



The Mitzvah of Sipur Yetziat Mitzraim

There are many mitzvot, practices, and traditions that relate to the first night of Pesach. The most central is the mitzvah of *sipur yetziat Mitzraim*, the recounting of the story of the exodus from Egypt. Acharonim ask a fundamental question regarding the mitzvah of *sipur yetziat Mitzraim*. The Mishna, *Berachot* 12b, as well as the Haggadah, record a dispute between Ben Zoma and Chachamim as to whether there is an obligation to mention the exodus from Egypt on a nightly basis (*zechirat yetziat Mitzraim*). Rambam, *Hichot Keri'at Sh'ma* 1:3, rules in accordance with Ben Zoma that there is a mitzvah to mention the exodus on a nightly basis. If in fact, there is such a mitzvah, what is added by having an additional mitzvah on the first night of Pesach of *sipur yetziat Mitzraim*. Isn't this already a nightly obligation?

The Difference between Sipur and Zechirah

R. Chaim Soloveitchik, *Chidushei HaGrach al HaShas, Pesachim* 116a, answers that the mitzvah that exists throughout the year is a mitzvah of *zechirah*, mentioning the exodus from Egypt. The mitzvah on the first night of Pesach is a mitzvah of *sipur*, recounting the exodus from Egypt. R. Chaim states that this difference is manifest in three ways. First, the *Beraita* (quoted in *Pesachim* 116a) states that part of the requirement of *sipur yetziat Mitzraim* is that it must be in question and answer format. The extent of this requirement is such that even if a person is alone, he must ask questions of himself. R. Chaim notes that this requirement only applies to the mitzvah of *sipur yetziat Mitzraim*. It does not apply to the nightly mitzvah of *zechirat yetziat Mitzraim*. Second, the Mishna, *Pesachim* 116a, states that the story of the Exodus must start by mentioning the dishonorable events and end with the praiseworthy events. R. Chaim notes that this requirement is limited to the mitzvah of *sipur yetziat Mitzraim*, and not the mitzvah of *zechirat yetziat Mitzraim*. Third, the Mishna, *Pesachim* 116a, states in the name of Rabban Gamliel that in order to fulfill the mitzvah of *sipur yetziat Mitzraim*, one must mention the *korban pesach*, the *matzah* and the *maror*, and how they relate to the story of the exodus from Egypt. There is no such requirement when fulfilling the nightly obligation to mention the exodus from Egypt.

R. Chaim's grandson, R. Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (quoted in *Hagadat Si'ach HaGrid* no. 27), adds one more fundamental difference between the mitzvah of *sipur yetziat Mitzraim* and the mitzvah of *zechirat yetziat Mitzraim*. The mitzvah of *sipur yetziat Mitzraim* not only requires one to recount the story of the exodus from Egypt, but requires that one also praise the Almighty for all of the miracles that were performed at the time. This is why *Hallel* is recited on the first night of Pesach. As such, *Hallel* is part of the mitzvah of *sipur yetziat Mitzraim*.

The *Tosefta*, *Pesachim* 10:8, states that there is a requirement to learn the laws of Pesach the entire first night of Pesach. [*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 481:2, codifies

this *Tosefta* and writes that one is not required to stay up the entire night, but should at least learn the laws of Pesach until sleep overcomes him.] R. Soloveitchik, *ibid*, no. 22, comments that the requirement to spend the night learning the laws of Pesach is part of the mitzvah of *sipur yetziat Mitzraim*. One can then add another distinction between the mitzvah of *sipur yetziat Mitzraim* and the mitzvah of *zechirat yetziat Mitzraim*. As opposed to the mitzvah of *zechirat yetziat Mitzraim*, the mitzvah of *sipur yetziat Mitzraim* requires that one familiarize oneself with the laws that relate to the mitzvot of the first night of Pesach.

A unique aspect of the *seder* is that one is required see oneself (*lirot et atzmo*) as if he was personally liberated from Egypt (Mishna, *Pesachim* 116b). Rambam, *Hilchot Chametz UMatzah* 7:6, writes that one must exhibit oneself (*l'harot et atzmo*) as if he was liberated from Egypt. Rambam then writes (*ibid*, 7:7) that this is the reason why one eats in a reclined position (*heseibah*), and why one drinks four cups of wine on the first night of Pesach. One can argue that the requirement to exhibit oneself as if he was liberated is an independent fulfillment of the mitzvah of *pirsumei nissa*, publicizing the miracles. However, one can equally argue that publicizing the miracles of the night is an added fulfillment of the mitzvah of *sipur yetziat Mitzraim*. Whereas the mitzvah of *zechirat yetziat Mitzraim* only requires that one mention the exodus from Egypt, the mitzvah of *sipur yetziat Mitzraim* demands that one re-experience the exodus.

The Role of Children

An integral element of the mitzvah of *sipur yetziat Mitzraim* is the role of children. Rambam, *ibid*, 7:3, writes that one is required to make certain changes to the meal in order to elicit questions from the children. Rambam, *ibid*, 7:2, adds that even if the children do not ask any questions, there is a mitzvah to teach one's child about the events surrounding the exodus from Egypt.

The Gemara, *Pesachim* 109a, quotes R. Eliezer that one should grab the matzahs in order that the children don't sleep. Rashi, *ad loc.*, s.v. *Chotfin*, and Ra'avad, *Hilchot Chametz UMatzah* 7:3, interpret this to mean that the matzah should be eaten without delay in order that children should remain awake. Rambam, *ibid*, 7:3, states that R. Eliezer refers to the practice of stealing the *afikoman* in order that the children stay awake until the end of the meal.

There is another aspect of the mitzvah of *sipur yetziat Mitzraim* that seems to be at odds with Rashi's interpretation that the matzah should be eaten without delay. The Haggadah states that with regards to the mitzvah of recounting the exodus from Egypt that the more one adds in recounting the exodus from Egypt, the more praiseworthy he is. The Haggadah supports this point by relating a story of five great sages who stayed up the entire night discussing the exodus from Egypt. Many commentaries (*Meyuchas LaRashbam ad loc.*, *Orchot Chaim ad loc.*, and *Kol Bo ad loc.*) ask, how can it be praiseworthy to spend more time recounting the exodus from Egypt; shouldn't the matzah be eaten without delay? They answer that the concept of spending additional time relating the story of the exodus from Egypt does not apply until after the matzah is eaten. The five great sages who spent the entire night discussing the exodus from Egypt only did so after they finished the *seder*.

Mishna Berurah, *Sha'ar HaTzi'un* 472:2, implies that there is a different answer implicit in the comments of R. Shimon Ben Tzemach (Rashbetz), *Ma'amar HaChametz*

s.v. *Tanya*. Rashbetz writes that the children should be fed expeditiously. *Mishna Berurah* interprets this to mean that one does not have to perform the seder quickly, but rather one should make sure that the children eat earlier than the rest of the participants.

The practical difference between the two interpretations is whether one should perform the *seder* quickly, and expound upon the exodus from Egypt after the *seder*, or whether one should expound upon the exodus from Egypt during the actual *seder* while providing the children with an abridged form of the *seder*. *Mishna Berurah* leans slightly towards the latter approach.

Both interpretations offer varied solutions as to how ensure that the children are active participants in the *seder*. They both agree that the participation of the children is of primary importance. Regardless of which approach one follows, one should ensure that the conversations and discussions surrounding the *seder* are age-appropriate to the participating children.

The Weekly Halacha Overview, by Rabbi Josh Flug, is a service of YUTORAH, the online source of the Torah of Yeshiva University. Get more halacha shiurim and thousands of other shiurim, by visiting www.yutorah.org.