

Experiencing Yetziat Mitzrayim Through The Seder

Rabbi Meir Goldwicht

The most difficult mitzvah on the night of the Seder, more difficult than any of the other mitzvot, is, as the Rambam says, is to truly feel as if we are leaving Mitzrayim, as if we are actually going from avdut to cheirut (Hilchot Chametz u'Matzah 7:6):

בכל דור ודור חייב אדם להראות את עצמו כאילו הוא בעצמו יצא עתה משעבוד מצרים, שנאמר 'ואותנו הוציא משם וגו'. ועל דבר זה צוה הקב"ה בתורה, 'וזכרת כי עבד היית, כלומר כאילו אתה בעצמך היית עבד ויצאת לחירות ונפדית.

This theme runs through the entire Haggadah. All of the meforshim of the Haggadah ask: Why don't we recite a beracha on sippur yetziat Mitzrayim at the beginning of the Seder as we do before every other mitzvah? Based on the comments of the Rambam, which is so central to the Seder, we can answer this question very simply. At the beginning of the Seder, we are obligated to feel as if we are still enslaved, a state that is certainly not conducive to reciting a beracha related to our geulah from Mitzrayim. The moment we finish saying "בצאת ישראל ממצרים," however, the point where we actually feel ourselves leaving Mitzrayim, we recite the beracha of:

אשר גאלנו וגאל את אבותינו ממצרים וכו' ונודה לך שיר חדש על גאלתנו ועל פדות נפשנו בא"ה גאל ישראל

The Chatam Sofer explains that this beracha is the beracha on sippur yetziat Mitzrayim. We do recite a beracha on sippur yetziat Mitzrayim, but the beracha is recited in the correct place and in the proper state-of-mind— cheirut.

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This obligation to feel as if we ourselves left Mitzrayim also explains why we drink ארבע כוסות. The Rashbam (Pesachim 99b) explains that the four ארבע כוסות correspond to the four leshonot of geulah mentioned by galut Mitzrayim:

לכן אמר לבני ישראל אני ד' והוצאתי אתכם מתחת סבלת מצרים והצלתי אתכם מעבדתם וגאלתי אתכם בזרוע נטויה ובשפטים גדלים ולקחתי אתכם אל הארץ אשר נשאתי את ידי לתת אתה לאברהם ליצחק וליעקב ונתתי אתה לכם מורשה אני ד'

These leshonot of geulah correspond to the promises Hashem made to Avraham Avinu at the ברית בין הבתרים:

ויאמר לאברהם ידע תדע כי גר יהיה זרעך בארץ לא להם ועבדום וענו אתם ארבע מאות שנה וגם את הגוי אשר יעבדו דן אנכי ואחרי כן יצאו ברכש גדול

Hashem told Avraham Avinu that his descendants would be subject to three stages of galut. In the first stage, B'nei Yisrael would be strangers in a foreign land. In the second stage, B'nei Yisrael would be enslaved. In the third stage, B'nei Yisrael would be subject to עבודת פרך, work of affliction.

Yetziat Mitzrayim was the reversal of this process. The first of the ארבע כוסות corresponds to the first stage of geulah, our redemption from the afflictions of Mitzrayim: "והוצאתי אתכם מתחת סבלת מצרים." The עבודת פרך, the "וענו אותם," was lifted, but the עבדות remained. The second of the ארבע כוסות corresponds to the second stage of geulah, our redemption from slavery: "והצלתי אתכם מעבדתם." The עבדות, the "ועבדום," was lifted, but we remained in galut. The third of the ארבע כוסות corresponds to the third stage of geulah, our redemption from exile in a foreign land:

וגאלתי אתכם בורוע נטויה ובשפטים גדלים
We finally left galut. After geulah from the three-stage galut, we can experience the fourth geulah, corresponding to the fourth of the ארבע כוסות:

ולקחתי אתכם לי לעם וגוי' והבאתי אתכם אל הארץ וגו'.

The ארבע כוסות also correspond to the four situations for which we are obligated to say birkat hagomel. The siman to remember these four people is:

י = יוצא מבית האסורים; ה = חולה שנתרפא; י = יורדי ים;
י = יוצא מבית האסורים; ה = חולה שנתרפא; י = יורדי ים;

When we left Mitzrayim we experienced all four of these situations, obligating us to say birkat hagomel for all four reasons. We fulfill these four obligations by drinking the ארבע כוסות, each of which is essentially a birkat hagomel.

