
**THE TANACH STUDY CENTER www.tanach.org
In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag
Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag**

PARSHAT VA'YELECH

Were we all at Ma'amad Har Sinai? According to "pshat," only the generation that left Egypt was granted this privilege. According to the popular Midrash, however, the "neshama" [soul] of every Jew, of every generation, witnessed that momentous event.

In this week's shiur, as we study Parshat Va'yelech, we will show how the mitzvah of HAKHEL helps 'bridge this gap' between "pshat" & "drash."

INTRODUCTION

Our study of Sefer Devarim thus far has focused on the centrality of Moshe Rabeinu's main speech (chapters 5->26), which details the mitzvot that Bnei Yisrael must keep in the Land. In our shiur on Parshat Nitzavim, we discussed how Moshe Rabeinu's final speech (i.e. chapters 29->30) forms a most appropriate conclusion for that main speech.

At this point in Sefer Devarim, i.e. as Moshe has completed his address, we would expect to find some concluding remarks and thus bring Sefer Devarim to a close. Sure enough, this is exactly what happens in the opening section of Parshat Va'yelech. Moshe Rabeinu first bids farewell by explaining why he can no longer lead (see 31:2), then introduces his successor - Yehoshua (see 31:3-8), and finally presents the written version of the Torah (whose mitzvot he has just completed teaching) to the Leviim and elders.

This indeed would have been an appropriate conclusion.

However, the next section (see 31:10-13) - the mitzvah of HAKHEL - i.e. the commandment to read the Torah in public once every seven years on the holiday of Succot - seems glaringly out of place. Did we not already finish listing all the mitzvot? Did Moshe not just write down the 'final' version of the Torah and present it to the Leviim? Would it not have made more sense to include the mitzvah of HAKHEL somewhere in Parshat Re'ay, together with all the other mitzvot relating to "haMAKOM ashe yivchar Hashem"?

[Note 31:11! see shiur on Parshat Re'ay. (Pay particular attention to 16:12-16.)]

To understand why the mitzvah of HAKHEL is recorded specifically at this time, we must return to Parshat Ki-tavo (and to Sefer Shmot) to uncover the underlying relationship between mitzvot HAKHEL and the events at Ma'amad Har Sinai.

FROM BRIT SINAI TO BRIT HAR EIVAL

Recall from Parshat Ki-tavo that immediately upon the completion of his main speech, Moshe instructs Bnei Yisrael to gather on Har Eival on the 'day they cross the Yarden' (see chapters 27->28). Here they were to:

- a) write down the mitzvot of Sefer Devarim, to be read and taught to Bnei Yisrael (see 27:1-4,8);
- b) erect a "mizbayach" & offer OLOT & SHLAMIM /see 27:5-7
- c) conduct a covenantal ceremony including the public reading of the "tochacha" (see 27:11-28:69).

It is important to note the fundamental difference between the "tochacha" and the main speech of Sefer Devarim. The main speech describes the MITZVOT which Bnei Yisrael must keep upon entering the Land, while the "tochacha" describes Bnei Yisrael's REWARD should they OBEY these mitzvot and their PUNISHMENT should they DISOBEY. [This can help us understand why the "tochacha" FOLLOWS the main speech]

To understand the reason for this additional "brit" on Har Eival, let's consider the parallel between this ceremony and that which

took place at Har Sinai forty years earlier (see Shmot 24:3-11). There (as well), we find that Moshe:

- a) writes down the laws and reads them to the nation;
- b) erects a "mizbayach" and offers OLOT & SHLAMIM;
- c) conducts a covenantal ceremony.
[Note that a "tochacha" was presented at Har Sinai, as well, as recorded in Parshat Bchukotei - see Vayikra 26:3-46. See also Chizkuni's explanation of "sefer ha'brit" in Shmot 24:7!]

Considering that the vast majority of the people of this new generation (i.e. those who are about to enter the Land) were not present at the original ceremony, this **new** generation must 'relive' the HAR SINAI experience. Since it will now become their duty - to fulfill the destiny originally planned for their parents' generation - they too must undergo a similar experience.

[Note: In Sefer Yehoshua we find many other parallels between "dor yotzei mitrayim" and "dor knisa la'aretz," most probably for the very same reason. See end of chapter 8.]

