit HaMikdash](mikdash.html).

[Adam](adam.html) HaRishon became [Adam](adam.html) and Chava. After [HaShem](hashem.html) separated Chava, [Adam](adam.html) and Chava were commanded to unify themselves whilst [walking](walking.html) with [HaShem](hashem.html) in the [PaRDeS](remez.html), the orchard, of Torah.

# [Shabbat](sabbath.html)

The [Shabbat](sabbath.html) Shacharit (morning) [prayers](prayer.html) focus on unity of [HaShem](hashem.html) and our unification in Him. These [prayers](prayer.html) culminate in the reading of the weekly Torah [seder](haggada.html). This Torah [seder](haggada.html) continually points to the hakhel at the end of the [Shmita](shmita.html) [cycle](cycles.html).

Every [seventh](seven.html) day we celebrate
[Shabbat](sabbath.html) and are [taught](teacher.html) to use the “free [time](time.html)” to
hear the reading of the weekly portion and to enrich our [knowledge](knowledge.html) of Torah.

# [Purim](Purim.html)

The [Purim](Purim.html) Story in [Esther](esther.html) documents the attempt by [Haman](esther.html) to destroy every [Jew](gen-jew.html). It also documents the free acceptance of the Torah given at [Sinai](stages.html) and the unification of the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people in the performance of teshuva and [mitzvot](cmds613.html). The [three](three.html) main observances of [Purim](Purim.html), all comply with the theme of unity:

**1.** Gathering in [synagogues](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CSUCCOTH%5Csynagog.html) for the reading of Megillat [Esther](esther.html) (Torah),

**2.** Giving charity to the poor, and

**3.** Exchanging gifts of goodies with relatives, friends, and neighbors.

# [Pesach](passover.html)

The Maharal of Prague [teaches](teacher.html) that the [Pesach](passover.html)[offering](korbanot) represents [oneness](oneness.html), **unity**. The Paschal lamb or sheep is a herding animal, an animal which associates with its flock. This [one](one.html) year old (signifying unity) animal may only be [eaten](eating.html) by [one](one.html) who assigns himself to a **group**, and only in a single house or location. Even the structure of the meat must be retained, as the meat must be [eaten](eating.html) roasted (roasting shrinks and unifies the meat, as opposed to stewing which breaks the meat apart), and a bone must not be broken in the meat, to retain bone structure. Thus the [seder](haggada.html) unifies Israel with the Torah when they recount the [Haggada](haggada.html).

# Sefirat HaOmer

Sefirat HaOmer, the counting of the [Omer](omer.html), is what a [Jew](gen-jew.html) does as he counts the day till the receiving the Torah at [Sinai](stages.html). His counting reflects the inner growth of his soul as he actively seeks to join with the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people and with [HaShem](hashem.html).

For the [Omer](omer.html), we count “[seven](seven.html) complete weeks[[5]](#footnote-5)”
and afterwards celebrate the fiftieth
day as a sacred [festival](festival.html).

# [Shavuot](shavuot.html)

Matan Torah at [Shavuot](shavuot.html), a unified Israel accepts [HaShem](hashem.html) as God and receives His Torah. In Shemot 19:2, the Torah uses the singular form of the verb "camped" (Vayichan), rather than the expected plural form. Since our people had risen to the level where they were thus "like [one](one.html) man, with [one](one.html) [heart](body.html)”, the singular form here becomes, for the [first](one.html) [time](time.html), appropriate.

From [Sinai](stages.html) onwards, every thought, word, or action in fulfillment of the Torah is both a [connection](connection.html) with [HaShem](hashem.html) and a link with all other [Jews](gen-jew.html). Every [time](time.html) we fulfill a [mitzva](cmds613.html) we are therefore bonding with the Creator and also expressing the inner and eternal unity of the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people.

The Rambam in Hilchot Chagigah [3:7] refers to Hakhel as "Yom Hakhel" [The Day of Hakhel]. Rav Hutner points out that if we take away the vowels of 'Yom Hakhel' it is precisely the same [letters](letters.html) as 'Yom HaKahal' [the Day of the Congregation] which the Torah repeatedly uses [Devarim 9:10, 10:4, 18:16] to refer to the the [standing](mashal.html) at Mt. [Sinai](stages.html).

