

Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim as a Special Form of Talmud Torah

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The primary text upon which we focus during the seder is the *parsha* in *Ki Savo*, “*Arami Ovaiv Avi*; (my father was tricked by an Aramean)” (Devarim 26:5), which also served as the text which would be recited by those who would bring *bikkurim* (first fruits) to Yerushalayim when they were *oleh regel*. The pilgrim would read, in thanks, the *parsha* of “*Arami Ovaiv Avi*.” The *Geonim* asked: Why was this text chosen to be the focus of the seder? There are so many direct and explicit *parshiyos* in *Sefer Shemos* that directly discuss *yetzias Mitzrayim*, the exodus. Why choose a more indirect *parsha* to serve as the primary text for exposition on the first night of Pesach?

Maggid as a form of Torah Study

Rabbi Soloveitchik, zt”l, suggested that the reason why this *parsha* was chosen, was that the primary mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*, the mitzvah to discuss the exodus on the night of the seder, is not only to retell the events of *yetzias Mitzrayim*, but it is a night of Torah Study. It is a night to study and to learn, through the instruments and the *middos* (tools) that the Torah *nidreshet bahem* (is analyzed), and through the vehicle of *Torah she-baal peh* (Oral Law), to interpret the *parsha* of *yetzias Mitzrayim*. As the Mishnah, *Pesachim* 116a, instructs: “*Ve-doresh kol ha-parsha kula* (one should interpret the entire section)”. *Doresh* means to interpret through *midrash*. The Mishnah in *Pesachim* also expresses *maggid* as a form of Torah study by stating, “*le-fi da'ato shel ben, aviv melamdo*; the father is obligated to teach his son based on the intellectual capacity of the child.” The expression is *melamdo* (to teach him), not *lesapro* (to tell him).

The Rav pointed out that this connection can be further proven from the comments of the Tosefta, *Pesachim* 10:8:

*One is obligated to involve oneself in the laws of
Passover all night long, even with one's son, alone,
or with one's student.*

חייב אדם לעסוק בהלכות הפסח כל הלילה אפילו בינו
לבין בנו אפילו בינו לבין עצמו אפילו בינו לבין
תלמידו.

* This article is based on a lecture given by Rabbi Genack and transcribed by R. Yonatan Kaganoff. The ideas quoted from Rabbi Soloveitchik (The Rav) were heard personally by Rabbi Genack.

The mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* includes not only telling over the miraculous events associated with *yetzias Mitzrayim*, but, additionally, by learning the laws, the *halakhos*, of the *mitzvos halayla* (the commandments relating to that night). In fact, the *Mekhilta*, in noting the answer to the *ben chakham* (the wise son) states that we teach him the laws of Pesach: “*Af at emor lo ki-hilkhot hapesach, ain maftirim achar pesach afikoman*; We teach him the *halakhos* of *akhilas korban Pesach* (the eating of the Passover sacrifice).” According to the text, the *girsas*, of the Vilna Gaon, it is “*ad ein maftirim* (until the last Mishnah in *Pesachim*).” We not only teach the *chakham* this particular law of “*ain maftirim achar pesach afikoman*”, but we teach him from beginning to end, all of the laws associated with *akhilas korban Pesach*.

In our Haggadah, we never mention Moshe Rabbeinu’s name. The Rav suggested that the reason is based on the passage in the Haggadah that states that the entire redemption was through *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* himself, *lo al yedai malakh, lo al yedai saraf, ela hakadosh baruch hu bekhvodo u-ve-atzmo* (not through an angel or a seraph, but rather through God himself). Therefore, it is inappropriate to mention any mortal as having a role in the exodus, even a mortal as important as Moshe Rabbeinu, who played a critical role in the exodus. Nevertheless, according to the Rambam, *Hilkhos Chametz U-Matzah* 7:2, the response to the *ben chakham* should include Moshe Rabbeinu's name. This is because when we are dealing with *halakha*, Moshe Rabbeinu’s name, as the *nosain hatorah* (the giver of the Torah), must be mentioned.

As we saw from the Tosefta, on the night of Pesach, there is a mitzvah to study Torah and in particular, the laws related to the *mitzvos halaylah*. That may be the reason why the Haggadah tells us the story of the five rabbis who gathered on seder night in Bnei Brak. The reason why they all came together is that the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* includes telling the story of the exodus in its most dignified fashion and understanding it on as profound a level possible. The *Mekhilta* states in *Parshas Bo*:

R. Eliezer states: How do we know that (even) if there is a group of Torah scholars, that one must still study the laws of Passover until midnight? This is why it states "What are these testimonies etc."

