

Yetziat Mitzrayim and its role in Shabbat and Yom Tov

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The words "*zecher l'yetziat Mitzrayim*" (in remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt) appear in the text of Kiddush for Shabbat and all holidays. The role of *yetziat Mitzrayim* in Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot is obvious as all three holidays commemorate either the Exodus itself or the events that transpired as a result of the Exodus. What is less obvious is the role of the Exodus in a holiday such as Rosh HaShanah or its role in Shabbat. In this article, we will explain how *yetziat Mitzrayim* impacts Shabbat and the holidays.

There is an important difference between the presentations of Shabbat in the Ten Commandments of Shemot and Devarim:²⁴

Because for six days G-d made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them and He rested on the seventh day. For this reason, G-d blessed the day of Shabbat and sanctified it.

Shemot 20:10

On the seventh day, it is Shabbat for G-d, don't perform all labor, (not) you or your son or your daughter or your servant or your maidservant or your ox or your donkey or any other animal or the convert that is in your midst, in order that your servant and maidservant can rest like you. And you shall remember that you were a servant in the Land of Egypt and G-d took you out with a strong hand and an extended arm. For this reason, G-d commanded you to observe the day of Shabbat.

Devarim 5:13-14

כי ששת ימים עשה ה' את השמים
ואת הארץ את הים ואת כל אשר בהם
וינח ביום השביעי על כן ברך ה' את
יום השבת ויקדשהו:
שמות כ:י

ויום השביעי שבת לה' אלהיך לא
תעשה כל מלאכה אתה ובנך ובתך
ועבדך ואמתך ושורך וחמרך וכל
בהמתך וגרך אשר בשעריך למען ינוח
עבדך ואמתך כמוך: וזכרת כי עבד
היית בארץ מצרים ויצאך ה' אלהיך
משם ביד חזקה ובזרע נטויה על כן
צוך ה' אלהיך לעשות את יום השבת:
דברים ה:יג-יד

In Shemot, the observance of Shabbat is a function of G-d's refrain from further creativity on the seventh day of creation. In Devarim, observance of Shabbat seems to be a function of the

²⁴ There is a more general discussion about why the two presentations of the Ten Commandments have different texts. See, for example, Ramban, Devarim 5:12 and Ibn Ezra, Devarim 5:5.

Exodus. There are two basic questions that must be addressed. First, what aspect of the Exodus are we commemorating through the observance of Shabbat? Second, why is there such a blatant discrepancy in the two presentations of the reason for Shabbat?

The Three Approaches to the Issue

R. Avraham Ibn Ezra (1092-1167) is sensitive to these questions and writes:

[The Torah] provides additional explanation why your servants [must refrain from labor on Shabbat] to remember that you were servants and were released from servitude, therefore, G-d commanded that you do the same on Shabbat and this is the reason for giving the servant rest.

Ibn Ezra, Devarim 5:14

הוסיף לבאר טעם עבדך
ואמתך וזכרת כי עבד היית
והניח עבדך על כן צורך ה'
אלקיך לעשות כן ביום
השבת והטעם למנוח' העבד.
אבן עזרא דברים ה:יד

According to Ibn Ezra, Shabbat as a whole does not commemorate the Exodus. The only aspect of Shabbat that commemorates the Exodus is the prohibition against allowing one's servant to work on Shabbat.²⁵ We must be sensitive to the fact that we were servants in Egypt and therefore, we must provide them with a day of rest on Shabbat.

Rambam takes a different approach and assumes that there are two aspects of Shabbat:

This difference can easily be explained. In the former, the cause of the honor and distinction of the day is given: "Therefore the Lord blessed the day of the Sabbath and sanctified it", and the cause for this is, "For in six days," etc. But the fact that G-d has given us the law of the Sabbath and commanded us to keep it, as the consequence of our having been slaves; for then our work did not depend on our will, nor could we choose the time for it; and we could not rest. Thus God commanded us to abstain from work on the Sabbath, and to rest, for two purposes; namely, (1) That we might confirm the true theory, that of the Creation, which at once and clearly leads to the theory of the existence of God. (2) That we might remember how kind God has been in freeing us from the burden of the Egyptians.

