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י"ל ע"י

קהילת שבתי בבית ד'

בנשיאות מורנו ורבנו הר"צ  
רבי גמליאל הכהן  
רבינוביץ שליט"א

# טיב הקהילה

English edition

באנגלית

טיב הפרשה

מצות 'הקהל' ולימודה לימינו

טיב המערכות

כדי שתמליכוני עליכם

*In order that you make Me king over you*

In the capital city there was very great excitement, everyone was preparing for the coronation of the new king. A special place was built for this purpose, and all the workers and attendants of the royal palace prepared for the great day. The capital city was decorated with flowers and many ornaments befitting such a special day, and renowned cooks were brought from across the world to prepare royal delicacies in honor of the occasion. There was not a corner in the city that was not renovated and cleaned, and everything spoke of renewal. And behold, the great day arrived. From every house in the city, excited voices were heard. And is it a simple thing? Today the king is being crowned! All were ready and prepared for the honorable ceremony.

The great moment arrived. From all corners of the world kings and princes streamed to the great event. All the people of the city left their homes dressed in their finest garments, heading toward the city center where a special place was prepared to receive the multitudes. The orchestra played sweet melodies, some of which had been composed especially in honor of the occasion, and in every corner stood servants dressed in livery, serving delicacies prepared by the finest cooks. And behold, the orchestra began a special melody. The king arrived clothed in splendor and majesty. All received the king with royal honor and opened the traditional coronation ceremony. But he looked around in all directions, and suddenly said that he wished his coronation to take place in *his* village, with the people who had always been by his side. With no choice, the royal procession departed toward the village. They arrived at the village, far from the capital city. Simple people dwelled there, and it seemed that they knew nothing of all that was taking place in the capital. But when they saw their beloved who had become king, they all went out toward him, and in a simple and modest ceremony they crowned him. And only then was the king satisfied.

We do not know by what merit we attained this, but this we know: that HaKadosh Baruch Hu has in the upper worlds myriads of angels and seraphim and holy beings and the wheels of the chariot. And certainly on the day of His coronation – Rosh Hashanah – there is special commotion there. But HaKadosh Baruch Hu, as it were, is not satisfied with all of that. He desires that *His* people, the people of Israel, crown Him. And thus He requests from us: 'אמר לפני מלכויות - "Say before Me kingships so that you will crown Me over you." How great will be our joy when we – beings formed of clay – merit to crown the King of the universe, Who chose us in particular from all the nations to crown Him over the entire world, and of course also over us. Tiv HaMoadim – Rosh Hashanah

*The mitzvah of 'Hakel' and the teaching for our time*  
בבוא כל ישראל לראות את פני ה' אלקיך במקום אשר יבחר תקרא את התורה הזאת נגד כל ישראל באזניהם: הקהל את העם האנשים והנשים וגרך אשר בשעריך למען ישמעו ולמען ילמדו ויראו את ה' אלקיהם ושמרו לעשות את כל דברי התורה הזאת: (לא יא יב)

When all Israel comes to appear before Hashem, your G-d, in the place that He will choose, you shall read this Torah before all Israel, in their ears. Gather together the people, the men, the women, and the small children, and your stranger who is in your cities, so that they will hear and learn, and they shall fear Hashem, your G-d, and be careful to perform all the words of this Torah. (31:11-12)

Behold, these *posukim* speak of the mitzvah of 'Hakel', and in their content one sees a point that arouses wonder and calls for explanation. For at first the Torah details all aspects of the mitzvah, and afterward it explains its purpose. Thus, it tells us that this mitzvah is not among the statutes that are a "decree of Scripture," [*gezeiras hakasuv*] for it has a revealed purpose and man understands why he fulfills it. Yet when examining the purpose itself, its essence is not understood. It seems like saying that the goal is the very mitzvah itself, as if one said: Give Reuven a gift so that you will give Reuven a gift...