At the root of the term "Hakhel" that the Torah employs to describe this [mitzva](cmds613.html) is the word "kahal." The word kahal is [one](one.html) of several words the Torah uses when discussing various groupings of the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people. The Malbim and Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch have inculcated within us the view, that there are no synonyms in [Hebrew](hebrew.html). It is, therefore, axiomatic, that if the Torah chooses to base the description of this [mitzva](cmds613.html) on the word kahal, that *the* [*mitzva*](cmds613.html) *be specifically to recreate a kahal*.

In Devarim 4:10, Moshe Rabbeinu relates that [HaShem](hashem.html) had commanded him to [gather](gather.html) the [nation](nations.html) for the giving of the Torah. In Devarim 9:10, Moshe calls the day of the giving of the Torah: "Yom Ha'Kahal." Obviously, the [event](feasts.html) of Hakhel is meant to be a re-enactment of the giving of the Torah.

This clearly connect the Hakhel to [Shavuot](shavuot.html). Yet, there is much more to [connects](connection.html) these [two](two.html) dates.

Rav Hutner says that the essence of the ceremony of Hakhel is supposed to be the reenactment of the [standing](mashal.html) at Mt. [Sinai](stages.html). It is the reenactment of the giving of the Torah. The Accepting of the Torah is THE seminal [event](feasts.html) in [Jewish](gen-jew.html) History. We are to reenact the giving of the Torah every [seven](seven.html) years in order to impress upon the people the importance of what Torah means to the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) People. We want the people to feel as though they have experienced another “giving of the Torah”.

An even more ambitious attempt to relate the content of the hakhelreading to the [standing](mashal.html) at Mt. [Sinai](stages.html) theme is undertaken by Menachem Kasdan, in an article on this topic in the journal Gesher*[[6]](#footnote-6)*, where he detects a parallel between this reading and the process of conversion. In the Hilchot Isurei Bi’a section of Mishneh Torah[[7]](#footnote-7), Maimonides outlines the procedure for dealing with a prospective [convert](aliens.html). He writes that the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) court [first](one.html) attempts dissuading the [Gentile](gen-jew.html), describing to him the persecution historically suffered by the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people, and the hostility and discrimination with which it is often been treated by other [nations](nations.html). If the prospective [convert](aliens.html) persists, he is informed of the basic tenets of the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) faith, particularly the [oneness](oneness.html) of [HaShem](hashem.html) and the absolute rejection of pagan beliefs. From there the court proceeds to present the [Gentile](gen-jew.html) a sampling of [Jewish](gen-jew.html) [law](law.html), particularly agricultural obligations, such as the required tithes and gifts to the poor. Finally, he is to read the section to which we referred earlier, in which Moshe promises blessing should the people obey the Torah, and calamity should they neglect their religious duties.

A careful look at the sections read at *hakhel*, as outlined by Maimonides[[8]](#footnote-8), reveals a general correspondence between these sections and the court’s response to a prospective proselyte. The hakhelreading begins with the opening chapters of the Book of Devarim, which tell of some of Benei Yisrael’s experiences during their travels in the wilderness. Strong emphasis is placed in these chapters on the hostility displayed towards them by the [nations](nations.html) they encountered, [Amalek](amalek.html), [Edom](edom.html), the Emorites, and the empire of Bashan. These chapters thus perhaps correspond to the court’s warning to the prospective [convert](aliens.html) of the animosity historically suffered by the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people. The next sections read at hakhelare the [first](one.html) [two](two.html) chapters of the [Shema](shema.html)service, which, of course, deal with the fundamental [Jewish](gen-jew.html) belief of [HaShem](hashem.html)’s [oneness](oneness.html) and the disastrous [consequences](conseq.html) of [idolatry](idolatry.html). From there the king skips to the section of “Aser Te’aser,” which begins with the [laws](law.html) of tithing and kind treatment to the underprivileged. The king continues with the next several chapters, which introduces numerous [mitzvot](cmds613.html)from across the spectrum of [Halacha](walking.html), and concludes with the section of the blessings and curses that Moshe promises will befall the people as a result of their obedience or betrayal, respectively.