Guide for the Perplexed 2:31 (adapted from Friedlander Translation)

וזה אמת, כי העלול במאמר הראשון
הוא כבוד היום והגדילו כמ"ש, על כן
ברך ה' את יום השבת ויקדשהו, זהו
העלול הנמשך לעלת כי ששת ימים וגו'.
אמנם תתו לנו תורת השבת וצוותו
אותנו לשומרו הוא עלול נמשך לעלת
היותנו עבדים במצרים, אשר לא היינו
עובדים ברצוננו ובעת שחפצנו ולא
היינו יכולים לשבות, וצונו בתורת
השביתה והמנוחה לקבץ ב' הענינים,
האמנת דעת אמת, והוא חדוש העולם
המורה על מציאות השם בתחלת
המחשבה ובעיון הקל, וזכור חסדי השם
עלינו, בהניחנו מתחת סבלות מצרים.
מורה נבוכים ב:לא

According to Rambam, in addition to commemorating the creation of the world, Shabbat also commemorates our freedom. While we were enslaved in Egypt we didn't have the liberty to have a day of rest, and our observance of Shabbat demonstrates the kindness of G-d in taking us out of Egypt.

Ramban presents the approaches of Ibn Ezra and Rambam and offers a third approach:

It is most preferred to explain that since the Exodus from Egypt

והראוי יותר לומר כי בעבור היות

²⁵ See Keritut 9a, Yevamot 48b, Rashba and Ritva ad loc., Rambam, *Hilchot Shabbat* 20:14 and *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* no. 304, regarding the parameters of this prohibition.

confirms an eternal G-d who creates, wills and produces, as I explained in the first commandment. For this reason, it states here that if doubt should arise in your heart regarding Shabbat which confirms (the ability to) create, will and produce, you should remember what your eyes saw at the Exodus from Egypt as it is a proof and a remembrance. Behold, Shabbat is a remembrance for the Exodus from Egypt and the Exodus from Egypt is a remembrance for Shabbat because [people] will remember it and say that G-d creates all of the signs and wonders and does as He wills because He is the one who created everything during the creation of the world and this is the meaning of "For this reason, G-d commanded you to observe the day of Shabbat."

Ramban, Devarim 5:14

יציאת מצרים מורה על אלוה קדמון
מחדש חפץ ויכול כאשר פירשתי
בדבור הראשון, על כן אמר בכאן אם
יעלה בלבך ספק על השבת המורה על
החדוש והחפץ והיכולת תזכור מה
שראו עיניך ביציאת מצרים שהיא לך
לראיה ולזכר. הנה השבת זכר
ליציאת מצרים, ויציאת מצרים זכר
לשבת כי יזכרו בו ויאמרו השם הוא
מחדש בכל אותות ומופתים ועושה
בכל כרצונו, כי הוא אשר ברא הכל
במעשה בראשית, וזה טעם על כן צוה
ה' אלקיך לעשות את יום השבת.
רמב"ן דברים ה:יד

According to Ramban, the Exodus does not create an independent reason to observe Shabbat. Rather, the Exodus reinforces the message of Shabbat- that G-d created the world and continues to exert His influence on the world. Shabbat serves to commemorate the Exodus just as the Exodus serves to commemorate Shabbat.

Ramban questions Ibn Ezra's approach based on our recitation of the words "*zecher l'yetziat Mitzrayim*" in the kiddush of Shabbat. The answer to this question is addressed by R. David Abudraham (14th century) in his commentary on the kiddush for Friday Night:

"It is the first of the holidays," meaning that Shabbat is mentioned first in the Torah's list of the holidays. "A remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt," because all of the holidays are a remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt. Ramban explained that Shabbat itself is a remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt since the Exodus from Egypt confirms an eternal G-d ...

