



D'var Torah – Sukkot Day 1, Sept. 30, 2023

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Succot is mentioned in the Torah ~6 times.

It is first mentioned in Shemot 23:14-17

שְׁלֹשׁ רְגָלִים תִּחַג לִי בַשָּׁנָה:

Three times a year you shall hold a festival for Me.

There is a quick discussion about Pesach which I will not discuss here.

וְחַג הַקְצִיר בְּבוֹרֵי מַעֲשֵׂיךָ אֲשֶׁר תִּזְרַע בַּשָּׂדֶה וְחַג הָאֶסֶף בְּצֵאת הַשָּׂנֵה בְּאֶסְפֹּךָ אֶת־מַעֲשֵׂיךָ מִן־הַשָּׂדֶה:
and the Feast of the Harvest, of the first fruits of your work, of what you sow in the field; and the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in the results of your work from the field.

שְׁלֹשׁ פְּעָמִים בַּשָּׁנָה יֵרָאֶה כָּל־זָכוֹרְךָ אֶל־פְּנֵי הָאֵדֶן | יְהוָה:

Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Sovereign, יהוה.

A second reference is made later in Shamot

Shemot 34:22-23

חַג שִׁבְעַת תַּעֲשֶׂה לָּךְ בְּבוֹרֵי קְצִיר חֲטָיִם וְחַג הָאֶסֶף וְתִקְוֹפֵת הַשָּׁנָה:

You shall observe the Feast of Weeks, of the first fruits of the wheat harvest; the Feast of Ingathering at the turn of the year. Later I will talk about the statement re: "the turn of the year."

Again the Torah states.

שְׁלֹשׁ פְּעָמִים בַּשָּׁנָה יֵרָאֶה כָּל־זָכוֹרְךָ אֶת־פְּנֵי הָאֵדֶן | יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Sovereign יהוה, the God of Israel.

The other places in the Torah where Succot is mentioned are Vayikra 23: 1-43, Where Hashem tells Moshe to speak to the Israelites about all the the festivals and the offerings to bring to the temple. Especially Vayikra 29: 39-43. The mitzvah of lulav and of building sukkot are introduced here. Bamidbar 29 :12-40 which tells the sacrifices which should be brought to the temple during each day of the festival.

וְהָיָה אֵלֵיךָ וּבְנֶךָ וּבִתְּךָ וְשִׂמְחֹתֶיךָ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשִׂבּוֹן שָׂמֶיךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ וְאִמְתְּךָ וְהַלְוִי אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ וְהַגֵּר וְהַיְתוּם וְהָאֵלְמָנָה אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבְּךָ בְּמָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשִׂבּוֹן שְׁמִי שָׁם:
You shall rejoice before your God יהוה with your son and daughter, your male and female slave, the [family of the] Levite in your communities, and the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow in your midst, at the place where your God יהוה will choose to establish the divine name. In Devarim

Parshat Vayeilech, it states 31:9-13 וַיִּכְתֹּב מֹשֶׁה אֶת־הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת וַיִּתְּנָהּ אֶל־הַכֹּהֲנִים בְּנֵי לֵוִי הַנְּשָׂאִים אֶת־אֲרוֹן בְּרִית יְהוָה וְאֶל־כָּל־זִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

Moses wrote down this Teaching and gave it to the priests, sons of Levi, who carried the Ark of יהוה's Covenant, and to all the elders of Israel : The importance of this statement will be discussed in a few minutes.

And finally:

וַיֹּצֵא מֹשֶׁה אוֹתָם לְאֶמְרָת מִקֶּץ אֶשְׁבַּע שָׁנִים בְּמַעַד שְׁנַת שְׁמִטָּה בְּחַג הַסּוּכּוֹת:

And Moses instructed them as follows: Every seventh year, the year set for shemittah, at the Feast of Booths,

בְּבֹא כָל־יִשְׂרָאֵל לְרֵאוֹת אֶת־פְּנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר תִּקְרָא אֶת־הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת נֶגֶד כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאָזְנֵיהֶם: when all Israel comes to appear before your God יהוה in the place that [God] will choose, you shall read this Teaching aloud in the presence of all Israel.