Mekhilta, Masechta D'Pischa no. 18

ר' אליעזר אומר מנין אתה אומר שאם היתה חבורה של חכמים או של תלמידים שצריכים לעסוק בהלכות פסח עד חצות לכך נאמר מה העדות וגו'.
מכילתא, מסכתא דפסחא פרשה יח

We see that it is significant to have a *chaburah* (fellowship) of *talmidai chakhamim* (Torah scholars) together at the seder and that is why, even though all of these *Tanaim* lived in different cities, they all came together to create a *chaburah* of *talmidai chakhamim*. They wanted the *limud* (study) of that evening to be more profound, deeper, and extensive.

The story of the five rabbis provides an additional insight into the Talmud Torah aspect of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*. We know that there is an argument, *machlokes Tanaim*, about the timeframe of the mitzvah of *akhilas korban Pesach* (eating the korban Pesach). According to Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah, one can only fulfill the mitzvah until midnight, and according to *chakhamim* one has all night long. Why then did Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah continue to stay up all night to continue studying and discussing *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* with his fellow *Tanaim*, if,

according to his own opinion, the mitzvos of the night expire at midnight? Some *Achronim* suggested that he stayed up only in deference to the opinion of Rabbi Akiva, who was the *morah de-asra* (communal leader) of Bnei Brak and who decided the law in accordance with the Chakhamim. However, the Rav suggested that Rabbi Elazar's reason was because of the aforementioned Tosefta that one is obligated to study the laws of Pesach all night long. Therefore, one can derive that there are two aspects to this mitzvah of Talmud Torah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*. One is to discuss and analyze the *nissim*, miracles, that happened that evening. The second, as indicated in the answer to the *ben chakham*, is to study the *hilkhos hapesach*, the laws of korban Pesach. According to Rabbi Elazar Ben Azaryah the mitzvah to study the laws only applies in the “*shaah she-matzah u-maror munachim lefanecha*, the time when matzah and maror are placed before you,” and ends at midnight. However, Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah agrees that the mitzvah of *le-shabayach la-Hashem*, to praise Hashem, and to tell over the miraculous events and how God saved the Jewish people applies the entire evening.

Our response to the *ben chakham* contains both of these aspects. First, we respond “*avadim hayinu le-Paro be-Mitzrayim* (we were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt)”, which is a commandment to tell over the story, the events, and the history of *yetzias Mitzrayim* and of our miraculous redemption. Then, we respond: “*Ve-yetzavainu Hashem la-asos es kol hachukim haelu* (God commanded us to perform these statutes)”. This second half of the response is an interpretation of all of the *mitzvos halayla*. The mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* is to give the most profound interpretation (*doresh es kol haparsha kula*). It is a mitzvah of Talmud Torah that not only incorporates the story of the exodus, but also the *mitzvos halayla* of Pesach.

The Rav suggested that this is why Chazal chose the more obscure and less explicit *parsha* of “*arami oveid avi*” to analyze during the night: so that one can fulfill the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* through the medium of *Torah shebaal peh*. The explicit *parshiyos* in *Sefer Shemos* of *Shemos*, *Vaera* and *Bo* describe the exodus in great detail and don't require explication or explanation. The choice of “*arami oveid avi*,” assures that the mitzvah will be fulfilled specifically through *derasha* (interpretation).

Based upon the Rav's analysis, that the mitzvah of the seder evening is a mitzvah of Talmud Torah, we can also understand the halakha regarding a person who celebrates the seder alone. The Gemara states:

Our rabbis taught: If the son is wise, he asks his father and if he is not wise, the wife asks and if not, he asks himself. Even two Torah scholars that know the laws of Pesach ask each other.

Pesachim 116a

תנו רבנן חכם בנו שואלו ואם אינו חכם אשתו
שואלתו ואם לאו הוא שואל לעצמו ואפילו שני
תלמידי חכמים שיודעין בהלכות הפסח שואלין זה
לזה
פסחים קטז.