Sefer Abudraham, Ma'ariv for Shabbat

תחלה למקראי קדש פירוש שהשבת
מוזכר בפרשת המועדים קודם לכולם.
זכר ליציאת מצרים שכל המועדים הם
זכר ליציאת מצרים. והרמב"ן פירש
שהשבת עצמו זכר ליציאת מצרים כי
בעבור היות יציאת מצרים מורה על
אלוה קדמון ...
ספר אבודרהם מעריב של שבת

According to Ibn Ezra, "*zecher l'yetziat Mitzrayim*" does not actually refer to Shabbat but to Yom Tov. Shabbat is the model for the rest of the holidays and the holidays are celebrated as a remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt.²⁶

R. Moshe Sofer (1762-1839), *Derashot Chatam Sofer* Vol. II (pg. 503) and R. Levi Ibn Chabib, *Teshuvot Maharalbach* (c. 1483-1545) no. 53, note that the types of prohibited activities on Shabbat and Yom Tov are reflective of what each day is commemorating. Shabbat serves as a

²⁶ One can present a similar explanation regarding Rosh HaShanah. The text of the Rosh HaShanah Kiddush is " ויום יציאת מצרים ממצרים מורה על אלוה קדמון". It is possible that "*zecher l'yetziat Mitzrayim*" refers to the fact that Rosh HaShanah is a Yom Tov and the Yamim Tovim are generally a remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt. A similar idea is presented in *Tur, Orach Chaim* no. 582, regarding the recitation of "*moadim l'simcha*" in the text of the Rosh HaShanah liturgy.

remembrance of the creation of the world and therefore, all forms of creative labor are prohibited. Yom Tov only serves as a remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt and therefore, only labor that was relegated to servants is prohibited. It is permissible to perform *melachot* involving food preparation because masters and servants were involved in food preparation and those types of labors do not commemorate the slavery of Egypt.

R. Yosef D. Soloveitchik (1903-1993, in *Shiurim L'Zecher Abba Mari* Vol. II pp. 138-151), following Rambam's approach,²⁷ suggests that the two sources for observance of Shabbat represent two different components of Shabbat. The Gemara notes that there is a fundamental difference between the sanctity of Shabbat and the sanctity of Yom Tov:

A Beraita was taught before Ravina: "[One should recite on Shabbat that coincides with Yom Tov] He who sanctifies the Jewish People, the Shabbat and the Holidays." Ravina responded "Do the Jewish People sanctify Shabbat? Isn't the sanctity of Shabbat established? Rather one should recite He who sanctifies the Shabbat, the Jewish People and the Holidays."

Beitzah 17a

תני תנא קמיה דרבנא מקדש
 ישראל והשבת והזמנים אמר
 ליה אטו שבת ישראל מקדשי
 ליה והא שבת מקדשא וקיימא
 אלא אימא מקדש השבת
 ישראל והזמנים.
ביצה יז.

Shabbat is automatically sanctified. Every seventh day is Shabbat and no human intervention is required to sanctify it. However, the holidays are only sanctified when the Jewish court establishes the new month. The Jewish people play an integral role in imbuing the holidays with sanctity. R. Soloveitchik posits that the automatic sanctification of Shabbat is a function of Shabbat as a remembrance of the creation of the world. The requirement for the active sanctification of Yom Tov is a function of Yom Tov serving as a remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt (and subsequently receiving the Torah). As such, Shabbat also has a component that requires active sanctification.²⁸ R. Soloveitchik suggests that this is the role of Kiddush.

Mentioning *Yetziat Mitzrayim* in Kiddush

How fundamental is "*zecher l'yetziat Mitzrayim*" to Kiddush on Shabbat? The Gemara states:

R. Acha bar Ya'akov stated: One must mention the Exodus from Egypt in the Kiddush of the day. It states here (Devarim 16:3) "In order that you remember the day [you left Egypt]" and it states there (Shemot 20:7) "Remember the day of Shabbat in order to sanctify it."

Pesachim 117b

אמר רב אחא בר יעקב וצריך
 שיזכיר יציאת מצרים בקידוש
 היום כתיב הכא למען תזכור
 את יום וכתוב התם זכור את
 יום השבת לקדשו.
פסחים קיז:

²⁷ Rambam's opinion is not referenced, but it is clear from the entire discussion that *yetziat Mitzrayim* is a separate component of Shabbat.

