

The Mitzvah of Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim

Rabbi Yonason Sacks

Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS

Recounting the Story of the Exodus

The mitzvah of “*sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*” – recounting the story of the Exodus – constitutes the cornerstone of the Seder experience. In characterizing this mitzvah, the Rambam emphasizes:

It is a positive mitzvah from the Torah to tell of the miracles and wonders which our ancestors experienced in Egypt on the night of the 15th of Nissan.

Rambam Hilchos Chametz U'Matzah 7:1

מצות עשה של תורה לספר בנסים ונפלאות
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At first glance, the mitzvah of “*sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*” of Seder night appears quite similar, if not identical, to the daily mitzvah of “*zechiras yetzias Mitzrayim*” – remembering the Exodus. Given the apparent similarity, the Rishonim and Achronim attempt to identify the exact differences between these two mitzvos.

Perhaps the most basic difference between the two mitzvos emerges from the opinions of the Ohr Sameach and the Ra'ah. Noting the Rambam's omission of the mitzvah of *zechiras yetzias Mitzrayim* from the Sefer HaMitzvos, the Ohr Sameach (beginning of Hil. Kriyas Shema) suggests that the Rambam maintains that there is no Biblical obligation to remember the Exodus on a daily basis. Rather, the mitzvah of *zechiras yetzias Mitzrayim* is purely a rabbinic imperative. The Ra'ah (Berachos 13b s.v. “Amar”) expresses a somewhat similar view, maintaining that although remembering the Exodus during the daytime is Biblical, the *zechira* of the nighttime is rabbinic. (See also Pri Chadash O.C. 58:1) According to both views, the difference between *zechiras* and *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* becomes quite apparent: the nightly *zechiras yetzias Mitzrayim* is merely a rabbinic obligation, while *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* of the Seder night bears the stringency of a Biblical imperative.

Even if one rejects the opinion of the Ohr Sameach and the Ra'ah, R' Soloveitchik (Shiurim L'Zecher Abba Mori I:2), quoting his grandfather, R' Chaim, cited four further distinctions between *sippur* and *zechira*. First, *zechira* applies every night of the year, while *sippur* applies

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solely on Seder night. Second, *zechira* requires a minimal recollection of the Exodus, while *sippur* demands detailed elaboration of the miracles and wonders which precipitated the Exodus. Third, *zechira* is a personal mitzvah, obligating an individual to remember the Exodus on his own. *Sippur*, however, necessitates recital to one's children and others, in keeping with the possuk "and you shall tell your son on that day" (Shemos 13:8). Fourth, *zechiras yetziyas Mitzrayim* does not constitute an independent mitzvah, but is rather subsumed under the broader imperative of *Kriyas Shema* and *Kabbalas Ol Malchus Shamayim* – "acceptance of the yolk of Heaven." *Sippur*, however, is reckoned independently among the canonical six hundred thirteen mitzvos. R' Soloveitchik himself added a fifth distinction: while *zechira* requires **recollection** of the events of the Exodus, *sippur* demands **praise** and **thanksgiving** to HaKadosh Baruch Hu for effecting the Exodus.

Thus, despite the apparent similarities, significant differences distinguish *zechiras yetziyas Mitzrayim* and *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim*.

Sippur and the Other Mitzvos of the Night

The Mishnah in Arvei Pesachim quotes the well-known adage of Rabban Gamliel:

"Anyone who does not recite the following three things has not fulfilled his obligation: Pesach, Matzah, and Maror."

Mishna Pesachim 116a

כל שלא אמר שלשה דברים אלו בפסח לא יצא ידי חובתו. ואלו הן: פסח, מצה, ומרור.
פסחים דף קטז.