Quite possibly, then, the hakhelreading reflects this ceremony’s role as a formal reentry into the [covenant](covenant.html) with the Almighty. As Maimonides writes a chapter earlier in Hilchot Isurei Bi’a, the conversion process is modeled after the process underwent by Benei Yisraelat the [time](time.html) of the [Exodus](exodus.html) [from Egypt](thebirth.html) and at [Sinai](stages.html). A proselyte enters the [covenant](covenant.html) through a procedure similar to the process required when that [covenant](covenant.html) was established initially. At hakhel, we reenact the [standing](mashal.html) at Mt. [Sinai](stages.html) in order to “[convert](aliens.html)”, to reaffirm and renew our commitment to the [covenant](covenant.html) with [HaShem](hashem.html). The king’s reading of selected portions of the Book of Devarim therefore correspond to the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) court’s warnings and instructions to a prospective [convert](aliens.html)[[9]](#footnote-9).

Rabbi Mordechai Zaks, in his discussion of this topic[[10]](#footnote-10), suggests that the [Shmita](shmita.html)year generates a sense of national unity that is indispensable for experiencing the revelation at Har [Sinai](stages.html). In [one](one.html) of the most famous passages in his Torah commentary, Rashi[[11]](#footnote-11) cites the [Midrash](orallaw.html)’s comment that Benei Yisraelencamped at [Sinai](stages.html) “as [one](one.html) person, with [one](one.html) [heart](body.html).” Benei Yisrael’s collective acceptance of the Torah and the establishment of a national [covenant](covenant.html) with the Almighty require a unity of mind and purpose. During the [Shmita](shmita.html)year, all agricultural activity is forbidden, and landowners must temporarily forfeit ownership over their fields. In effect, then, during the [Shmita](shmita.html)year, there is no economic competition or even any economic classes. Everyone shares precisely the same assets and fate, withdrawing from agricultural work and spending a year engaged in more [spiritual](physical.html) endeavors. The social harmony and elimination of commercial rivalry is a necessary prerequisite to the [standing](mashal.html) at Mt. [Sinai](stages.html) [experience](experience.html) which the hakhelceremony is intended to replicate.

Maimonides[[12]](#footnote-12) also understands Hakhel as a re-acceptance of the [Covenant](covenant.html) at [Sinai](stages.html). Hakhel is also linked to [Succoth](succoth.html) (the [Feast of Tabernacles](succoth.html)), the most universal of our holidays which concludes the [Rosh Hashana](teruah.html)h [festival](festival.html) period. Hakhel involves not only the Children of Israel but the entire Bnai [Noach](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CSUCCOTH%5Cnoachide.html) [world](worlds.html) as well, the strangers as well as the uncircumcised.

This is most reminiscent of the biblical vision of the [End of Days](lastdays.html), as recorded by the prophet Isaiah:

***Yeshiyahu (Isaiah) 2:2-4*** *"And it shall come to pass in the* [*End of Days*](lastdays.html)*, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all* [*nations*](nations.html) *shall flow to it. And many peoples shall go and say, 'Come you, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the House of the G-d of* [*Jacob*](israelja.html)*, and He will* [*teach*](teacher.html) *us of His ways, and we will* [*walk*](walking.html) *in His paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the Torah, and the Word of the Lord from* [*Jerusalem*](city.html)*, and He shall judge between the* [*nations*](nations.html)*, and shall decide for many peoples, and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks,* [*nation*](nations.html) *shall not lift up sword against* [*nation*](nations.html)*, neither shall they learn war anymore".*

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| **Hakhel** | **Har** [**Sinai**](stages.html) |
| "[GATHER](gather.html) THE PEOPLE... in order that they may hear and in order that they MAY LEARN, and they WILL [FEAR](fear.html) the Lord your God all the days you live on the land...."  | "The day on which you stood... at Chorev, when God told me, '[GATHER](gather.html) THE PEOPLE and I shall make them hear My words, that THEY SHALL LEARN TO [FEAR](fear.html) Me all their days which they live on the land, AND THEY SHALL [TEACH](teacher.html) THEIR CHILDREN."  |

In addition, the Sinaitic [experience](experience.html) is also referred to as "the day of hakhel" (Devarim 9:10 and 8:14).

# Tisha B’[Av](tishabav.html)

The dis-unity of Israel is reflected in the [events](feasts.html) of Tisha B’[Av](tishabav.html): The golden calf, the [sin](sin.html) of the [ten](ten.html) spies, and the destruction of the [Beit HaMikdash](mikdash.html) because of baseless hatred. These will all be corrected when Tisha B’[Av](tishabav.html) becomes a [time](time.html) of joy because the [Mashiach](mashiach.html) is “born” who will be the [Beit HaMikdash](mikdash.html) which will unify all Israel in the Living Torah.

