



RABBI SHALOM

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# Hak'hel: Enhancing the Spirituality of Others

הקהל את העם האנשים והנשים והטף וגרך אשר  
בשערך למען ישמעו ולמען ילמדו ויראו את ה' אלקיכם  
ושמרו לעשות את כל דברי התורה הזאת: (דברים לא:יג)

Assemble the people: the men, the women, and the children, and your stranger in your cities, in order that they hear, and in order that they learn and fear Hashem, your God, and they will observe to do all the words of this Torah. (*Devarim* 31:13)

The Torah dictates that at the end of every seventh year – the *shemita* year – the entire nation is to assemble to hear the king read the Torah. This is the mitzva of “*hak'hel*” (“assemble”).

One may have thought that such an inspiring experience, the gathering of the nation to hear the king read the Torah, would be reserved for those above a certain age, who could appreciate this event. Yet, we are told to assemble “the men, the women, and the children”. Will the children benefit from this event? Or will they disturb the spiritual experience

of others? Several commentaries offer explanations for the required presence of the children.

The Ramban suggests that the “children” referred to in the *pasuk* above are children old enough to grasp the magnitude of the moment. They will witness the event and inquire. It will serve as an educational experience and will enhance their awe and reverence of Hashem. There is no reason to bring babies who will not comprehend the significance of the occurrence. The Ramban admits that Hazal relate that there is a requirement to bring young children in order to be rewarded for bringing them,<sup>1</sup> yet he doubts that it refers to infants.

Rav Natan Adler<sup>2</sup> offers an explanation for why Hazal encourage bringing young children, even though it seems that they would just interfere with such a potentially spiritual experience. Anyone who has ever taken small children to a potentially significant spiritual experience can relate. I personally recall what I expected to be a spiritually uplifting visit to *Mearat Hamachpela*, ended up getting interrupted by having to find a restroom for my young child. However, Rav Adler claims that

1 *Hagiga* 3a; *Rosh Hashana* 12b; *Rashi* to *Devarim* 31:13.

2 Quoted by Rabbi Matis Blum, in *Torah L'Daat* (Vagshal Ltd 1984), 463.

the mitzva of *hak'hel* teaches: "It is better for one to give up a bit of his spirituality in order to raise children in the spirit of the Torah."

Life is not only about enhancing our own spirituality. We have to educate others even if it detracts from ourselves. That's what we learn from *hak'hel*: Don't leave the kids at home. Bring them to the *Mikdash*. You won't hear every word, but your kids will get something out of it.

A similar idea is derived from an incident at the end of *Parashat Yitro*. The Torah states: "Moshe descended from the mountain to the people" (*Shemot* 19:14). Rashi understands this to mean that Moshe did not devote any time to personal matters. Rather, he went from the mountain directly to the people. Why? And what else did he have to take care of?

The *Likutei Yehoshua* (Rav Yehoshua Scheinfeld) tells a story about Rav Yehezkel of Kozmir that provides us with a deeper understanding of this *pasuk*. The Rebbe was travelling through various Polish towns on Rosh Hodesh Sivan. Although the town he was visiting asked him to stay for Shavu'ot, the Rebbe insisted that he had to return home. He explained his reasoning based on our *pasuk*. What "business" could Moshe have attended? Not a material pursuit, rather a spiritual pursuit. Moshe just returned from a meeting with Hashem. He could have chosen to be by himself for a few moments, to internalize the conversation, perhaps meditate and enhance his spirituality. Yet, Moshe chose to advance the spirituality of the nation

at the expense of his own spirituality. Based on this, the Rebbe explained, although personally he would benefit from remaining in the town for Shavu'ot, he felt that it would be important for his community's spirituality to be with them for the *hag*.

The Gemara (*Sukka* 49b) asks the meaning of the term "*Torat hesed*". Isn't all Torah the Torah of *hesed*? The Gemara distinguishes: one who learns Torah in order to **teach** – that is ***Torat hesed***. One who learns not necessarily to teach – that is Torah (absent *hesed*). Moshe Rabbeinu, the Rebbe par excellence, always placed the interests of Klal Yisrael before his personal interest, including his spiritual growth.

At times we are faced with a similar dilemma. Do I sacrifice my own advancement in spirituality in order to enhance the spirituality of my children and those around me? Do I spend an hour at night learning by myself or with a *havruta* and gaining knowledge, or do I give a shiur so I can transmit Torah to others? May we find the proper balance of strengthening ourselves and those around us in Torah and *yirat Shamayim*.

During this challenging time, we should follow the lead of Moshe Rabbeinu and Rav Yehezkel of Kozmir and do what we can to enhance the *Yamim Noraim* of those around us who may be unable to participate in *tefilla b'tzibur* due to health concerns. We should help enhance the spirituality of others, even at the expense of our own spirituality! ■