The questions of *ma nishtana*, which are proscribed to be recited by the Mishnah, must be asked at the seder. Even if no one else is around, *shoel le-atzmo*, he should ask himself. It is a very strange phenomenon, that one should ask questions to oneself. I would like to suggest that the reason why one can ask oneself is that this self-interrogating act is reflective of the nature of Talmud Torah. The Rambam teaches this principle in the beginning of the laws of Talmud

Torah (1:4), where he discusses the mitzvah to teach one's son Torah:

Just as there is a commandment to teach one's son, so too there is a commandment to teach oneself.

כשם שמצווה עליו ללמד את בנו כך הוא מצווה ללמד עצמו.

The Rav pointed out that the Rambam should have said, just as one is obligated to teach his son, so too he is also obligated to study. What does it mean *le-lamaid es atzmo*, to teach oneself? The answer is that the essence the mitzvah of Talmud Torah is to share the treasures of Torah with others. Yet, even when one studies alone, it is not simply an act of study. It is always an act of teaching, of transmitting.

If this principle is true about Talmud Torah, then that concept can be applied to the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*. Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik pointed out that the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*, which is unique to the night of Pesach, is an expansion beyond the general daily mitzvah of *zechiras yetzias Mitzrayim*, of remembering the exodus from Egypt. He noted that there are a number of additional requirements on the night of Pesach that are not required for the daily mitzvah. One of those requirements is that *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* has to come through *shaylah u-teshuvah*, through question and answer. When there is no one to ask the *ma nishtana*, then one must ask oneself. This is because the Talmud Torah aspect of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* produces a requirement of *shaylah* and *teshuvah*, question and answer.

The Rav explained that this is why before the passage about the four sons is introduced, we recite, “*Baruch haMakom baruch Hu, baruch shenason Torah le-am Yisrael, baruch Hu* (Blessed is the Omnipresent, blessed is He. Blessed [is He] Who gave the Torah to Israel, blessed is He)”. Why is it relevant to mention *baruch shenason Torah le-am Yisrael*? This passage, the Rav said, is a special form of *birkas hatorah*, blessing before Torah study. We recite this *beracha* before the unique mitzvah of Talmud Torah on the night of Pesach.

This mitzvah has to be gauged and measured appropriately, according to the capacity of each child present. It must be relevant and significant to each person. To the *chakham* who is able to understand the abstract and complicated laws of Pesach, we teach him *Hilchos Pesach*. To the *she'aino yodeia lishol*, we must make Pesach relevant to him on his level.

The Night of Pesach as *Kabbalas Ol Malkhus Shamayim*

Why is the mitzvah of Talmud Torah and specifically *Torah shebaal peh*, chosen as the medium of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*? I think that there are several reasons that can be found.

The night of Pesach serves as a night of *kabbalas ol malkhus shamayim*- accepting the yoke of heaven. *Yetzias Mitzrayim* is one of the foundations of the Jewish faith. It demonstrates to all Jews, God's involvement in human history.

The Rambam writes in the beginning of *Hilchos Kerias Shema*, that there is a biblical obligation to read all three *parshiyos*, portions, of *Kerias Shema*. Other *Rishonim* have different approaches. Some *Rishonim* are of the opinion that only the first verse is biblically required and the rest is a rabbinic requirement. Rashi seems to believe that it is only the first *parsha*. The *Shagas Aryeh* (in his responsa no. 9) was bothered by the Rambam's position because the Gemara in *Maseches*

Brachos 12b, seems to say explicitly that the last *parsha* of *tzitzis* is only rabbinic. The Gemara asks why the *parsha* of *tzitzis* was chosen to be recited twice daily, as opposed to alternative *parshiyos* and gives a number of reasons. If, according to the Rambam, the *parsha* of *tzitzis* is a biblical obligation, how could the Gemara debate which *parsha* to include as the third? Reb Chaim Soloveitchik suggested that, indeed, according to the Rambam, all three *parshiyos* are biblically mandated. However, there is no biblical requirement to specifically read the *parsha* of *tzitzis*. Rather, one must read a *parsha* that contains the theme of *zechiras yetzias Mitzrayim*. In order to fulfill the mitzvah of *Kerias Shema*, one must mention *yetzias Mitzrayim*.

Rambam does not count the mitzvah of *zechiras yetzias Mitzrayim* as an independent commandment in his list of 613 mitzvos. If there is a daily mitzvah to mention *yetzias Mitzrayim*, why is it not counted in the *minyan hamitzvos*? Reb Chaim explained that it is not an independent mitzvah. It is one of the details of the mitzvah of *Kerias Shema*, and the Rambam does not include *peratai ha-mitzvah*, the details of mitzvos when counting the mitzvos.