# [Elul](elul.html) – Reconciliation Begins

Israel, as a [nation](nations.html), begins the yearly struggle for unity by reconciling with his brother in [Elul](elul.html). This reconciling is the [first](one.html) act of teshuvah and sets the stage for Israel’s reconcilliation with [HaShem](hashem.html) on Yom [HaKippurim](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CSUCCOTH%5Ckippur.html).

**The Shalosh Regalim**

The Shalosh Regalim, the [three](three.html) pilgrimage [festivals](festivals.html), provide a focus on those [Moedim](settimes.html) ([festivals](festivals.html)) which [physically](physical.html) unite Israel with [HaShem](hashem.html) in [Yerushalayim](city.html).

# Yom [HaKippurim](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CSUCCOTH%5Ckippur.html)

Israel begins the yearly struggle for unity by reconciling with [HaShem](hashem.html) on Yom [HaKippurim](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CSUCCOTH%5Ckippur.html), the Day of [Atonement](kippur.html), through teshuva.

On Yom [HaKippurim](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CSUCCOTH%5Ckippur.html) Israel unites in fasting and selichot as be beseech [HaShem](hashem.html) to [forgive](forgive.html) our collective [sins](sin.html). Each speaks the [sin](sin.html) as though it were his personally.

# [Succoth](succoth.html)

The [mitzva](cmds613.html) of Hakhel is described by both the [Talmud](orallaw.html) Bavli and the Yerushalami as celebated either on the second day of [Succoth](succoth.html), or just after the end of [Succoth](succoth.html). This makes [Succoth](succoth.html) the [festival](festival.html) which must contain significant understanding for the [mitzva](cmds613.html) of Hakhel. Lets delve into this [festival](festival.html) to see the connections with Hakhel:

[Succoth](succoth.html) comes at the end of the year:

***Shemot (***[***Exodus***](exodus.html)***) 23:16*** *and the feast of harvest, the* [*first*](one.html)*-fruits of thy labours, which thou sowest in the* [*field*](field.html)*; and the feast of* [*ingathering*](gather.html)*, at the end of the year, when thou gatherest in thy labours out of the* [*field*](field.html)*.*

[Succoth](succoth.html) is only [fifteen](fifteen.html) days into the [new](teruah.html) year which began on [Rosh HaShana](teruah.html)h, never the less, [HaShem](hashem.html) calls it the end of the year. This suggests that the end of the harvest year is the intended meaning. Indeed, this is intimated by the pasuk itself. [Succoth](succoth.html) is the end of the harvest year and the beginning of the [calendar](calendar.html) year. [Succoth](succoth.html) stands as a pivot point for the year.

The [Midrash](orallaw.html)[[13]](#footnote-13) explains that the [mitzva](cmds613.html) of the lulav and etrog symbolizes the intrinsic unity of the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people. We take these [four](four.html) species on [Succoth](succoth.html). The fulfillment of this [mitzva](cmds613.html) requires us to hold together either fruit or branches from [four](four.html) different species of trees, the date palm (lulav), the myrtle (hadas), the willow (aravot), and the citron (etrog).

Vayikra (Leviticus) 23:42-43 speaks of [booths](important.html), impermanent strucures built for shade during the wanderings in the wilderness, and Rabbi Eliezer who contends that the "[booths](important.html)" referred to in the verse are an allusion to the "clouds of glory" which accomanied the children of Israel in the desert[[14]](#footnote-14).



***Sukkah 11b*** *That is satisfactory according to the* [*authority*](authority.html) *who says that [the* [*booths*](important.html) *of the wilderness were] clouds of glory, but according to the* [*authority*](authority.html) *who says [the Israelites] made for themselves real* [*booths*](important.html)*, what can* [*one*](one.html) *say? For it has been* [*taught*](teacher.html)*: For I made the children of Israel to* [*dwell*](dwelling.html) *in* [*booths*](important.html)*, These were clouds of glory, so R. Eliezer. R. Akiba says, They made for themselves real* [*booths*](important.html)*. Now this is satisfactory according to R. Eliezer, but according to R. Akiba, what can* [*one*](one.html) *say?*