²⁸ R. Soloveitchik notes that Ravina's assertion that the Jewish people do not provide the Shabbat with its sanctity was not meant to exclude any human involvement in the sanctity of Shabbat. Rather, Ravina was concerned for a formulation that creates the impression that the sanctity of Shabbat is provided exclusively by the Jewish People.

R. Yosef Babad (1801-1874), *Minchat Chinuch* no. 31, concludes from this statement that part of the biblical requirement of sanctifying Shabbat includes mentioning the Exodus from Egypt.²⁹

R. Yisrael M. Kagan (1838-1933), *Mishna Berurah, Bei'ur Halacha* 271:1, notes that R. Avraham Gombiner (c. 1633-1683) seems to disagree. R. Gombiner, *Magen Avraham* 271:1, rules that one can fulfill the biblical requirement to sanctify Shabbat by reciting the Ma'ariv prayer. The *Amidah* for Ma'ariv on Shabbat contains no mention of the Exodus and therefore, *Magen Avraham* seems to be of the opinion that there is no biblical requirement to mention *yetziat Mitzrayim*. R. Kagan suggests that *Magen Avraham* is of the opinion that the Gemara's requirement to mention the Exodus from Egypt is only rabbinic in nature.

R. Kagan also suggests that perhaps *Magen Avraham* also requires one to mention the Exodus from Egypt on a biblical level. However, that requirement can be fulfilled during Ma'ariv because one mentions *yetziat Mitzrayim* in the *berachot* prior to the *Amidah*. R. Moshe Schick (1807-1879), *Taryag Mitzvot* no. 31, suggests that Ma'ariv is the preferred method of sanctifying Shabbat because the *berachot* prior to the *Amidah* discuss the Ten Plagues as well as the splitting of the sea. Kiddush at the Shabbat meal only discusses the actual Exodus from Egypt.

R. Eliyahu Bakshi Doron (b. 1941), *Binyan Av* 2:23, suggests that the dispute regarding the nature of the obligation to mention the Exodus from Egypt on Shabbat is contingent on the dispute between Rambam and Ramban. According to Rambam, the Exodus from Egypt is an integral component of Shabbat and therefore, it is logical that there is a biblical requirement to mention it on Shabbat. According to Ramban, the Exodus from Egypt is not integral to Shabbat and only serves a reminder of the reason for Shabbat. As such, it is arguable that there is no biblical requirement to mention the Exodus on Shabbat.

Conclusion

Ramban's objection to Rambam's explanation is that the refrain from labor on Shabbat cannot commemorate the Exodus from Egypt when the refrain from labor already commemorates the creation of the world. There is nothing unique in the refrain from labor that distinguishes it as a commemoration of the Exodus from Egypt and therefore, any refrain will be attributed to the commemoration of the creation of the world. In defense of Rambam's position, Ritva (1250-1330), *Sefer HaZikaron*, no. 12, suggests that at the time the Torah was given, the Jewish people had a greater appreciation for their freedom, and for them, the refrain from labor on Shabbat as a function of *yetziat Mitzrayim* had greater significance.

Perhaps one can add to Ritva's comments and suggest that the annual requirement to discuss the Exodus from Egypt on Pesach should give us a greater appreciation of what freedom means.³⁰ By seeing ourselves as if we personally left Egypt, we can better appreciate having one day each week and numerous holidays when we are not enslaved to our work and we can truly appreciate our freedom.

²⁹ See *Torah Temimah*, *Shemot* 20:54, who suggests that the Gemara's discussion about mentioning the Exodus from Egypt in Kiddush only applies to the Kiddush of Pesach. This approach would fit with Ibn Ezra's opinion that the Exodus from Egypt does not play a general role in the sanctity of Shabbat.

³⁰ There is a daily requirement to mention the Exodus from Egypt. However, on Pesach, there is a specific requirement to appreciate the entire experience and see oneself as if one personally left Egypt.