FROM HAR EIVAL TO HAKHEL

For a similar reason, we can explain the reason for recording the mitzvah of HAKHEL in Parshat Va'yelech. Needless to say, the covenant of Sinai is binding for all generations (see 29:12-14). Nevertheless, just as it was necessary to 'recreate' that experience forty years later for the new generation on Har Eival, the mitzvah of HAKHEL will recreate that experience for all future generations. Once every seven years, Am Yisrael must 'relive' MA'AMAD HAR SINAI as the men, women, and children gather at the Beit Ha'Mikdash on Chag ha'Succot for a public celebration to hear the Torah. The Torah will be read in public (see 31:9-13) just as it was at Har Sinai (see Shmot 24:4-7), and just as it was at Har Eival (see 27:3,8).

This interpretation is supported by the Torah's explicit reason for the mitzvah of HAKHEL:

"HAKHEL ET HA'AM - Gather together the nation, the men, the women, and the children... in order that they HEAR and in order that they will LEARN and fear their God, and they will faithfully keep all the words of this TORAH. And their children WHO DO NOT KNOW [i.e. those who were not at the last ceremony] will listen and learn to fear God, for all of the days that they are alive on the land which you are now crossing to inherit." (31:12-13)

OLOT & SHLAMIM - ALIYAH LA'REGEL

However, for our parallel to be complete, we would expect to find a mitzvah to offer korbanot of OLOT & SHLAMIM - just as was the case at Har Sinai and Har Eival. Why don't we find them in the Torah's commandment of HAKHEL?

One could suggest that this relates to the timing of HAKHEL - on SUCCOT. Recall that on SUCCOT every individual is obligated to offer OLOT and SHLAMIM to fulfill the mitzvah of "aliyah l'regel" (see 16:16-17 and Mesechet Shkalim).

Therefore, by performing this mitzvah on Succot at the Beit Ha'Mikdash, the element of korbanot of OLOT & SHLAMIM is present, and our parallel to Ma'amad Har Sinai is complete. [Recall as well our shiur Parshat Terumah that expalined why the Mishkan/Mikdash itself is simply a model (and perpetuation) of Ma'amad Har Sinai!]

WHY HERE?

With this background, we can explain why Moshe orders the mitzvah of HAKHEL specifically now as he presents the Leviim and the elders the 'official copy' of the Torah. The mitzvah of HAKHEL is not 'just another mitzvah' in Sefer Devarim - it relates to the entire sefer! The purpose of this mitzvah is to periodically remind Bnei Yisrael of their obligation to keep ALL the mitzvot of Sefer Devarim, which Moshe had just finished teaching. Therefore, it is given when the Sefer itself is given over the Leviim for 'safe-keeping'.

[Iy'h, in next week's shiur we will explain why this mitzvah is followed by the SHIRA.]

A PARALLEL PURPOSE

The need to periodically teach these mitzvot at a NATIONAL gathering emphasizes yet another significant aspect of Matan Torah. The ultimate purpose of the mitzvot of Sefer Devarim is not only to enable each individual to develop his own, personal relationship with God, but also to create an "am kadosh" (a holy nation) in the Land of Israel - a nation that can properly represent God to the other nations.

This perspective is supported by yet another textual parallel between the mitzvah of HAKHEL and the description of "Ma'amad Har Sinai," as depicted earlier in Sefer Devarim (4:5-14). Precisely in the same 'parshia' where Sefer Devarim explains the ultimate, national purpose for keeping these mitzvot, we find a parallel description of Ma'amad Har Sinai:

"See, I have taught you 'chukim & mishpatim'... for you to keep in the Land which you are about to enter and conquer. Keep them and do them, for they are the proof of your wisdom and discernment IN THE EYE OF THE NATIONS, who, upon hearing these laws, will say... For what a great nation that has God so close to it... and what great nation has laws and rules as perfect as this Torah..." (4:5-8)

That parsha then continues with a commandment not to forget Ma'amad Har Sinai:

"But take utmost care ... NOT TO FORGET the things you saw with your own eyes and so that they do not fade from your memory as long as you live, and MAKE THEM KNOWN TO YOUR CHILDREN AND CHILDREN'S CHILDREN - The DAY YOU STOOD BEFORE GOD AT HAR CHOREV ("ma'amad har sinai") when Hashem told me GATHER THE PEOPLE TOGETHER that I may let them hear my words... (4:9-11)

Now we will study this parallel - using transliterated Hebrew - by carefully reading the psukim concerning Har Sinai & Hakhel [note the repetition of several key words]:

AT HAR SINAI (4:10-12):

"yom asher amad'ta lifnei Hashem Elokecha b'Chorev b'emor Hashem alei HAK'HEL LI ET HA'AM v'ASH'MI'EIM et dvarei asher YIL'M'DUN L'YIRAH oti KOL HA'YAMIM, asher heyim CHAYIM AL HA'ADAMA v'et B'NEIHEM y'LAMEIDUN."

