



KINDER TORAH

701

PARASHAS VAYELECH

HAKHEL

"This year is a very special, kinderlach. It contains a very rare mitzvah."

"Which mitzvah Abba?"

"*Hakhel*. In the times of the Beis HaMikdash we had an opportunity to perform this mitzvah only once every seven years."

"Please tell us about it, Abba."

"On the first day of Chol HaMoed Succos, on the year after the *shmitta* year, the *chatzotzros* (horns) would be blown in Yerushalayim. This would be the call for all of Klal Yisrael, men, women, and children, to gather together in the Beis HaMikdash. The king would sit or stand on a wooden *bimah* in the *ezras noshim* and read selected portions from Sefer Devarim."

"It sounds magnificent, Abba. What was the reason behind this huge gathering and reading?"

"The Keli Yakar has a fascinating explanation of the deep meanings of this mitzvah. The words that the king reads from Sefer Devarim are words of *tochacha* (constructive criticism). They are meant to arouse the people to do *teshuvah* (correct their mistakes)."

"*Teshuva*? Chol HaMoed Succos is just six days after Yom Kippur. Why would anyone need to do *teshuvah* so soon after being cleansed of all of his *aveyros*?"

"Excellent question, Chaim. The first four days after Yom Kippur, we are busy gathering the *daled minim* (four species), building the Succah, and preparing for the *chag*. There is no time to do *aveyros*. The first day of Succos is rich in mitzvos. One mitzvah brings another mitzvah; therefore, a *tsaddik* will not sin on that day either. The next day, the sixteenth of Tishrei, is the first day that *aveyros* are recorded for the new year. On that day, we need to do *teshuvah* to keep us on the straight path. *Hakhel* prepares us for that *teshuvah*."

"How, Abba?"

"I will explain, Avi. Firstly, we gather together all of Klal Yisrael, men, women, and children. The huge gathering brings unity, which is essential to the acceptance of *teshuvah*."

"Why, Abba?"

"Klal Yisrael can do *teshuvah* either as individuals or as a unified group. Hashem will accept an individual's *teshuvah* during the ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Now, six days after Yom Kippur, that opportunity had passed. Hashem would accept their *teshuvah* only if the people were united. They needed the unity of *Hakhel* to promote acceptance of their *teshuvah*."

"That is so interesting."

"This unity is hinted to in the mitzvah of

the first day of Succos. "You shall take for yourselves on the first day (of Succos) the fruit of a beautiful tree (*esrog*), the branches of date palms (*lulav*), the twigs of myrtle tree (*hadassim*), and willows (*aravos*)" [Vayikra 23:40]. Our Sages relate that the four species represent four types of Jews who all unite to do the will of The Creator. The Succah itself also promotes peace. We leave our permanent homes to dwell in the temporary Succah, sheltered by Hashem's peace, as we say in our *tefillos*, "Spread upon us Your Succah of peace."

"How inspiring, Abba! However, I have a question. If Succos is so strongly tied to peace and unity, why do we observe *hakhel* only once every seven years, after the *shmitta* year?"

"Aha! I was waiting for someone to ask that question, Esti. During the *shmitta* year, the produce of Eretz Yisrael becomes *hefker* (ownerless). Poor people can come and eat for free. This surely promotes shalom, because most disputes stem from disagreements about ownership. "This is mine and not yours!" On *shmitta*, the produce is *hefker*; therefore,

there are no arguments over who owns it. Two weeks after the end of the *shmitta* year is the ideal time to promote harmony in Klal Yisrael."

"Abba, we never realized the depth of the mitzvah of *hakhel*! It was quite an event."

"May we all merit fulfilling it this year."

"Amen."

Kinderlach . . .

This week is Shabbos Shuva. We stand in the midst of the days of teshuva, five days before Yom Kippur. This is the special time of the year that Hashem accepts the teshuva of individuals. We can each return to Him without the assistance of the Klal. This is a wonderful opportunity, kinderlach. In olden times, we had the mitzvah of hakhel to help us do teshuva after Yom Kippur. Nowadays, we do not have that mitzvah. Therefore, it is very worthwhile for us to seize the golden opportunity to do teshuva now, during these ten days. Return to Hashem! Wipe out aveiyros! Do more mitzvos! Wipe your slate clean this Yom Kippur.

HIDE AND SEEK

In times of *tsaros* (suffering), people may ask, "Where is Hashem?" Sickness,

poverty, terrorism, family strife; where is Hashem? They may wonder, "How can a merciful G-d allow so much suffering?"

"And I will surely hide My Face on that day, for all of the evil that it did, because it turned to other gods" (Devarim 31:18). Hashem hides His Face (so to speak). He "turns away" and allows the troubles to descend upon Klal Yisrael. Is this fair? Does the punishment fit the crime? It seems that the suffering outweighs the sin. The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that *Hester Panim* (Hashem's hiding His Face) is just and fair. Klal Yisrael turned away from Him. They followed foreign gods. They hid their faces from Him; therefore, He hides His Face from them. Serving foreign gods is like denying the whole Torah. Therefore, the *tsaros* come.

What is the remedy? Turn towards Him. Serve Him. Fulfill His mitzvos with joy. Speak to Him in prayer. Listen to His words of Torah. Help fellow Jews, His children. When the Jewish people turn towards Him, He turns to them. Seek Him and He will not hide.

Kinderlach . . .

Are you thinking about Hashem right now? What can you do this minute to please Him? Can you help Imma with the baby? Can you learn a Mishnah? Can you pray with kavannah (concentration)? Can you cheer someone up? Can you listen to someone who needs to talk? These are all ways to serve Hashem. Think about Him. Ignore those distractions that modern technology brings you on the little screen. They only serve

to turn you away from Him. Turn towards Him. Stop playing the "hide" game. Instead, "seek" Him. Uncover the "hidden face".

Parasha Questions:

- Which blessing did Moshe Rabbeinu give Klal Yisrael? (31:6)
- Which blessing did Moshe Rabbeinu give Yehoshua? (31:7,8,23)
- Which "shira" did Moshe write? (31:19,22,24)