The Gaon of Vilna suggested a different reason for the timing of the [mitzva](cmds613.html) of [Succoth](succoth.html) on the [fifteenth](fifteen.html) of [Tishri](feasts.html). He writes that with the [sin](sin.html) of the golden calf the clouds of glory departed from the [camp](stages.html) of the Israelites. When Moshe descended from Mount [Sinai](stages.html) with the second tablets it was Yom [HaKippurim](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CSUCCOTH%5Ckippur.html) ([Tishri](feasts.html) 10), on the eleventh of [Tishri](feasts.html) Moshe [gathered](gather.html) the people and instructed them concerning the builing of the [mishkan](mikdash.html), the [sanctuary](mikdash.html), which was to memorialize the [forgiveness](forgive.html) granted on the previous day for the [sin](sin.html) of the golden calf. On the [twelfth](twelve.html) and [thirteenth](thirteen.html) of [Tishri](feasts.html) the Israelites brought their contributions for the building of the [mishkan](mikdash.html), on the [fourteenth](fourteen.html) the artisans collected, assorted and organized these contributions, and on the [fifteenth](fifteen.html) of [Tishri](feasts.html), the [first](one.html) day of the [festival](festival.html) of [Succoth](succoth.html), they began to build the [mishkan](mikdash.html).

**The** [**Septennial**](shmita.html)[**Cycle**](cycles.html)

Israel begins the [septennial](shmita.html), consisting of [two](two.html) [cycles](cycles.html) of [three](three.html) and a half years, Torah [cycle](cycles.html) on the [first](one.html) [Shabbat](sabbath.html) after [Simchat Torah](simchat.html). The goal of the Torah reading [cycle](cycles.html) is to unify Israel, around the [world](worlds.html), in [HaShem](hashem.html) and His Torah. When the [Babylonian](bavel.html) [Jews](gen-jew.html) introduced the [annual](annual.html) Torah [lectionary](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CSUCCOTH%5Cshmitatc.html) [cycle](cycles.html), they also arranged it so that it would conclude and recommence at the end of [Succoth](succoth.html), the date on which we still celebrate [Simchat Torah](simchat.html).

We [know](daat.html) from the [Talmud](orallaw.html)[[15]](#footnote-15), that Torah can be learned on various levels: the simple [pshat](remez.html), hints or “[remez](remez.html)”, the more complicated [drash](remez.html), and kabalistic explanations, “[sod](sod.html).”  If you take the [first](one.html) [letters](letters.html) of all those words, you come up with the word [PaRDeS](remez.html), (peh, reish, dalet, samech) meaning "garden," or "paradise," as a hint to the [Garden of Eden](eden.html).

Israel finishes the [**first**](one.html) 3½ year Torah [cycle](cycles.html) on [Pesach](passover.html) to recall that the purpose of the [Exodus](exodus.html) was the unity of the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people with the Torah.

# [Simchat Torah](simchat.html)

Israel finishes the **second** 3½ year Torah [cycle](cycles.html) on the [Shemini Atzeret](shemini.html) to recall that the purpose of [Shemini Atzeret](shemini.html) is to enjoy the presence of [HaShem](hashem.html) as a unified people. All Israel celebrates [Simchat Torah](simchat.html) in the [Mishkan](mikdash.html) / [Beit HaMikdash](mikdash.html). All Israel relives the [Sinai](stages.html) [experience](experience.html).

# [Chanukah](chanukah.html)

[Chanukah](chanukah.html), and the year of Hakhel. Both embody the concept of eternity, connecting them both with the [future](future.html) [redemption](redemption.html). They are both related to [eight](eight.html): [Chanukah](chanukah.html) is [eight](eight.html) days long and Hakhel is the year after the [Shmita](shmita.html), the “[eighth](eight.html)” year.

# עשרה בטבת - Asarah BeTevet

# The [Tenth of Tevet](tevet10.html)

The [connection](connection.html) of Asarah BeTevet with the Hakhel year can be explained as follows: Asarah BeTevet began the siege on [Jerusalem](city.html), the place in which the Hakhel was held. Hakhel expresses the complete state of the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people. Gathering together “the entire [nation](nations.html), men, women, and children, shows the complete state of our people. Asarah BeTevet is connected with the complete state of [Jerusalem](city.html). [Jerusalem](city.html) is only complete when it is surrounded by a wall (which grants it a higher status of holiness than the rest of Eretz Yisrael[[16]](#footnote-16)) and when the [Temple](temple.html) is [standing](mashal.html). Furthermore, since [Jerusalem](city.html) is the capital and major [city](city.html) of the entire Eretz Yisrael, it follows that the complete state of Eretz Yisrael, is dependent on [Jerusalem](city.html).