AT HAK'HEL (31:12-13):

"HAK'HEL ET HA'AM, ha'anashim v'ha'nashim v'hataf ... l'maan YISHM'U ul'maan YIL'M'DU v'YA'RU et Hashem.... u'B'NEIHEM asher lo ya'du, YISHM'U v'LAM'DU l'YIRAH et Hashem KOL HA'YAMIM asher atem CHAYIM AL HA'ADAMA."

[It is easier just to compare them by yourself in the actual Hebrew.]

Similarly, the Torah in Devarim 18:16 refers to the day of Matan Torah as Yom ha'KAHAL. [Note also "k'halchem" in 5:19.]

Both these textual and thematic parallels point to a clear connection between the mitzvah of HAKHEL and Ma'amad Har Sinai.

JEWISH CONTINUITY

This background in "pshat" can possibly help us better understand the Midrash that every Jewish "neshama" was present at Ma'amad Har Sinai. One could explain that as members of the Jewish nation and our shared eternal destiny, each and every one of us was indeed present at Har Sinai. Nonetheless, to impress upon each new generation the importance of Ma'amad Har Sinai, there remains a need to recreate that experience (ideally through the mitzvah of HAKHEL).

Today, in the absence of the Beit Ha'Mikdash, we cannot fulfill the mitzvah of HAKHEL. Nevertheless, we can still utilize our 'Tishrei gatherings' [in 'shul' - the 'mikdash m'at'] on Rosh Ha'shana, Yom Kippur, and Succot to help achieve (at least partially) the important goals of HAKHEL - at both the individual and national levels.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. Note the opening and closing psukim of Sefer KOHELET. Based on those psukim, can you find a conceptual relationship between Sefer KOHELET and the mitzvah HAKHEL? [Keep in mind Devarim 31:12-13!]

Does this help explain our minhag to read sefer Kohelet on the shabbat of Succot?

Can you find a relate Sefer Kohelet to the time of year of Succot?

B. Review the HAKHEL psukim again and pay attention to the emphasis on "yirat Shamayim." Compare this emphasis with the purpose of Ma'amad Har Sinai as described by Moshe himself in Shmot 20:17. Notice the two distinct functions Moshe mentions. How does the element of "nasot etchem" come into play at HAKHEL? Compare Rashbam's interpretation with the Rambam's comments towards the end of Hilchot Chagiga 3:6 ("l'chazek dat ha'emet").

Additionally, see Dvarim 14:23. Could "ma'aser sheni" serve as a "miniature" form of HAKHEL? [See Ramban 14:22 and Rashbam 14:23.]

C. The m'forshim offer different bases for the relationship between HAKHEL and shmitta. Of particular interest to us is that of Rav Dovid Tzvi Hoffman, who compares the cessation of agricultural work during shmitta to the wilderness, which he views as the perfect setting for the preparations for Matan Torah. Note the machloket among the m'forshim on Chumash as to whether Hakhel takes place at the beginning or end of the shmita year, and the various reasons given therefor.

How does this relate to the parallel to Har Sinai?

Relate to the fact that if one was not permitted to work his field for an entire year (during shemitah), it was likely that he could dedicate that year to Torah study.

D. The Torah requires that specifically the melech read the Torah in public at Hakhel. Suggest various reasons based on the content of Sefer Devarim that would explain this halacha.

E. According to 'pshat,' it would appear that the Sefer Torah that Hashem commands to be placed next to the Aron is only Sefer Devarim. Note the machloket rishonim on this topic (see 31:9 & 31:24-26).

[Be sure to see at least Ramban.]

1. Try to explain the reason for this machloket.
2. Why is this Torah placed next to the Aron? What does the Aron contain?
3. As usual, relate this to the shiurim thus far on Sefer Dvarim.

F. Based on the above shiur, why do you think the Rambam records the halachot of Hakhel in Hilchot Chagiga rather than Hilchot Shmita & Yovel?