

Parashat Bo, 5780, 2019:

## *Understanding the Mitzvah of Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim*

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yecheiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, Chaya Sarah bat Reb Yechezkel Shraga, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof and Pittsburgh, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, Moshe ben Itta Golda, Yocheved Dafneh bat Dinah Zehavah, Reuven Shmuel ben Leah and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Our *parasha* contains the *mitzvah* of *sippur yetziat mitzrayim* — the recounting of the story of the Departure from Egypt — that is fulfilled during the *Pesach Seder* experience.

The 13<sup>th</sup> century anonymous author of the *Sefer HaChinuch* begins his discussion of this commandment in the following manner:

**The commandment to recount the exodus from Egypt:** To tell about the Exodus from Egypt on the night of the fifteenth of Nissan — each person according to his own power of expression — to laud and to praise Hashem, may He be blessed, for all the miracles He performed for us there, as it is stated, “And you shall tell your son — v’he’gaddatah l’vinchah...” (*Sefer Shemot* 13:8, translation with my emendations, [https://www.sefaria.org/Sefer\\_HaChinukh.21.1?lang=bi](https://www.sefaria.org/Sefer_HaChinukh.21.1?lang=bi))

The *Sefer HaChinuch* generally follows the approach of the Rambam (Maimonides, 1135-1204) in his presentation of the *mitzvot*. Yet, when we examine the Rambam’s introductory words in the *Mishneh Torah* concerning *sippur yetziat mitzrayim*, we find that he bases this commandment on an entirely different proof text than that of the *Sefer HaChinuch*:

It is a positive commandment of the Torah to relate the miracles and wonders wrought for our ancestors in Egypt on the night of the fifteenth of Nisan, as the Torah states: “Remember this day, on which you left Egypt — zachor et hayom hazeh asher y’tzatem m’mitzrayim” (*Sefer Shemot* 13:3) just as it states: “Remember the Sabbath day.” (*Sefer Shemot* 20:8, *Hilchot Chametz u’Matzah* 7:1, translation, Rabbi Eliyahu Touger with my emendations)

In truth, when the *Sefer HaChinuch* cites “v’he’gaddatah l’vinchah” as his source for *sippur yetziat mitzrayim*, he does so in congruence with the position of nearly every classic *meforash* (commentator) on the *Taryag* (613) Torah commandments. This leads us to ask, “Why does the Rambam in the *Mishneh Torah* act as an outlier in his selection of *zachor et hayom hazeh asher y’tzatem m’mitzrayim* for his proof text, rather than the universally accepted *v’he’gaddatah l’vinchah*?” This question is particularly apropos, since the Rambam did adopt *v’he’gaddatah l’vinchah* as his source for the *mitzvah* of *sippur yetziat mitzrayim* in his *Sefer HaMitzvot!* (Positive Commandment 157)

In order to better understand the Rambam’s choice in the *Mishneh Torah* of *zachor et hayom hazeh asher y’tzatem m’mitzrayim* as the source for the *mitzvah* of recounting the story of the Exodus, we need to analyze how this verse is usually interpreted. In his *Commentary on the Torah*, Rashi (1040-1105), basing himself upon the *Mechilta*, Parashat Bo 16, states: “This teaches us that we have a daily [obligation] to mention the Exodus from Egypt.” It is noteworthy that while this is a daily, and for that matter, nightly *chovah* (obligation), the Rambam does not count it as one of the *Taryag Mitzvot*. Instead, he places it within the laws of *kriat sh’ma*: “There is a *mitzvah* to mention the Departure from Egypt during the day and at night...” (*Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Kriat Sh’ma* I:3). While the Rambam supports this statement with a citation from *Sefer Devarim* 16:3, my *rebbe* and mentor, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik *zatzal* (1903-1993), known as “the Rav” by his students and followers, notes that “regarding the truth of the matter, the *mitzvah* [that is, the daily obligation to mention the Exodus] was really stated in the verse, ‘*zachor et hayom hazeh.*’” (*Shiurim l’Zacher Abba Mori*, II, page 152, translation and brackets my own) Why, then, did the Rambam chose *zachor et hayom*

*hazeh* as the proof text for the commandment of *sippur yetziat mitzrayim*, when it seems its proper purview is the daily obligation to mention the Exodus?

In his exploration of this question entitled, “*The Conjunction of Sippur and Zechirat Mitzrayim*,” Rabbi Michael Rosensweig, *rosh hayeshiva* at the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary, suggests the following answer to our question:

The Rambam's carefully crafted articulation of the *mitzvah* of *sippur yetziat mitzrayim* subtly, yet artfully, conveys that the singular focus of the actual night of Pesach is further enhanced by its wide and pervasive impact, as expressed in daily *zechirat mitzrayim*...it is the ubiquitous *zechirah*...that determines *sippur*'s ultimate significance even as a concrete commemoration of the historical event of the Exodus. (www.Torahweb.org)

At this point, Rav Rosensweig elaborates upon the symbiotic relationship that obtains between *sippur* and *zechirat mitzrayim*:

Thus, *zechirat yetziat mitzrayim* and *sippur yetziat mitzrayim* are mutually enhancing, even mutually dependent. Without the detailed, intense and more concrete *sippur* practiced once a year, the more amorphous and abstract *zechirah* would be compromised; absent the continuous outlet and impact provided by daily *zechirah*, the anniversary of the Exodus would be nothing more than a nostalgic memory.

Rabbi Rosensweig has provided us with the tools to gain a deeper understanding of the inextricable relationship between *zechirat yetziat mitzrayim* and *sippur yetziat mitzrayim*. Each informs the other, to the extent that neither could reach their full potential without the powerful light of the other shining upon it.

May the Master of the Universe help us recognize the power and significance of *zechirat yetziat mitzrayim*, and in so doing, may we be *zocheh* (merit) to infuse our *sippur yetziat mitzrayim* with new and dynamic meaning. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>  
They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org> using the search criteria Etengoff and the *parasha*'s name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

\*\*\* My audio *shiurim* on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: [\*\*http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpd\*\*](http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpd)

\*\*\* I have posted 164 of **Rabbi Soloveitchik's** English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.