Thus, we can see the [connection](connection.html) between Asarah BeTevet and Hakhel. This stresses that the complete state of [Jerusalem](city.html) and of Eretz Yisrael is connected with the complete state (the Hakhel) of the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people, and also the complete state of Torah, for the purpose of Hakhel was to hear “all the words of this Torah”. In simple terms, the complete state of Eretz Yisrael will be when “all of its inhabitants [dwell](dwelling.html) within,” i.e. when it is filled with [Jews](gen-jew.html) and filled with Torah and [mitzvot](cmds613.html).

# In Tehillim

The division of Tehillim, [Psalms](psalms1.html), into [five](five.html) books corresponding to the sederim of the dual [triennial](shmita.html) [cycles](cycles.html) which make up the [septennial](shmita.html) [cycle](cycles.html), points clearly to King David and alludes to the reading of the Torah at hakhel. Tehillim tends to bind the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people together in that we recite Tehillim during times of stress when we need the support of the [community](community.html).

# The [Shmita](shmita.html) Year

[One](one.html) of the goals of the [Shmita](shmita.html) year is the freeing of slaves. This allowed the slave to be the same as the rest of Israel and to have the [time](time.html) to learn Torah. Another goal was the [command](cmds613.html) to let the land be unworked in the [Shmita](shmita.html) year so that the rich and the poor were all gleaners. This set the stage for unity at the Hakhel in “[eighth](eight.html)” year. [HaShem](hashem.html) promises abundant produce in the [sixth](six.html) year to feed the [nation](nations.html) until the [eighth](eight.html) year crops arrive. This means that at the beginning of the [eighth](eight.html) year, all Israel had the leisure to learn torah. This is similar to the [Sinai](stages.html) [experience](experience.html) where manna was available.

Hakhel has an advantage over [Shmita](shmita.html). It is the [eighth](eight.html) year; and simultaneously it is the culmination of the [seventh](seven.html) ([Shmita](shmita.html)) year “at the end (meaning culmination and perfection) of [seven](seven.html) years.”

Thus we see that it is *not* that Hakhel follows [Shmita](shmita.html), rather, the entire [Shmita](shmita.html) year serves as preparation for Hakhel.

# The Hakhel

All Israel is unified into the [body](body.html) of [Mashiach](mashiach.html), the Living Torah. [Mashiach](mashiach.html), the Living Torah reads the Torah to a unified Israel, [Adam](adam.html) HaSheni, the second [Adam](adam.html). There are [three](three.html) requirements: [First](one.html), we have the formal [commandment](cmds613.html) to assemble. Second, there is the actual reading, listening, and learning that is done at this assembly. The [third](three.html) aspect is the fulfillment of Hakhel's purpose, as the Torah writes: "In order that they hear, and in order that they learn to [fear](fear.html) [HaShem](hashem.html) your Lord."

According to Maimonides,[[17]](#footnote-17) the ceremony of Hakhel is "to prepare their hearts and to set their [ears](body.html) to listening, to hear in [fear](fear.html) and [awe](fear.html) and joy, in trembling, as on the day it was given at [Sinai](stages.html)”. Because [Sinai](stages.html) was an [experience](experience.html) of [Gan Eden](eden.html) we can also conclude that Hakhel is a re-experiencing of the [experience](experience.html) of [Gan Eden](eden.html) as we can see in the similarity of words from [Sinai](stages.html):

***Devarim (Deuteronomy) 4:10*** *The day on which you stood before the Lord your God at Chorev [*[*Sinai*](stages.html)*], when* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *said to me, “*[*Gather*](gather.html) *the* [*nation*](nations.html) *to Me so that I may have them hear My words, that they will learn to* [*fear*](fear.html) *Me all the days that they live on the land, and that they may* [*teach*](teacher.html) *their children.”*

