

HAKHEL – A SEVEN-YEAR TORAH CYCLE:

A Signature Study-Practice of Belonging for Participants of Beth Shalom Spiritual Fellowship

The Torah (in Parshat Vayelekh) tells us of a seven-year cycle for reading the Torah scroll.

And Moses commanded them, saying: ‘At the end of every seven years, in the Sabbatical year, on the Festival of Succot, when all Israel is come to appear before the Eternal your God in the place which God shall choose, you shall read this Torah before all Israel in their hearing. Assemble (Hakhel!) the people, the men and the women and the little ones, and your stranger that is within your gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and revere the Eternal your God, and observe to do all the words of this Torah.

Deuteronomy 31:10-12

In recent generations the practice of Hakhel has been re-emerging in some communities, involving gathering and reading Torah on Succot at the end of each Sabbatical year.

As a means of maintaining connection with the entire Jewish world, we at Beth Shalom acknowledge and study from the entire weekly Torah portion of the annual cycle which begins and ends each Simchat Torah. As a means of uniting our own Fellowship we emphasize one-seventh of the parsha each week, so that in the course of 7 years we have honored or recited the entire Torah. ***When each of us engages in the study of the same passage of the Torah reading each week, we are affirming our connection to each other wherever we are. In this way we are emotionally gathering ourselves together in the spirit of the commandment to Assemble (Hakhel!) ourselves around the reading of the Torah over the course of each cycle of Seven Years.***

The latest Hakhel observance was on Succot 2022, marking the end of the Sabbatical year 5782. Therefore our seven-year cycle begins with 5783 (western year 2022-23). In 5785 we recite the third Aliyah of each traditional parsha. When we do not meet as a community on a given week, we post the passage on our website and individual members of the Fellowship read the passage on their own, in keeping with the Torah words (also in Parshat Vayelekh), *teach it to the people and put it in their mouths...* (Deuteronomy 31:19).