I will explain: After the first *posuk* before us taught the time of the mitzvah of *Hakel* [as a continuation of the *posuk* before it] and the obligation of its fulfillment at the Mikdash, it informed also the nature of the mitzvah: "You shall read this Torah before all Israel in their ears." These words are in truth the essence of the mitzvah of *Hakel*: to proclaim the Torah before the entire congregation of Israel. "In their ears" means that it is not fulfilled merely by proclaiming in their presence, but also that it be "in their ears"—that they incline their ear to accept the words. That is, the essence of the mitzvah is to hear the Torah from the mouth of the king who reads it.

After we know all the details of the mitzvah, the next *posuk* tells us its purpose: "that they may hear." With these words the *posuk* reveals that this mitzvah has a goal. What is it? Hearing! But this is not understood, for hearing is not the goal but the very mitzvah itself.

The other points brought as purposes—"that they may learn and fear Hashem, your G-d" and so forth—also require explanation. For we do not see that precisely from this hearing one attains all of these, since even in our days, when *Hakel* does not apply, there are many who learn Torah, and all who choose fear know that its attainment is not in the hands of Heaven (see Berachos 33b). And Israel is also in our days filled with mitzvos and good deeds.

Yet a great matter the *posuk* has revealed. To understand, I will first quote a short line from the Malbim in his commentary on Yeshayah (1:11-12), when he spoke about the mitzvah of pilgrimage

to Yerushalayim. His words: “He commanded them to ascend to the holy city three times a year, to learn there the fear of Hashem and His ways from the kohanim and the prophets, as it is said (Devorim 14:23): ‘אלקיך - למען תלמד ליראה את ה’ - ‘that you may learn to fear Hashem, your G-d.’” In these words he revealed that words of Torah and rebuke heard in the Mikdash were not like words of Torah and rebuke heard elsewhere. In the Mikdash the influence was different for the better in great measure. Therefore, HaKadosh Baruch Hu desired that Israel not suffice with the Torah and rebuke of their own sages in their towns, but that three times a year they exert themselves to ascend to Zion and receive Torah and rebuke from the kohanim and prophets in Yerushalayim. From their mouths they would merit elevation, fear, and wholeness.

And why was Yerushalayim different from all other lands? Only because of the greatness of holiness that resided there. This holiness caused that whoever entered its gates found his mind elevated, his will awakened with longing for closeness to G-d. Then he strongly desired to hear words that would rouse his heart to repentance and good deeds, that these might help him fulfill “turn from evil,” removing barriers between him and his Creator, and also “do good,” that these deeds serve as means to draw him closer. These desires drew him to the kohanim and prophets to hear from them words stirring correction of deeds, and their words indeed were absorbed in his heart. From this he was able to fulfill his longing, rising in fear and cleaving to G-d. Thus he returned to his city filled with holiness and lofty fear. From then on, his Torah was changed for the better, for the holy *seforim* explain that so long as man is not cleansed from sin, his Torah is not accepted with favor. But once he purifies himself from sin, the merit of Torah stands for him. Torah of this kind surely adds fear to his fear. And his mitzvot he then fulfilled with pure intent, in all their details without compromise.

From this we may say that the mitzvah of *Hakhel* too was for this purpose. It was another opportunity to stir the nation in the holiest place, through

the greatest among the people reading before them *Mishneh Torah*, the book that stirs to “turn from evil and do good.” For about half the book is rebuke and moral exhortation, and the other half repeats most of the mitzvot. This hearing supported them and brought them to excellent repentance. From then on, they were worthy of elevation through the power and merit of their Torah.