הגאון מו"ר הרב שלמה זלמן אויערבאך זצ"ל asked why we drink four cups of wine as opposed to any other drink. The reason, he explained, is that when someone drinks orange juice, for example, he finishes the entire first cup, enjoying even the last drop. He manages to finish the entire second cup as well, albeit not as easily as the first cup. By the third cup he is already sick of orange juice, and he leaves over part of the cup; when it comes to the fourth cup, he can only drink part of it. With wine, on the other hand, each cup is better than the first. It is only fitting that wine, which gets better with each cup, is the proper beverage for the ארבע כוסות, each one of which represents a level of geulah that is better than the last:

והוצאתי והצלתי וגאלתי ולקחתי.

It is for this purpose—to demonstrate our current departure from Mitzrayim—that there is a minhag to put out the nicest dishes on the night of the Seder, demonstrating the fulfillment of Hashem's promise to Avraham Avinu, “*ואחרי כן יצאו ברכוש גדול*.” Another aspect of the table setting also demonstrates our transition from avdut to cheirut: there is a prevalent minhag to leave the table completely empty except for the Seder plate and silver cups of wine until “*בצאת ישראל ממצרים*” is read; as soon as the paragraph is read, everything

is brought out to the table, showing that now, as we leave Mitzrayim, we possess this “*רכוש גדול*.”

The idea is that on the night of the Seder we must feel as if all that happened actually happened to us, re-experiencing as much of the galut and geulah as possible, allows us some insight into the idea of karpas. Why do we dip the karpas in saltwater? Galut Mitzrayim began because Yosef sold Yosef. The Torah tells us that after throwing Yosef into the pit, his brothers dipped his ketonet pasim in blood, leading their father to cry out, “*טרוף טרוף יוסף*.” Rashi explains that the ketonet pasim was made of expensive wool, as the passuk says, “*חור כרפס ותכלת*” (Megillat Esther 1:6). The vegetable karpas symbolizes the fabric karpas, reminding us of the ketonet pasim. We therefore dip the karpas in saltwater, symbolizing the brothers' dipping of the ketonet pasim in blood and reminding ourselves how galut Mitzrayim began. (Rabbeinu Manoach on the Rambam (Hilchot Chametz u'Matzah 8:2) in fact writes that the minhag of dipping the karpas in saltwater is a remembrance of the ketonet pasim that Yaakov Avinu made for Yosef, which was the underlying cause of our ancestors' descent to Mitzrayim.)

This is also why we break the matzah (יחץ) immediately after eating the karpas. The breaking of the matzah represents the breaking up of the family of Yaakov, which set the galut in motion. Once we understand the reason for the galut, i.e. the machloket between the brothers that caused the breaking up of the family, we can begin Maggid, essentially testifying to הקב"ה that we accept upon ourselves to do as much as we can to bring everyone in Am Yisrael together. Therefore Maggid begins with the announcement of “*כל דיכפין*” “*Let everyone who needs come and eat with us*,” inviting people who we wouldn't necessarily invite under normal circumstances to join us, or providing for those who don't have matzah or nice clothing for Yom Tov. Through this we show our willingness to help others shoulder their burdens. Immediately after יחץ, we begin to fix the rupture in the family of Am Yisrael by performing actions and making statements that express our togetherness. This includes bringing the ארבעה בנים together, not breaking the bones of the korban Pesach, and many other things.

Thus, at the end of the Haggadah, we arrive at the כוס של אליהו. In Tanach, Eliyahu is written without a ו (אליה) five times and Yaakov is written with a ו (יעקוב) five times. Rashi in Bechukotai (Vayikra 26:42) explains that Yaakov told Eliyahu that he would get his ו back when he would come to announce the geulah of Yaakov's children. Why did Yaakov take the letter ו specifically? Because ו represents chibur. This is why, whenever we deal with chibur between Jews, Eliyahu is present. This is why Eliyahu attends every brit milah, because brit milah creates a chibur between the generations. This is also why Eliyahu appears in many aggadot in Shas discussing Yerushalayim, because Yerushalayim is the place of chibur for all of Am Yisrael. So too, on the night of the Seder, we have a כוס של אליהו, which symbolizes our coming back together, our chibur,

fixing the split in the family that started galut Mitzrayim.

At the end of the Seder, after we have truly felt כאילו עתה יצא משעבוד מצרים, as the Rambam writes, we can say, "ונאמר לפניו שירה חדשה." How can we call this a שירה חדשה, when we sang the exact same song last year and the year before? This is the very point. We feel כאילו עתה יצא, and we can't help but spontaneously burst into songs of praise. For this reason, the Hallel of the night of the Seder is a Hallel said as a song, sung by people saved through the most miraculous of miracles from the most difficult and trying of circumstances. Such a Hallel is said while sitting, with an interruption in the middle to enjoy a festive meal, unlike the standard Hallel, because all of this is part and parcel of the gratitude we show הקב"ה.