Why is the theme of *yetzias Mitzrayim* part of the mitzvah of *Kerias Shema*? *Yetzias Mitzrayim* is part of the mitzvah of *kabbalas ol malkhut shamayim*, accepting the yoke of heaven. Our belief in *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is not simply a deistic belief in a God who created the world but then subsequently became uninvolved after the moment of creation. We believe in a God who is intimately involved in the world and in human events, a caring God who is involved in history and a design for humankind. This is the central lesson of *yetzias Mitzrayim*. According to the Rambam, the mitzvah of *kabbalas ol malkhus shamayim* must include a mention of *yetzias Mitzrayim*. Indeed, *Anochi Hashem Elokecha*, the foundation of faith according to the Rambam, in his *Minyan HaMitzvos*, is identified as the belief in a God who is *hotzaisikha mei-eretz mitzrayim*; it is the God who took us out of Egypt.

It is interesting that the Rambam also considers *Kerias Shema* a special mitzvah of Talmud Torah. The Rav proved this from the fact that *Ahava Rabbah*, which is the *bracha* immediately preceding *Keriat Shema* is a form of *birkas haTorah*. If a person did not say *birkas haTorah* before Shacharis (morning prayers), and he said the *bracha* of *Ahava Rabba*, he fulfills the biblical mitzvah of reciting a *birkas haTorah*. This proves that *Ahava Rabba* is a form of *birkas hatorah*. Why is it that *Ahava Rabba* was instituted as a form of *birkas hatorah*? It is because *Kerias Shema* itself is a mitzvah of Talmud Torah. This is not simply because the *parshiyos* of *Kerias Shema* are *parshiyos* that are in the Torah, but rather, the essence of *Kerias Shema* and the fulfillment of *Kerias Shema*, itself, is a special mitzvah of Talmud Torah.

There are a number of other sources that indicate the connection between *Kerias Shema* and Talmud Torah. First, Rashi *Berachos* 14b, says that the command to study Torah is mentioned in *Kerias Shema*- in the words *ve-debartu bam*. Rashi, says that those words are the source of both the mitzvah of Talmud Torah and the mitzvah of reading *Kerias Shema*. Second, the Yerushalmi, *Berachos* ch. 1, says that the reason why Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai and his colleagues were exempt from reciting *Kerias Shema* is because *hai shinun ve-hai shinun* (this and this are both considered study). Torah is *shinun*, study. The study with which they were involved constantly was Talmud Torah and *Kerias Shema* also is Talmud Torah. Third, the Gemara states in *Meseches Menachos* 99b, that the minimal requirement of Talmud Torah of *ve-*

hagisa bo yomam va-layla, the minimal requirement is fulfilled by saying *Shema* once at day and once at night.

Why is *Kerias Shema* an expression of the mitzvah of Talmud Torah? This is because it would be impossible to formulate and posit a mitzvah of *kabbalas ol malkhus shamayim* that doesn't include an aspect of Talmud Torah. When the Rambam discusses in *Hilkhos Kerias Shema*, the order of the *parshiyos* and the themes, he writes:

The section containing Hear O' Israel is read first because it contains the uniqueness of God, love for Him and study of His Torah which is the main principle that everything is dependent on.

Rambam, Hilkhos Kerias Shema 1:2

מקדימין לקרות פרשת שמע מפני
שיש בה יחוד השם ואהבתו
ותלמודו שהוא העיקר הגדול שהכל
תלוי בו.
רמב"ם הלכות קריאת שמע א:ב

Kerias Shema as a mitzvah of *kabbalas ol malkhus shamayim* includes the fundamental principle of Talmud Torah. Parallel to this is the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* on the night of Pesach. As an extension of the daily mitzvah to remember *yetzias Mitzrayim*, it is, in a sense, a mitzvah of *kabbalas ol malkhus shamayim*. Since *kabbalas ol malkhus shamayim* without Talmud Torah would be impossible, *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* must be through Talmud Torah, specifically through the medium of *Torah shebaal peh*.