While Rabban Gamliel is explicit that fulfillment of one's "obligation" hinges upon this recitation, what remains unclear is precisely *which* obligation Rabban Gamliel refers to. Indeed, one could envision two different possibilities. Perhaps, Rabban Gamliel is teaching that the fulfillment of the individual mitzvos of Korban Pesach, matzah, and maror depends upon concomitant recitation of "Pesach," "Matzah," and "Maror." Alternatively, however, perhaps Rabban Gamliel is teaching that fulfillment of the more general mitzvah of *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* depends upon mentioning these specific details.

The interpretation of this Mishnah is subject to considerable debate amongst the Rishonim. Tosafos (ibid., as explained by Aruch L'Ner Sukkah 28a s.v. "Lo"), the Ramban (Milchamos Berachos 2b in Rif), and the Rashbam (Hagaddah HaMeyuchas L'Rashbam L'Hagaddah Shel Pesach) all strongly imply that Rabban Gamliel refers to the fulfillment of the mitzvos of Korban Pesach, matzah, and maror. The Ra'avan, Kiryas Sefer (Hil. Chametz U'Matza 7:1), and Aruch L'Ner (ibid.), however, maintain that Rabban Gamliel refers to the mitzvah of *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim*. In quoting the halacha of Rabban Gamliel in the context of his discussion of *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim*, the Rambam (Hil. Chametz U'Matza 7:1-5) also implies this understanding of Rabban Gamliel's statement.

The understanding of the Ra'avan, Kiryas Sefer, and Aruch L'Ner - that *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* depends upon mentioning Pesach, Matzah, and Maror - suggests a close relationship between *Sippur Yetziyas Mitzrayim* and the other mitzvos of the night. The Kehillos Yaakov (10:55) derives further support for this relationship from the Gemara in Maseches Pesachim (116b). The Gemarah questions how Rav Yosef and Rav Sheishes, who were both blind, could recite the

Haggadah on behalf of their respective Seders, in light of Rav Acha bar Yaakov's ruling that a blind person is exempt from reciting the Haggadah. Since an individual who is exempt from a mitzvah cannot exempt an individual who is obligated, Rav Yosef and Rav Sheishes should have been ineligible to exempt the other obligated participants. The Gemara explains their practice by ruling that matzah in the post-Mikdash era is only a rabbinic requirement. Because *everyone's* obligation—even those who are not blind – is only rabbinic, Rav Yosef and Rav Sheishes could exempt their respective parties. The Kehillos Yaakov notes that the Gemara's response is puzzling. If the inquiry of the Gemara pertains to the mitzvah of reciting the Haggadah (*sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim*), why does the Gemara present support for the practices of Rav Yosef and Rav Sheishes from the seemingly unrelated mitzvah of matzah? Apparently, the Gemara understands the mitzvah of matzah to be in fact closely linked to the mitzvah of *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim*. Hence, if the mitzvah of matzah does not apply Mid'oraisa nowadays, one must by extension assume that the mitzvah of *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* is equally inapplicable Mid'oraisa.

The Teshuvos Chessed L'Avraham (Tinyana, O.C. 54) goes even further in describing the relationship between *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* and the other mitzvos of Seder night, arguing that one who lacks matzah and maror cannot fulfill the mitzvah of *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim*. He explains that this critical relationship accounts for the absence of a beracha on *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim*. In order to warrant a beracha, a mitzvah must exist independently. A mitzvah which is dependent upon another mitzvah, however, does not warrant a beracha. For example, although the Ramban (Sefer Hamitzvos, Shoresh 12) counts the designation of terumah and the giving of terumah to a Kohen as two separate mitzvos, one does not recite a beracha upon giving terumah to a Kohen, because this mitzvah depends upon a prior designation of terumah. Similarly, because *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* depends upon the mitzvos of matzah and maror, one does not recite an individual beracha for *sippur*.

