

Child Benefit

Excerpted and adapted from a shiur by Dayan Yitzhak Grossman

https://baishavaad.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/DEV81_009_Vayeilech_Hakhel_Children_and_the_Synagogue.mp3

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 G-d, and they will observe to do all the words of this Torah.

Devarim 31:12

The Gemara (Chagigah 3a) explains that the only reason this *pasuk* says to bring children to *hakhel* is to provide reward for those that bring them. It would seem from this formulation that Chazal interpreted the reference to children to mean very young children who cannot understand the proceedings, which consisted of the king reading portions of Sefer Devarim. Since they will not understand, the only reason to bring them is to receive reward. The Maharal in Gur Aryeh notes that it is difficult to understand why the Torah would require the bringing of young children for this reason alone. He therefore holds that the mitzvah applies only to older children, who *can* understand, and he interprets the statement of Chazal differently. Most commentators (including the Maharsha, Ramban, and Or Hachaim), assume that Chazal do indeed apply the mitzvah to young children. The Ramban nevertheless concedes that he would have theoretically understood the *pasuk* to include only older children.

Although the mitzvah of *hakhel* does not apply today, Tosafos comments that the custom to bring children to shul stems from this Gemara. The Or Zarua writes similarly and adds that bringing young children to shul instills in them *yiras shamayim*.

R' Menachem de Lengzano of Italy (quoted by the Shelah, Magein Avraham, and Mishnah Brurah) argues strongly against this practice. He writes that today, parents who bring young children to shul will not receive reward but be punished. He explains that children do not act appropriately in shul but are disruptive, so they must be kept at home. One may only bring older children who can sit quietly and participate in the davening.