I would like to suggest an additional insight into the story of the five rabbis in Bnei Brak. The Haggadah teaches us that they were involved in *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* until their students told them it was time for *Kerias Shema shel Shacharis* (the morning recitation). Why did they continue until the time for *Kerias shema shel Shacharis*? Shouldn't the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* end with dawn, well before the mitzvah of *Kerias Shema* begins at *misehyakir ben tekheles lelavan* (when there is enough light to distinguish between the blue and white strands of the *tzitzis*)? It is possible that the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* extends until the next mitzvah of *zechiras yetzias Mitzrayim* begins. Since, according to the Rambam, *zechiras yetzias Mitzrayim* is part of *Kerias Shema*, the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* is in effect until the time for *Kerias Shema shel Shacharis*.

Perhaps there is another reason why Talmud Torah is used, and, in particular, *Torah shebaal peh*, as the medium for the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*. There is a fundamental difference between *Torah shebikhtav* and *Torah shebaal peh*. Let me demonstrate this difference with an example. The *pasuk* (*Shemos* 3:15) states “*zeh shmi li-olam ve-zeh zikhri li-dor dor* (this is My name forever and this is My remembrance for all generations).” The Gemara in *Pesachim* has the following comment on this verse:

The Holy One blessed be He said: The way My name is written is not the way it is pronounced. I am written with yud and heh and I am read with aleph and nun.

Pesachim 50a

אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא לא כשאני נכתב אני
נקרא, נכתב אני ביו"ד ה"א, ונקרא אני
באל"ף דל"ת.
פסחים נ.

God's name, the *Shem Hameforash* (the tetragrammaton) can almost never be pronounced as it is written. It can only be pronounced in the Bais HaMikdash by the Kohanim. The *kri*

(pronunciation) of the *Shem Hameforash* is the *shem adnus*. The Brisker Rav, Reb Velvel Soloveitchik, in his commentary on Chumash, suggests that *zeh shmi li-olam*, refers to the way that the name is written. Since it is written in the *Torah shebikhsav*, it is automatically enduring (*li-olam*). *Zeh zichri li-dor dor*, refers to the pronunciation. The way we pronounce His name can only be transmitted orally and is therefore considered *Torah shebaal peh*. This is why the *pasuk* states *li-dor dor*, because it is contingent on the transmission from generation to generation. The *Torah shebikhsav* doesn't require a transmission from one generation to the next. The *mesorah*, the transmission is strictly a function of *Torah shebaal peh*. The night of Pesach is the night of *mesorah*, when we pass the traditions that we experience from one generation to the next. The focal point of the night of the seder is the child, *ve-higadita li-bincha* (you shall tell your child). If it is *ve-higadita li-bincha*, then it is specifically through *Torah shebaal peh*; through the *mesorah*.

That may be why we find two occasions in Jewish life where we encounter Eliyahu HaNavi. One is at a *bris* and the other is the night of Pesach. What's the relationship between Eliyahu and the night of Pesach? The answer may be understood by understanding the historic role of Eliyahu HaNavi. Eliyahu HaNavi is the guarantor of the *mesorah*. From the time of Abaye and Rava, the *semikha* (ordination) ended. Until that time each rav (teacher) would bestow upon his student *semikha* and guarantee that the student was able and qualified to deal with certain issues. For example, *kenasos* (enforcing penalties) required *semikha*; *dinai nefashos* (capital trials) required *semikha*; *malkos* (lashings) required *semikha*. This chain extended back to Moshe Rabbeinu and ended in the time of Abaye and Rava. Ultimately it will be resurrected. How? There is one person from this unbroken chain who still exists and can re-institute the *semikha*. That person is Eliyahu HaNavi. That is why whenever we come to a halakhic conundrum that we cannot answer in the Gemara, the Gemara says “*Taiku*”, which refers to Eliyahu Hanavi: “*Tishbi yetareitz kushyot u-bayos*”. He will come and resolve all halakhic difficulties through the re-institution of *semikha*. Therefore, at a *bris*, when a father brings his child into the eternal covenant, “*lehachniso lebriso shel avraham avinu*”, and the *mesorah* is passed from one generation to the next, Eliyahu HaNavi is present. He is also present on the night of Pesach, which is a night of *mesorah*.

The Haggadah as a Form of *Shira*

I would like to suggest another reason why *Torah shebaal peh* is the medium for *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*. One of the unique aspects of the Haggadah is that it incorporates into the seder, the mitzvah to say *Hallel* (praise to God). There are a number of indicators that *Hallel* is integrated into the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*. First, according to Rashi, *Pesachim* 36a, *Hallel* is said only at the time when the matzah is present. Second, according to the Ran, *Pesachim* 27a, Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah is of the opinion that the mitzvah of *Hallel* ends at midnight. Tosafos, *Pesachim* 119b, are of the opinion that because *Hallel* is only rabbinic in origin, one may be lenient and rely on the position of the rabbis that the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* extends for the entire night. However, they seem to agree fundamentally that *Hallel* is integrated into the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*.