Now we understand well the intent of the *posuk* “that they may hear.” For this is not the same hearing mentioned in the body of the mitzvah, where the meaning is the obligation of hearing in its plain sense, as with all mitzvot that depend on hearing. From the Torah’s view this hearing is no different from other hearings that are obligatory, for all mitzvot are decrees of Heaven, and by law man must incline his ear even against his will. But after telling you that hearing is an obligation, it informs you that the purpose of this mitzvah is “that they may hear”—that they merit hearing that penetrates the heart. That is, to fulfill the obligation it suffices with hearing by the ear, but the purpose is hearing that comes from the holiness of the place. This kind of hearing greatly stirs man to repentance, correction of deeds, and closeness to G-d. This hearing will bring also to “that they may learn”—that when he returns home his study will be considered true study, for it will be for the sake of Heaven. Such Torah adds fear to his fear, and “they shall fear Hashem, your G-d” will be fulfilled in him. From this he will be careful in fulfilling mitzvot, and “they shall observe to do all the words of this Torah” will be fulfilled.

Nor will it be difficult that even without *Hakhel* a man has the choice to learn Torah, awaken fear, and increase in mitzvot. For Torah learned before repentance is not like Torah learned after. Torah without repentance is not considered Torah compared to Torah with repentance.

And on the question of “fear of Heaven” not being in the hands of Heaven, that all who choose fear can attain it—though there is truth in this claim—you must know: he who chooses fear can attain it, but to choose it he needs Torah learned with repentance.

And even if you are right that the

choice to do mitzvot and good deeds is given even in our days, you must understand: the merit to “do all the words of this Torah” is found only in one who learns Torah with repentance. For he alone merits true fear of his Creator, and fear stands as a shield against the *yetzer* that tries to cause man to compromise with his Creator... And now, as we sit in exile, we do not merit the mitzvah of *Hakhel*. But when we contemplate this mitzvah and understand its purpose, we too must awaken and yearn to attain its goal as much as possible. Before study we must repent, and only then will our Torah be pleasing, raising us higher and higher.

And even though, as said, we do not have *Hakhel*, and cannot awaken to deep repentance as they merited in the time of the Mikdash through its holiness, still we have hope, if we strive to attain at least the repentance within our reach. Then the merit of our Torah will stand for us, to attain in time the true repentance demanded of us.

This came from the pen of the holy author of *Bnei Yissaschar* in the introduction to his *sefer Agra DeKallah*. His words: “Behold, the prophet’s saying is not hidden: ‘נִירוּ - לכם ניר ואל תזרעו אל הקוצים’ - ‘Break up for yourselves fallow ground, and do not sow among thorns’ (Yirmiah 4:3). The Torah and mitzvot that man does while still clothed in the filth of the world’s impurity are considered like sowing among thorns. *Chas v’shalom*, he strengthens thorn and thistle, the forces of the Other Side. Yet such is the way of Teshuva. By Torah law, mere annulment suffices until Hashem Yisbarach shines upon him with mercy through Torah study. Torah will teach him knowledge and understanding to correct his traits with great love. This is hinted at in the *posuk* ‘מִי פְתִי יִסוּר’ - ‘Whoever is simple, let him turn here’ (Mishlei 9:4). For ‘Mi’ is the world of repentance, as known, and thus, when the simple one desires to return in repentance, let him turn here, and Torah will teach him knowledge.”

From his words you see: at first, they do not ask of man more than that he do what he is able. If he does so, Torah will aid him to reach the desired Teshuva.

## ‘Delayed understanding’

“Do not ask!!! The baby almost stopped eating. He eats with difficulty ten cc (about two teaspoons), and the doctors want to hospitalize him and connect him to a feeding tube!!! (feeding through the stomach). A miracle is needed here. You are connected to the righteous. Do me a favor and request a blessing for me!!!”

Thus began the conversation between me and my helpless brother-in-law. Immediately I arranged for him a meeting with one of the tzaddikim for a bracha. He entered for a bracha, and the tzaddik explained to him that all the suffering one endures from children is from a lack of honoring parents. The Chafetz Chaim said that all the suffering a person experiences in this world is for not honoring parents properly. If there is distress in raising children, it comes from a lack of honoring our parents in the past and in the present. Therefore, see to appease your parents and honor them in an elevated manner, and you will see that everything will be resolved!!!