הַקְהֵל אֶת־הָעָם הָאֲנָשִׁים וְהַנְּשִׁים וְהַטָּף וְגֵרְךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ לְמַעַן יִשְׁמְעוּ וְלְמַעַן יִלְמְדוּ וַיִּרְאוּ אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְשָׁמְרוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־כָּל־דְּבָרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת:

Gather the people—men, women, children, and the strangers in your communities—that they may hear and so learn to revere your God יהוה and to observe faithfully every word of this Teaching.

וּבְנֵיהֶם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדְעוּ יִשְׁמְעוּ וְלִמְדוּ לִירְאֵה אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם כָּל־הַיָּמִים אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם חַיִּים עַל־הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם עֹבְרִים אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן שְׁמֶה לְרַשְׁתָּהּ: {פ}

Their children, too, who have not had the experience, shall hear and learn to revere your God יהוה as long as they live in the land that you are about to cross the Jordan to possess.

This is a celebration that I had not remembered learning about or reading about in the past and I wanted to know more about it.

The name of this event is called Hakhel. It occurred until 70 CE until the destruction of the second Temple.

Hakhel means ingathering: I will share with you the who, what , when, where and why of this celebration, not necessarily in that order, and then discuss more modern versions of this celebration and what we can learn from this practice . Professor Marc Tzvi Brettler, a professor at Duke University, who some of you may have known when he was at Brandeis, wrote a nice summary about this event.

Where: “ In the place that Hashem will choose”. It is assumed that since this event occurs during Succot, one of the pilgrimage festivals, it will be held in Yerushelayim, It took place in the Women's court at the Bet Hamigdash

When: every 7 years, at the end of the shemittah year, during the festival of Sukkot. According to the Mishna, it was held on the first day of Chol hamoed /the second day of sukkot.”The Hakhel gathering is scheduled for the [16th of Tishrei](#), the second day of Sukkot—the first of [Sukkot's](#) "Intermediate Days" (*Chol Hamoed*). If the 16th of Tishrei falls on Shabbat, the Hakhel is postponed until Sunday.”

It is likely that Sukkot was at some point in ancient Israel a new year festival; it is dated in Devarim 16:13 to the very end of the harvest season, and thus would mark the end of one year and the beginning of another. Indeed, in Shemot 34:22 notes וְיָמַגְדְּ אֶת־הַמִּצְוָה הַשְּׁנֵי תְקִיפֹת הַשָּׁנָה “the Feast of Ingathering at the turn of the year.”

“ After the final ingathering and before preparation for planting the first grain crops, was the major festival in ancient Israel, a time that afforded some leisure from the agricultural cycle, and was, therefore, an appropriate time for this grand ritual. This complex ritual, which imagined everyone gathered in Jerusalem, was too grand to transpire annually, so it happened on the special Sukkot, once every seven years at the year of shmitta.”

The above is the simple reading of the text, but the Sages (m. *Sotah* 7:8) stated that the agricultural rest would apply to that year’s harvest, since whatever might be in the fields came from what grew during the seventh year. Thus, he writes (v. 12), people would have an easy time coming to the Temple then, since no agricultural activity needed to be done that year, making it truly a time of leisure . One source stated that since there is limited work during the shmitta year, many used this time to do Torah study, and this event was a like a siyum to complete the year of study.

Who: Gather the people—men, women, children, and the strangers in your communities, Their children, too, who have not had the experience, shall hear and learn to revere your God יהוה as long as they live in the land that you are about to cross the Jordan to possess.

Unlike the other pilgrimage holidays when only the men traveled to Jerusalem, , the entire family came to Yerushalayim for Succot. Just as we had all heard the Torah at Sinai, so we were all to hear the Torah at this event. The stranger /convert(some translations say stranger and others say convert) among us were also to attend the HakHel ceremony so they could hear the teachings of the Torah and learn from them. Although we do not proselytize there was the discussion that the stranger may learn about Hashem’s teachings and may choose to convert.

The emphasis on children was for them to hear the Torah at an age that they may begin to understand the Torah, especially as they may have been too young to comprehend the teachings at an earlier age. To me this is like Pesach where we are commanded to teach the children about the exodus.