The *Sefer HaChinukh* implies that giving praise is an integral part of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*:

To discuss the exodus from Egypt on the fifteenth of Nisan, each person according to their ability, and to give praise and tribute to God for all the miracles that He performed for us.

Sefer HaChinukh no. 21

לספר בענין יציאת מצרים בליל חמשה עשר בניסן כל אחד כפי צחות לשונו, ולהלל ולשבח השם יתברך על כל הנסים שעשה לנו שם.
ספר החינוך, מצוה כא

Indeed, the Rav suggested that the very word “Haggadah,” means to give *shevach vehodaah*. The Torah states in the *parsha* of *arami ovoid avi, higaditi hayom la-Hashem elokecha* (I have declared today to God), and the Targum Yerushalmi interprets this phrase as *odinan ve-shabchinan yuma hadain*, to give praise and thanks to Hashem.

The night of Pesach is a night of thanksgiving and therefore, we must say *Hallel*. We must experience the seder as if we lived through the night of *yetzias Mitzrayim*. It is not ancient history for us. It is an intimate event that we have just experienced and relive yearly. “*Chayav adam liros es atzmo ke-ilu hu atzmo yatzah miMitzrayim*,” a person must see himself as if he personally experienced the exodus. Each Jew is required to give praise to Hashem for the salvation that he has personally experienced.

Hallel and *hodaah* is a central theme of the seder. This is why the entire seder night is built around the four cups of wine, *Kiddush, maggid, birkas hamazon* and *Hallel*. The reason for this is that, “*ain omrim shira ela al hayayin*”. *Shira*, praise and song, is always said in association with wine. Just as the songs of the *Leviyim* in the *Bais Hamikdash* were said over wine, so too everything that is said as a song to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, including the *Haggadah* as well, is said over wine. The theme of *shira* is why we say all the *piyyutim* at the end of the seder at *Nirtzah*. The custom to recite *Shir haShirim* on the night of Pesach also relates to this idea. It is the most beautiful song of praise we sing to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

Perhaps this is another reason why the passage “*arami ovoid avi*” was chosen to be recited during the seder as opposed to a more explicit discussion of the exodus. “*Arami ovoid avi*” serves primarily as an instrument of praise. When the farmer comes to the *Bais HaMikdash* on pilgrimage, he brings his first fruit to the *Bais HaMikdash*. After he has planted his crop and felt great risk, with the sense of anxiety whether this year will be a year of plenty or a year of famine, he brings this fruit, his first fruit and offers thanks and praises to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. What *parsha* does the farmer recite? “*Arami ovoid avi*.” The *Mishnayos* in *Bikkurim* describe how the *bikkurim* were brought to *Yerushalayim*. The picture described is very idyllic:

How does one bring bikkurim? All of the cities would assemble and they would rest that night. They would sleep on the road of the city and would not enter the homes. They would get up early and the appointed one would say "Come, let us go to Zion, to the house of God." Those that were close would bring their fresh fruit; the other ones who were far would bring dried fruit. And there would be an ox that would be before them

כיצד מעלין את הבכורים כל העיירות שבמעמד מתכנסות לעיר של מעמד ולנין ברחובה של עיר ולא היו נכנסין לבתים ולמשכים היה הממונה אומר קומו ונעלה ציון אל בית ה' אלהינו. הקרובים מביאים התאנים והענבים והרחוקים מביאים גרוגרות וצמוקים והשור הולך לפניהם וקרניו

with his horns plated with gold, crowned with an olive wreath. And there would be instruments playing until they would enter Yerushalayim ... All artisans would stand up and ask of their welfare saying "Our brothers from that place have come peacefully." The instruments would play until they reached the Temple Mount. Once they reached the Temple, even King Agrippas would place the basket on his shoulders and enter the Azarah where the Leviyim would sing "I will exalt God for He has drawn me up and not let my enemies rejoice over me.