From the house of the Rav, my brother-in-law went straight to his parents. He made peace with them and sat with them for a long time and set a plan to henceforth come and visit them frequently. Already on his way home, he called his wife to prepare a bottle for the baby. And behold, a wonder! The baby ate one hundred and ten cc (almost four ounces). From ten to one hundred and ten!!!

Since then the baby has been eating normally already for more than two weeks. We returned to the Rav to thank him, and the tzaddik said that there was here no wonder and no miracle. The matter is very simple, and thus he explained: “Children belittle their parents because they think they grew up and developed from the air.

What does HaKadosh Baruch Hu do? He causes them to be awake whole nights with their baby, and sometimes hospitalizations in hospitals, and thus distress and pain. What is the reason for all this? Not to punish anyone, but to awaken the person to think in the following manner: ‘My parents were awake with me whole nights and cared for me with self-sacrifice according to their ability for food and for clothing and for teachers. And now I am ungrateful?’ All this is to cause you to understand that you must recognize the good to your parents. The moment you understood the message, there is no more need to awaken you, and therefore everything was resolved!!! There is here no miracle, you simply absorbed the message!!!”

## The Essence of the Day Atones

**“The essence of Yom Kippur atones for those who repent, as it says (Vayikra 16:30), תְּתַהַרְוּ ה' - For on this day He shall provide atonement for you (Rambam, Hilchos Teshuvah 1:3).**

Chazal (*Shavuos* 13b) on this issue: According to Rav, “the essence of the day atones” even for those who do not repent, while Rabbanan hold that it atones only for those who repent. The Rambam rules like Rabbanan, that the day atones only for penitents, as explained by the Kesef Mishneh.

The commentators explain that even though the Rambam rules according to Rabbanan, he uses the language of Rav: “The essence of the day atones.” Because although the Rabbanan, whose opinion is accepted, require repentance for the atonement of Yom Kippur, and “the essence of the day” without repentance does not suffice, the primary atonement of Yom Kippur, according to all opinions, stems from the power of the day itself. However, the Rabbanan maintain that the essence of the day is ineffective for those who do not repent. The rationale behind this is due to the unique nature of Yom Kippur, which is a day fundamentally different from all others. As stated in Tanna D’vei Eliyahu Rabbah (chapter 1): וְלֹא אֶחָד בָּהֶם - *The days were fashioned, and for Him, one among them (Tehillim 139:16)*—this refers to Yom Kippur for Yisrael, which is a day of great joy before the One who spoke and the world came into being, given with great love to Yisrael.” Similarly, in Otzar Midrashim, Midrash Chaser Veyaser (p. 197), it states: *The days were fashioned, and not one among them.* It is written וְלֹא and not with an *aleph*, but we read it as וְלוֹ - *for Him* with a *vav*, teaching that Hakadosh Baruch Hu created one unique day from all others [that is different and not among the others]—Yom Kippur, for atonement.”

This midrash explains that Yom Kippur is fundamentally distinct in its very creation from all other days. While *the days were fashioned* according to one type of creation, Yom Kippur was created uniquely, endowed with a sublime spiritual nature. It is a day entirely spiritual, unlike other days, which are primarily physical. Yom Kippur emanates purity and holiness from the upper spiritual realms. Thus, on this day, we are likened to the ministering angels: we do not eat or drink like them, we dress in white like them, and we recite “Blessed is the Name of His glorious kingdom” aloud, as they do.

This is the meaning of “the essence of the day atones”—through the immense sanctity and wondrous light that shines on this day, purifying the souls of Yisrael. It is of this unique light that we say on the night of Kol Nidrei: אֹרֶךְ לַצִּדִּיק - *Light is sown for the righteous (Tehillim 97:11)*, as is known. The day itself, through its sanctity and purity, cleanses the sins of Yisrael.