Maimonides indicates that the hakhelceremony serves as a kind of reenactment of the giving of the Torah at Har [Sinai](stages.html), the divine revelation at [Sinai](stages.html). Amidst his discussion of the [laws](law.html) of hakhelin his Mishneh Torah[[18]](#footnote-18), he writes:

Proselytes who do not understand must set their hearts and lend their [ears](body.html) to listen with [awe](fear.html), [fear](fear.html) and trembling joy, like the day on which it was given at [Sinai](stages.html). Even great scholars who [know](daat.html) the entire Torah must listen with exceedingly intense concentration. And [one](one.html) who cannot hear should think this reading in his mind, because the Torah established it only to reinforce the true faith; and [one](one.html) should see himself as if he is now commanded with regard to it, and hears it from the [mouth](body.html) of the Almighty; for the king is a messenger conveying the words of the Almighty.

This brings us full circle:

***Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) 1:9*** *The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no* [*new*](new.html) *thing under the* [*sun*](hachama.html)*.*

# The [Yovel](yovel.html) (the [Jubilee](yovel.html)) Year

The [Yovel](yovel.html), the fiftieth year after [seven](seven.html) [Shmita](shmita.html) [cycles](cycles.html), is the ultimate conclusion to the [triennial](shmita.html) Torah [cycle](cycles.html). The [Yovel](yovel.html) is also the year of hakhel and is an entire year where [HaShem](hashem.html) provides without our efforts. This, in turn, gives us the [time](time.html) to focus on out Torah studies after having been inspired by the hakhel.

For the [Shmita](shmita.html) and [Yovel](yovel.html) we count “[seven](seven.html) weeks of years[[19]](#footnote-19)” and then “must sanctify the fiftieth year.”[[20]](#footnote-20)

# What Has Been Before…

Chazal [teach](teacher.html) that the [world](worlds.html) will endure for [seven](seven.html) thousand years. The beginning of the [eighth](eight.html) [millennium](millenium.html) will, therefore, correspond with the [time](time.html) of the hakhel and will picture the total unity of the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people with [Mashiach](mashiach.html) and [HaShem](hashem.html).

The opening sentence of the Torah tells us that the [worlds](worlds.html) was created by a benevolent Deity to fulfill His grand plans. That [first](one.html) sentence, in its original [Hebrew](hebrew.html) possesses a striking distinction.  [Six](six.html) of its [seven](seven.html) words contain an *aleph -* א.  The *aleph* – א is not only the [first](one.html) [letter](letters.html) of the alphabet, it also means [one](one.html) thousand (*elef*).

בראשית ברא אלהים את השמים ואת הארץ

Our Sages [teach](teacher.html) that [first](one.html) verse’s [six](six.html) alephs - א or thousands, to the [six](six.html) thousand years of human history starting from when [Adam](adam.html) [first](one.html) [spoke](mashal.html).  Furthermore, it links each of the [six](six.html) days of [creation](bara.html) to its parallel [millennium](millenium.html).

Chazal say that the son of David will actually come after the close of the [seventh](seven.html) year of the [Shmita](shmita.html) [cycle](cycles.html), i.e. in the [eighth](eight.html) year.

The [Zohar](orallaw.html) says: "[HaShem](hashem.html), the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people and Torah are [one](one.html)".

Rav Saadiah Gaon tells us, "Our [Nation](nations.html) is not a [Nation](nations.html) except through Torah".

\* \* \*

The breastplate is a symbol of the unity of the children of Israel.

# The Readings:

The [Mishna](orallaw.html)[[21]](#footnote-21) specifies various sections of the Book of Devarim as the selections read by the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) king during Hakhel.

The Rambam[[22]](#footnote-22) lists the sequence of the chapters in Devarim which were read at Hakhel:

**1** "From the beginning of the book of Devarim until the end of the parsha of 'Hear Oh Israel ([Shema](shema.html))'; **Devarim 1:1 – 6:9**