What: The HakHel ceremony:

A large stage was erected in the women's court of the Temple. The king would be on the stage. All the people would come to The Temple. The Torah, which was written by Moshe, was used.

The minister(hazzan) of the synagogue would take the torah scroll and hand it to the chief of the synagogue, who would then hand it to the deputy high priest, who would then hand it to the Kohen Gadol. The Kohen gadol handed it to the king. The king would receive the Torah while standing but would sit to read from the Torah. The king would say the brachot before reading the Torah and the 8 brachot after his recitation from the scrolls. These are the same brachot we say today during the Torah service

The King would read from certain sections of Devarim, from the beginning of the book to pusuk 6:19. In this reading, Moshe is told he will not be crossing the Jordan and that Joshua will be the new leader for the people. Moshe reviews the decrees and ordinances given by Hashem. That they should remember what was experienced at Har Sinai, receiving the Aseret Hadibrot, reviewed past battles, the appointment of judges, sending of the spys, and having the Israelites be aware of their beliefs which would make them lose and gain trust by Hashem. Then a reaffirmation that the Israelites will be protected by Hashem. They were reminded to follow the mitzvot. The Aseret Hadibrot were read." These are to be followed by you , your child and your grandchild so your years will be lengthened. ". Then 2 paragraphs of the Shema are read. In parshat Re'eh (14: 22-27) which describes tithing, then describes how they could spend their money received for their grains. In KiSavo (26:12-15)" after 3 years, tithing to the widow, orphan, proselyte, Levite . Finally in Shoftim 17:14-20 Hashem announces He will appoint them a king. . The king should not be greedy. The king is to remain humble. The king

should write 2 Torahs, from which he should read daily. He will learn to fear Hashem. And observe the Torah. Finally from parshas Ki tavo , the curses of one who performs forbidden relationships, and hurts his fellow man are read.

Some sources stated that the entire book of Devarim was read.

Why: “ Gather the people so they may hear and so learn to revere Hashem and observe faithfully every word of His teachings.” The Torah was read to inspire the Israelites for the next 6 years.

Modern day observances:

The first official modern ceremony of Hakhel was held during Sukkot on 1945, the year following the shmittah year. A special service was held in the Yeshurun Synagogue followed by a procession to the Kotel. Where the Torah portions were read. Similar ceremonies have been conducted by Government officials and Chief Rabbis every 7 years since.

In New York a special ceremony, sponsored by the Rabbinical Assembly and the Jewish agency was held at the Commodore Hotel at the same time as the ceremony was going on in Israel. Several speakers spoke about renewing the practice of Hakhel, responsibilities of the Jew to the State of Israel. Jewish leaders encouraged Rabbis to hold Hakhel ceremonies all over the country.

What should we learn from this.

1)Unity: the entire community attended the Hakhel ceremony. I love that this Kahal is very diverse in terms of age, family groups, Jewish identity/backgrounds, secular identity and personal identity. People are from all over the world and work in many professions. But we all respect each other and can learn from each other. We are all here because we have a special love of Torah and Judaism.

2) Torah study: We should take time to do some learning be it individual, with a chevrusa, or to take advantage of learning opportunities sponsored by Minyan Maor or other programs like Ma'ayan, the

Hartman institute, Hadar or all the numerous classes sponsored by our shuls, schools and Jewish organizations. We are lucky to live in a community that provides us with so many opportunities for learning.

3) Family: To carry on our traditions to our children. I love that there are many children in this kehillah. They appear to be happy to come to shul. They do a beautiful job laying and leading the kehillah in prayer. I know many families send their children to Hebrew day schools/ hebrew schools, and send their children to Jewish camps. I am sure your personal practice of Judaism at home is a source of inspiration for your family.

4) Chessed: The need to support those in our community who are struggling by performing acts of chessed or by donating to the many organizations in the area who are there to assist those among us who could use some assistance

I hope that this new year will allow each of us to recommit ourselves to progress our own spiritual journey by finding meaning in our practice of mitzvot, increase our learning and share it with our families and friends. And to reach out to all members in our Jewish community to promote unity.