However, according to the halachah, as established by the Rabbanan, there is a condition for the atoning effect of the essence of the day: repentance. If one repents, the day automatically atones. Nevertheless, even according to the Rabbanan, the erasure of sins on Yom Kippur is not primarily achieved through the individual’s acts of repentance, as on other days of the year, but rather through the power of the day itself, as derived from the *pasuk*, תְּתַהַרְוּ ה' - *For on this day He shall atone.* The day itself is the agent of atonement.

As demonstrated in the discussion of the four types of atonement (*Yoma* 86a), Yom Kippur can atone even for transgressions that ordinary repentance cannot remove. Repentance is needed, however, to enable the atonement of the day to take effect. If a person clings to their sins and refuses to repent, they block the atonement of the day from penetrating and cleansing their soul of its impurities.

Thus, the *pasuk* continues: *For on this day He shall atone*—but this is contingent upon *to purify you*. You must abandon sin and return with repentance to Hashem on Yom Kippur. Then the essence of the day will atone for you, purifying you, as the *pasuk* concludes, תְּתַהַרְוּ ה' - *Before Hashem, you shall be purified.*

It is said of Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld *zt”l*, the revered Rav of Yerushalayim, that after the passing of the chazzan who led the *Yamim Nora'im tefillos* in his *shul*, the question arose during Elul as to who would take his place. The deceased chazzan’s son was in mourning and had not yet established a tradition of leading prayers during the *Yamim Nora'im*, and the *poskim* write that a mourner in such a situation should not lead the prayers.



Rav Yosef Chaim avoided giving a clear answer to the question, assuring that everything would be arranged with Hashem's help.

As Rosh Hashanah drew near, the *gabba'im* approached the Rav again, but he remained noncommittal. Trusting his wisdom and righteousness, they deferred to his judgment.

At *Minchah* on Erev Rosh Hashanah arrived, the *kehillah* gathered in the *shul*, adorned in white garments, with hearts filled with awe and joy for the approaching *Yom HaDin*. After *Minchah*, Rav Yosef Chaim signaled to the son of the deceased chazzan, who was still in mourning, to lead *Maariv*.

The *kehillah* was astonished. How could the great Rav disregard the *poskim*? They refrained from questioning his decision, confident that his reasoning was sound.

Afterward, Rav Yosef Chaim explained: "I deliberated extensively about this matter. Indeed, it is less than ideal for a mourner to lead the prayers for the first time on the *Yamim Nora'im*. However, it would be far worse if the widow of the deceased chazzan saw someone other than her son leading the prayers. Her anguish, expressed in a sigh from the women's section, would be far more harmful than any issue arising from the mourner leading the prayers."

This story teaches the extent to which one must be cautious not to cause others pain, especially the widow and orphan, whose cries reach directly before Hashem. Sometimes, this sensitivity takes precedence even over halachic considerations, emphasizing the importance of relationships *bein adam lechaveiro*, which Yom Kippur does not atone for until one appeases the offended person.

The elders of Yerushalayim testified about Rav Yosef Chaim that throughout his fifty years of service as Rav of Yerushalayim, he always prayed in the same *shul* in the Batei Machseh neighborhood of the Old City, near the *Makom Hamikdash*. He sat in his designated place and never once asked for a window to be opened or closed, fearing it might inconvenience someone else. Even in his old age, when his strength waned, he avoided actions that might cause distress to any Jew.

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A similar story is told about Rav Chaim Palagi *zt"l*, one of the *gedolei hasefardim*. He was appointed to serve as *rav* in a city where the custom was for the new *rav* to deliver his inaugural sermon in the great *beis knesses*, accompanied by a grand procession with music, songs, and dances.

The streets where the procession was to pass were cleaned and decorated with beautiful and radiant banners. Many candles were lit at the entrances of homes and on windowsills, and everyone awaited the grand event.

When the time arrived, the community leaders and the entire population came to the home of the revered *rav*. Rav Chaim emerged in his splendor, his rabbinic robe draped around him and his turban adorning his head. The procession began with awe and reverence, to the joy of all the city's inhabitants.

However, midway, he stopped and requested a change in the route. Instead of continuing directly to the *shul*, he asked to take a longer route.