The Chessed L'Avraham suggests that this idea also underlies the Terumas HaDeshen's opinion (125) that a minor who elects to participate in *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* on the Seder night should also refrain from eating matzah on erev Pesach. By doing so, the minor will retain an appetite to be able to fulfill the mitzvah of matzah on the Seder night. Apparently, the Terumas HaDeshen assumes that *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim*, even if performed in a rabbinic fashion by a minor, should always be accompanied by the mitzvos of matzah and maror.

R' Ovadya Yosef (Chazon Ovadya I 23) disagrees with the Chessed L'Avraham, maintaining that one can certainly fulfill *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* in the absence of matzah and maror. Citing the Pri Megadim and the Oneg Yom Tov, R' Ovadya Yosef argues that *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* exists as an independent mitzvah, entirely distinct from the mitzvos of matzah and maror. Hence, failure to consume matzah and maror in no way invalidates one's fulfillment of *sippur*.

R' Soloveitchik suggested a further connection between Sippur Yetziyas Mitzrayim and other mitzvos of the night. The Mishnah (Pesachim 119b) teaches that one may not eat after consuming the *afikoman*. In this context, the Rishonim debate the reason for the institution of the *afikoman*. The Rashbam (ibid., s.v. "Ain") maintains that consumption of the *afikoman* fulfills the primary obligation of *achilas matzah* for the Seder. The matzah eaten earlier in the Seder (during Motzi Matzah) serves a more technical purpose, inaugurating the *seudas Yom Tov*.

The Rosh (Pesachim 10:34), however, disagrees, maintaining that the mitzvah of matzah is fulfilled during Motzi Matzah. The *afikoman* merely serves as a commemoration of the Korban Pesach eaten in the times of the Beis Hamikdash at the end of the Seder.

While the Rashbam and the Rosh state their views explicitly, the Rambam's understanding of *afikoman* is not entirely clear. On the one hand, the Rambam rules (Hil. Chametz U'Matzah 6:1) that a person fulfills his matzah obligation upon consuming a single *k'zayis* of matzah. This ruling implies that the initial consumption of matzah after Maggid fulfills the mitzvah. On the other hand, in explaining the prohibition of eating after the *afikoman*, the Rambam writes (Hil. Chametz U'Matzah 8:9) that this prohibition serves "so that one will conclude the meal with the taste of Pesach or (in post-Mikdash times) matzah in his mouth, שאכילתן היא המצוה, *since their consumption is the mitzvah.*" In referring to the matzah of *afikoman* as "the mitzvah," the Rambam seems to suggest that it is the *afikoman* which fulfills the primary mitzvah of matzah.

R' Soloveitchik suggested that the Rambam's understanding may be rooted in the relationship between *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* and the other mitzvos of the Seder night. Although the mitzvah of matzah itself is fulfilled with the initial consumption of matzah after Maggid, the mitzvah of *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* throughout the Seder requires the continued presence of matzah and maror in front of the individual. The Rambam maintains that when a person retains the lingering taste of matzah in his mouth for the conclusion of the Seder, Halacha considers the situation *as if* matzah is literally present before the person. This halachic simulation enables an individual to continue to fulfill the mitzvah of *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* through the conclusion of the Seder.

R' Soloveitchik's explanation may also shed light upon the opinion of the Ba'al HaMaor. The Ba'al HaMaor (Pesachim 26b in Rif) maintains that the prohibition of eating after the *afikoman* exists only while a person is involved in fulfilling the mitzvah of *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim*. Once the Seder concludes, however, a person may resume eating and drinking. Based on R' Soloveitchik's explanation, one could explain that the role of the prohibition is to facilitate the lingering "taste of matzah in his mouth" in order to enable continued fulfillment of *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim*. Once the Seder has concluded, he no longer performs the mitzvah of *sippur*, and thus the taste of matzah is no longer necessary.