***Devarim (Deuteronomy) 6:9*** *And thou shalt write them upon the door-posts of thy house, and upon thy gates.*

**2.** then he skips to 'And it will be if you will listen (V-haya im Shamoa)'

***Devarim 11:13-21 (25)*** *And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto My* [*commandments*](cmds613.html) *which I* [*command*](cmds613.html) *you this day, to love* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *your God, and to serve Him with all your* [*heart*](body.html) *and with all your soul, 14 that I will give the rain of your land in its season, the former rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest* [*gather*](gather.html) *in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil. 15 And I will give grass in thy fields for thy cattle, and thou shalt* [*eat*](eating.html) *and be satisfied. 16 Take heed to yourselves, lest your* [*heart*](body.html) *be* [*deceived*](garment.html)*, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them; 17 and the anger of* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *be kindled against you, and He shut up the* [*heaven*](heaven.html)*, so that there shall be no rain, and the ground shall not yield her fruit; and ye perish quickly from off the good land which* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *giveth you. 18 Therefore shall ye lay up these My words in your* [*heart*](body.html) *and in your soul; and ye shall bind them for a* [*sign*](signs.html) *upon your* [*hand*](fourteen.html)*, and they shall be for frontlets between your* [*eyes*](body.html)*. 19 And ye shall* [*teach*](teacher.html) *them your children, talking of them, when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. 20 And thou shalt write them upon the door-posts of thy house, and upon thy gates; 21 that your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children, upon the land which* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *swore unto your* [*fathers*](fathers.html) *to give them, as the days of the* [*heavens*](heaven.html) *above the earth.*

**3.** then he skips to 'You shall surely tithe (aser t-aser)' and reads from 'You shall surely tithe' in sequence until the end of the 'Blessings and Curses' until the words 'besides the [Covenant](covenant.html) which He entered into with them at Horeb' and then he stops (u'posek)"

***Devarim 14:22 – 28:69*** *These are the words of the* [*covenant*](covenant.html) *which* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of* [*Moab*](stages.html)*, beside the* [*covenant*](covenant.html) *which He made with them in* ***Horev****.*

May we very speedily [merit](merit.html) the ultimate Hakhel, when all Israel will assemble in the [third](three.html) [Beit HaMikdash](mikdash.html) and hear Torah from the King [Mashiach](mashiach.html), Amen v’Amen!

**\* \* \***

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1. [Yerushalmi](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CSUCCOTH%5Corallaw.html), Sotah 7:7 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. see, e.g., Shemot 20:18 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The mitzva of writing a sefer Torah is a pivotal mitzva. It concludes the [613 mitzvot](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CSUCCOTH%5Ccmds613.html) and, in a sense, it encompasses all the other mitzvot, because when we write a [sefer Torah](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CSUCCOTH%5Cletters.html) we are reminded of all the mitzvot contained in it. At the same time, being placed towards the end of the Torah, it is near the account of the [creation](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CSUCCOTH%5Cbara.html) of the world. The [Midrash](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CSUCCOTH%5Corallaw.html) tells us, that the whole [world](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CSUCCOTH%5Cworlds.html) was created for the sake of the Torah. By writing a sefer Torah we demonstrate that we understand the purpose for which we have been created: to keep the Torah and its commandments. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Bereshit Rabbah 48:7, Devarim Rabbah 7:2, Tanchuma Vayera 4, Midrash Tehilim 22:19, Otzar Ha-midrashim p. 222, Mishna Avot 3:6, Talmud Bavli Tractate Berachot 6a, et al. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Vayikra 23:15 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Yeshiva University, 1969 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. chapter 14 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Hilchot Chagigah 3:3 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. http://www.maimonidesheritage.org//ContentFolder/4/Vayelekh.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. in the journal Torah She-be-al Peh, vol. 2, p. 73 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Shemot 19:2 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Laws of Hagiga, chapter III, 1-7, MAIMONIDES [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Vayikra Rabbah 30:12 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Succah 11b [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Chagigah 14b [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. The Rambam, Hilchot Beit HaBechirah 6:15, writes that sacrifices of lesser sanctity and Maaser Sheni ([foods](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CSUCCOTH%5Cfood.html) that must be [eaten](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CSUCCOTH%5Ceating.html) within Yerushalayim) can be eaten in Yerushalayim if there is no wall because when it was first sanctified it was sanctified for all time to come. Nevertheless a) its sanctification came about because of the wall and b) the full state of holiness exists only when the wall is intact. Note the Responsa of the Maharit, Chosen Mishpat 37; Minchas Chinuch, Mitzvah 362. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Hilchot Chagigah 3:6 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Hilchot Chagigah 3:6 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Vayikra 25:8 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Vayikra 25:10 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Sota 41a [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Hilchot Chagiga 3:3 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)