The community leaders asked for an explanation. The righteous *rav* humbly explained: "The designated route passes by the home of the widow of the late *rav* *zt"l*. If this grand procession, with its singing and music, passed her house, seeing the celebrations of the appointment of a new *rav* would undoubtedly bring her sorrow and pain over her late husband's passing. I cannot celebrate this joyful occasion at the expense of her grief and suffering. Therefore, I ask you to alter the route, even if it means a much longer walk through streets unprepared for this procession. It is worth it to spare the heartache of this esteemed widow."

This story exemplifies the profound care of the great tzaddikim of previous generations in interpersonal relationships. On this Yom Kippur, when the holy Jewish people reconcile with one another and introspect to rectify serious transgressions between individuals, it is worth contemplating the importance of respecting and honoring others, which leads to the atonement granted by the essence of the day.

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In his later years, Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz *zt"l*, dean of the Mirer Yeshivah, once had a hectic day. In addition to delivering a major *shiur klali* in the yeshivah's main hall before many eminent *talmidei chachamim*, he also served as *sandak* at a *bris milah*, participated in the *pidyon haben* of a close student, and delivered a heart-wrenching eulogy at a funeral.

After returning home from such an arduous day, which was challenging even for a young person, the elderly *rosh yeshivah* was weak and exhausted. Late in the evening, while resting in utter fatigue, he suddenly remembered that he had been invited to a bar mitzvah celebration for the son of one of

his *talmidim*. Summoning his remaining strength, he rose, leaning on his cane, and set out, slowly, step by step, to attend the celebration.

When he arrived, his presence brought great joy to the hosts. But seeing his evident exhaustion, his *talmidim* asked him: "Rebbi, why did you feel compelled to exert yourself in such a state to attend this bar mitzvah? Surely the father, one of your close *talmidim*, would have understood if you couldn't attend due to your weakness. Moreover, it is not his first bar mitzvah, and he and his son could have come to your home to receive your blessing. Why did you go through so much trouble?"

The *rosh yeshivah*, known for his exceptional *middos*, replied: "There was no way I could forgo attending this celebration. The bar mitzvah boy's father is one of the most dedicated participants in my *shiurim*. I owe him *hakaras hatov*! Without *talmidim*, there is no *rosh yeshivah*; without listeners to *shiurim*, there is no *maggid shiur*. How could I not exert myself to show appreciation to someone who so faithfully attends my *shiurim*?"

This story teaches us the importance of gratitude, even in difficult circumstances. Feeling an obligation of gratitude to a fellow Jew, the tzaddik made an effort, despite his exhaustion, to acknowledge the support he had received.

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A similar story is told about Rav Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik of Brisk *zt"l*. One Erev Shabbos, a man came to his home in great anguish. His wife was gravely ill, and her condition had deteriorated to the point of being life-threatening.

Hearing of the dire situation, the Brisker Rav contemplated briefly and then advised: "At this hour, as Shabbos approaches, many Jews are rushing to immerse themselves in the mikveh to honor the sanctity of Shabbos. This is a most opportune time! Go to the nearby mikveh, wait outside, and ask those emerging from their immersion, their hearts and souls purified, to bless your wife for a complete recovery. Among these sincere and pure-hearted Jews, someone will surely offer a heartfelt blessing, and such a blessing, coming from the depths of a pure heart, can achieve great and wondrous results."

The man stood outside the mikveh with a heavy heart, pleading with those emerging to bless his ailing wife. The holy Jewish people, compassionate and kind, readily offered their blessings. Soon after, the man witnessed the salvation of Hashem: his wife recovered fully, regaining her health and living many more healthy years.

This story teaches us the power of sincere *berachos*, especially on a holy day like Yom Kippur when Jews bless one another abundantly. May we bless and be blessed with all heart and soul, for no one knows how much a friend's heartfelt blessing can bring salvation, ensure a good and sweet year, and seal us all for life and goodness. Amen.