In a very different context, the Ramban also underscores the intrinsic relationship between *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* and the other mitzvos of the night. In his additions to the Sefer Hamitzvos (positive mitzvah 15), the Ramban objects to the Rambam's conspicuous omission of Birchos HaTorah – the blessings recited upon Torah study – from the Sefer Hamitzvos. If Birchos HaTorah are a Mitzvah D'oraisa, reasons the Ramban, why does the Rambam fail to count them? In light of this omission, the Sha'agas Aryeh (24) suggests that the Rambam believes that Birchos HaTorah are required only Mid'rabbanan. The Kiryas Sefer (Hil. Tefillah 12), however, argues that the Rambam does maintain that Birchos HaTorah are Mid'oraisa, but refrained from counting them independently because they are included as a part of the broader mitzvah of Talmud Torah itself. In challenging the Rambam, the Ramban raises the Kiryas Sefer's possibility, but immediately rejects it, noting that the Rambam always counts mitzvos d'oraisa *independently*, even if they are merely components of a broader mitzvah. After all, reasons the Ramban, if the Rambam counts *Mikra Bikurim* (the passage recited upon bringing

the first fruits) independently from the mitzvah of Bikurim, and *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* independently from the mitzvah of Korban Pesach, he should certainly count Birchos HaTorah independently from Talmud Torah. Because the Rambam does *not* list Birchos HaTorah independently, he must understand them to be Mid'rabbanan.

The Ramban's almost parenthetical analogy, comparing the relationship between Birchos HaTorah and Talmud Torah to the relationship between Sippur Yetziyas Mitzrayim and Korban Pesach, is quite revealing. Just as Birchos HaTorah are conceptually linked to the mitzvah of Talmud Torah, so too *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* is fundamentally connected to the mitzvah of Korban Pesach. In this context, it is also worth noting that the Ramban's analogy between Birchos HaTorah and Sippur Yetziyas Mitzrayim fits consistently with his general understanding of Birchos HaTorah as a birkas hoda'ah – a beracha of thanksgiving towards HaKadosh Baruch Hu. Because of their encomiastic nature, Birchos HaTorah resemble *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim*. If Birchos HaTorah were *not* a birkas hoda'ah, however, the analogy to Sippur Yetziyas Mitzrayim would be less clear.

As a final note, the Rosh (Teshuvos HaRosh 24:2) also appears to view the mitzvah of *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* as being fundamentally linked to the other mitzvos of the Seder. The Rosh explains that no beracha is recited upon *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* because the other mitzvos of the night unequivocally proclaim our mindset to engage in the mitzvah of recounting the Exodus. Because we are eating matzah and maror, no declaration of intent (in the form of a beracha) is necessary for the *sippur* itself, as these practices provide context and meaning for the *sippur*. In essence, the Matzah itself functions as a “quasi-birkas hamitzvah” for *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim*, calling attention to the greatness of the miracles and the obligation to remember in much the same way of a typical birkas hamitzvah.

What emerges from all of these Rishonim is that the mitzvah of *sippur* is intrinsically connected, on both a practical and conceptual level, to the other mitzvos of the night. This connection thus represents another major difference between *zechiras yetziyas Mitzrayim* of the entire year and *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* of the Seder night.

The Scope of Sippur Yetziyas Mitzrayim

The Rishonim debate the minimal recitation necessary to fulfill one's obligation of *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim*. The Avudraham (cited by Rabbeinu Yerucham, Nesiv Chamishi:4) explains that no beracha is recited on the recital of the Hagaddah because the mitzvah of *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* has already been fulfilled by mentioning the three words “*zecher l'yetzias Mitzrayim*” in Kiddush. The Avudraham's reasoning presupposes that *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* can be fulfilled through a minimalistic recognition of the Exodus. The Pri Megadim (Pesicha L'Hilchos Kriyas Shema) concurs, explaining that Chazal instituted the Hagaddah at a later point in history, but the basic *D'oraisa chiyuv* merely requires a nominal mentioning of the Exodus on the Seder night. The Nesivos HaMishpat (Haggadah Shel Pesach Ma'aseh Nisim) disagrees, maintaining that the Torah obligation of *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* requires an elevated retelling of everything which transpired from beginning to end. The Nesivos draws a parallel to Purim, which is only a rabbinic mitzvah, yet requires the recitation of the entire Megillah in order to fulfill one's obligation. If reading the Megillah requires completeness and thoroughness, then the

Mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* should certainly warrant a comprehensive and complete recital. Moreover, adds the Nesivos, grammatically, the phraseology “*v’higadeta*” denotes an extended recounting, not a mere mentioning. R’ Chaim Soloveitchik (cited above) also agrees with the Nesivos, proposing that the mitzvah of *sippur* demands detailed descriptions of the miracles and wonders which HaKadosh Baruch Hu performed on our behalf.

Articulating Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim

The Rosh (Teshuvos HaRosh 24:2) writes that the need for “Hagaddah” – “retelling” – in the context of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* is not to be taken literally. Even if one merely contemplates *yetzias Mitzrayim*, the obligation is fulfilled. The Sefer HaChinuch 21, however, disagrees, maintaining that actual articulation is necessary in order to fulfill the mitzvah. Even a person dining alone must speak the Hagaddah to himself, “for his speech will arouse his heart.” The Pri Megadim (M’Z 474:1) suggests that this debate may depend on the dispute Amoraim (Berachos 20b) regarding whether or not *hirhur*, thought, is tantamount to *dibur*, speech: The Rosh maintains that thought is tantamount to speech, and one may therefore merely contemplate the Hagaddah. The Chinuch argues that thought is not equated with speech, and actual pronunciation of the terms is thus essential.

The Pri Megadim adds that if thought is tantamount to speech, one can account for the absence of a beracha on the mitzvah of *sippur*, as Chazal never instituted a beracha for a mitzvah which can be fulfilled through mere thought. R’ Shlomo Kluger (Hashmatos to Shu”T Haalef Lecha Shlomo O.C. 40) rejects the Pri Megadim’s analysis, maintaining that *sippur* absolutely requires speech, according to both opinions in the Gemarah in Berachos. R’ Kluger explains that the dispute in Berachos pertains only to mitzvos which the Torah specifically demands *dibur*. *Sippur*, however, is different. As opposed to *dibur*, speech, the Torah stipulates “Hagaddah,” which denotes “communication,” an interaction between two individuals. Based on the Torah’s diction, R’ Shlomo Kluger infers that *both* opinions in the Gemarah in Berachos would maintain that one cannot fulfill *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* unless it is recited in a manner that could possibly be heard by others.

In light of R’ Kluger’s interpretation, a further distinction emerges between the mitzvah of *sippur* and *zechiras yetzias Mitzrayim*. Although R’ Kluger argues that *sippur* demands speech, perhaps he would admit that *zechira* can be fulfilled through mere mental contemplation. The Shaagas Aryeh (13), however, rejects this distinction, arguing that even *zechiras yetzias Mitzrayim* requires verbal articulation. Citing the requirement to verbally articulate *zechiras Amalek* as a model, the Shaagas Aryeh derives that any *zechira* requires verbal declaration.

Even if one accepts the Shaagas Aryeh’s view that both *sippur* and *zechiras yetzias Mitzrayim* require speech, one can still distinguish between the two. R’ Yehudah rules in Maseches Berachos (15a) that although one must ideally recite the Shema in an audible tone, if one articulated the words inaudibly, one fulfills the obligation post-facto. The Rashba (ibid. s.v. “Amar Rav Yosef”) implies that this rule is Mid’oraissa. Based on this Gemarah, R’ Asher Weiss (Hagaddah Shel Pesach Minchas Asher 4) suggests that although one fulfills the requirement of *zechiras yetzias Mitzrayim* even if it was recited in an inaudible tone, perhaps the higher standard of “Hagaddah” necessary for *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* would necessitate recitation in an audible tone.

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