Bikkurim, Chapter 3

מצופות זהב ועטרת של זית בראשו
 החליל מכה לפניהם עד שמגיעים קרוב
 לירושלם ... וכל בעלי אומניות
 שבירושלם עומדים לפניהם ושואלין
 בשלומם אחינו אנשי המקום פלוני
 באתם לשלום. החליל מכה לפניהם עד
 שמגיעין להר הבית הגיעו להר הבית
 אפילו אגריפס המלך נוטל הסל על
 כתפו ונכנס עד שמגיע לעזרה הגיע
 לעזרה ודברו הלויים בשיר ארוממך ה'
 כי דליתני ולא שמחת אויבי לי

בכורים פרק ג

This beautiful description in the Mishnah emphasizes the experience of a spontaneous and explosive song of thanks and praise. Therefore, Chazal chose the *parsha* of *arami oveid avi* to be recited at the seder in order to express the exodus in the form of *shira*.

The Haggadah, when encouraging us to extend our discussion of the exodus states: *ve-chol hamarbeh lesaper beyetzias Mitzrayim harei zeh meshubach*. The Rambam's text is "*hamarbeh bederash parsha zu*," of interpreting *arami oveid avi, harei zeh meshubach*, is praiseworthy. Why is it that, although there is a defined text, whoever extends it and is more elaborate in their interpretation is praiseworthy? That, I think, is reflective of these two themes, of Talmud Torah and *shira*. Regarding Talmud Torah, there is an intrinsic requirement to study the material on the most profound level possible. Regarding the mitzvah of *shevach ve-hodaah*, to praise and give thanks to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, the more elaborate the interpretation, the more gracious the praise.

Talmud Torah as an Expression of Freedom

I would like to suggest one other reason why Talmud Torah is the medium for *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*. The Haggadah begins with the passage "*ha lachma anya*", and I believe that the *ha lachma anya* serves as an introduction. The *Baal HaHaggadah* is bothered by a historical problem. The night of Pesach we eat in a regal fashion, reclining, as if we are all kings drinking wine. The question that begs itself is that throughout most of Jewish history, Jews were in a situation where they were rejected and oppressed. How is it possible to have a seder during the Chmelnitzky massacres? How is it possible to have a seder in the Warsaw Ghetto? The Warsaw Ghetto rebellion began on Pesach. How was that year's Pesach a meaningful experience? Weren't the words of the Haggadah empty at that historical moment? Recognizing this historical reality, the *Baal HaHaggadah* provides two answers. First, this unleavened bread, (*Ha lachma anya*) was eaten in Mitzrayim as slaves. We can feel freedom while in slavery if we have the perspective that "*leshanah haba bnei chorin*, next year we will be free." Second, *Hashata hacha, leshanah habaah b'arah d'Yisrael*, this year we are here, next year in Israel." There is always the possibility of immediate redemption. Even though a Jew's external circumstances may be at the moment very dark and bleak, his destiny is towards freedom and redemption and therefore, existentially, the Jew is always free.

Who feels greater freedom? Is it the person who is currently out of jail, but knows that he has been convicted, and that he is about to be sentenced, or is it the person who is imprisoned, but knows that within a day he will be free? Certainly, the second person will feel that he has greater freedom. While a Jew may be externally enslaved, there is a transcendent idea of freedom that makes the whole night of Pesach possible, meaningful, and real. That is the underlying concept behind the statement when we speak about the *luchos*, that God's words were *charus* on the *luchos*, engraved on the tablets. *Chazal* interpret these words, beautifully, *charus* is from the word, *chairus*, freedom: *ain lekha ben chorin ela mi sheosaik baTorah*, there is no person who is free except for one who is engaged in the study of Torah. It is that attachment to Torah that gives us that existential quality of freedom. When God took us out of Egypt, it was for the purpose of receiving the Torah at Sinai. Only when we accepted the Torah was the freedom that He gave us, the political freedom, meaningful, and that is a freedom that can never be taken away. Therefore, on the night of Pesach, when we affirm and assert our freedom as Jews, it must be linked to Talmud Torah.

Conclusion

On the night of Pesach, a night of Torah study, Torah is linked to *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*, and Torah is the medium for the *mitzvah* of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* for many reasons. Talmud Torah affirms the *mesorah* of father to son. Without Talmud Torah, the theme of *kabbalas ol malkhus shamayim* would be meaningless. *Arami Ovaid Avi* is a statement of *shira* and praise because it looks to our future, to our ultimate redemption, when our existential freedom will become not only the internal reality but also the external reality as well, *bimhaira veyamainu, Amen*.



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