

## Pesach – Actions Speak Louder than Words

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The central Mitzva of the night of Pesach is Sipur Yetziyat Mitzrayim (סיפור יציאת מצרים). It derives from a cryptic Pasuk in Parshat Bo, "And you shall tell your son on that day saying because of this God did this for me when I left Egypt."<sup>1</sup> Given the repetition of the word "this", the commentaries are perplexed as to what is the antecedent to "because of this" (בעבור זה). What is the cause and the effect being conveyed by the Pasuk? Is it because God did all of these miracles for me therefore I am bringing the Korban Pesach (רשב"ם)? Or did God take me out of Egypt in order that I keep all of his Mitzvot (רש"י)? Or did God take me out of Egypt because I kept and will keep his commandments to bring the Korban Pesach and eat Matza (אבן עזרא)? The usage of the word Zeh (זה) is also interesting because in the parlance of Chazal whenever the Torah uses the word Zeh, it refers to something tangible that one can point their finger at.<sup>2</sup> In that vein, the Ramban explains Ba'avur Zeh (בעבור זה) as you should tell over that which you personally saw God do for you upon the Exodus from Egypt. He then adds that Chazal understood this in the famous Mechilta<sup>3</sup> that is found in the Haggada to mean at the time when Matza and Maror are in front of you (בשעה שמצה ומרור מונחים לפניך). This is somewhat reinforced by Raban Gamliel's dictum that anyone who has not mentioned one of three following items, Pesach, Matza and Maror along with their explanations at the Seder, has not fulfilled their obligation of Sipur Yetziyat Mitzrayim.<sup>4</sup> In this week's shiur, we will discuss why Chazal seemingly put such a premium on the presence of these "props" at the Seder and why they are so central to the Mitzvah of Sipur Yetziyat Mitzrayim.

The Mitzvah of Sipur Yetziyat Mitzrayim is made even more complicated when in the Mishnayot in Arvei Pesachim tell us that the central part of the retelling of the story of the Exodus revolves around the text of the Mikra Bikurim (מקרא ביכורים) said by the pilgrims that presented their first fruits in the Temple (ארמי עובד אבי). It is strange that Chazal go to a small paragraph in Sefer Devarim to be the center-piece of Magid when there is no dearth of primary sources in Sefer Shmot with which to fulfill the Mitzvah. Why did Chazal think that this was the best medium for conducting the Seder and accomplishing the Mitzvah of Sipur Yetziyat Mitzrayim.

(ב) וְלִקְחַתְּ מֵרֵאשִׁית כָּל פְּרֵי הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר תָּבִיא מֵאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יִקְוֶה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נֹתֵן לְךָ וְשָׂמַתְּ בַטֶּנָּא וְהִלַּכְתָּ אֶל הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יְקֻוֶה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשֹׁכֵן שְׁמוֹ שָׁם: (ג) וּבָאתְּ אֶל הַפֶּהַן אֲשֶׁר יְהִי בַיָּמִים הַהֵם וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו הִגַּדְתִּי הַיּוֹם לִיקְוֶה אֱלֹהֶיךָ כִּי בָאתִי אֶל הָאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע יְקֻוֶה לְאֲבוֹתַי לָתֵת לָנוּ: (ד) וְלִקַּח הַפֶּהַן הַטֶּנָּא מִיָּדְךָ וְהִנִּיחוּ לְפָנַי מִזְבַּח יְקֻוֶה אֱלֹהֶיךָ: (ה) וְעָנִיתָ וְאָמַרְתָּ לְפָנַי יְקֻוֶה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲרָמִי אֲבִד אָבִי וַיִּרְדַּ מִצְרַיִם וַיְגַר שָׁם בְּמִתֵּי מַעַט וַיְהִי שָׁם לִגְוִי גָדוֹל עָצוּם וְרַב: (ו) וַיִּרְעוּ אֹתָנוּ הַמִּצְרִים וַיַּעֲנוּנוּ וַיִּתְּנוּ עָלֵינוּ עֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה: (ז) וַנִּצְעַק אֶל יְקֻוֶה אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַי וַיִּשְׁמַע יְקֻוֶה אֶת קִלְנוּ וַיִּרָא אֶת עַנְיֵנוּ וְאֶת עֲמַלְנוּ וְאֶת לַחֲצֵנוּ: (ח) וַיּוֹצֵאנוּ יְקֻוֶה מִמִּצְרַיִם בְּיַד חֲזָקָה וּבְדָרַע נְטוּיָה וּבְמָרָא גָדֹל וּבְבָאוֹתוֹת וּבְמִפְתֵּימָם: (ט) וַיְבָאנוּ אֶל הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה וַיִּתֵּן לָנוּ אֶת הָאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֶלֶב וּדְבָשׁ: (י) וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הִבָּאתִי אֶת רֵאשִׁית פְּרֵי הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַתָּה לִּי יְקֻוֶה וְהִנְחִיתוּ לְפָנַי יְקֻוֶה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתָ לְפָנַי יְקֻוֶה אֱלֹהֶיךָ: (יא) וְשָׂמַחְתָּ בְכָל הַטּוֹב אֲשֶׁר נֹתֵן לְךָ יְקֻוֶה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וּלְבֵיתְךָ אֹתָהּ וְהָלוּ וְהִגִּיר אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבְּךָ: ○

In Parshat Ki Tavo, the Torah instructs the individual to "take their first fruits from the Land that God has bestowed you, place them in a basket and bring it to the place that God has chosen to have His name dwell there. You will come to the priest that is serving in that day and you will say to him..." The next word in the Pasuk, V'Higaditi (והגדתי) seems to be superfluous since the traditional meaning of the word would be "and I tell you".<sup>5</sup> If the person is already speaking (ואמרת אליו) to the Kohen, why do they need to then add "and I tell you" (והגדתי). This difficulty is further underscored by the fact that the three translations (תרגומים)<sup>6</sup> of the Torah all translate the word differently. Moreover, all the exegetes are clearly struggling because they proffer multiple and varied interpretations of the word with disclaimers like "it is similar to" or "it possibly means".

One might want to suggest that the reason for the repetition is because the object of the verb switches from the Kohen to God, "you will say to him (the Kohen), and I tell God, your Lord..." The problem is that remainder of the Pasuk does not really support such an explanation because it continues, "...that I have come to the Land that God had promised to our forefathers to give to us." Why does one need to tell God that they have come to the Land that He promised to our forefathers? The Ramban tries to avoid this issue by explaining the word V'Higaditi as V'Siparti (וספרתי)<sup>7</sup>, a narrative. One is telling a story as if to give background and context to the bringing of the Bikurim, but then the Pasuk is somewhat stranded and probably should have been a part of the broader story told later in verses five through ten.

<sup>1</sup> והגדת לבנך ביום ההוא לאמור בעבור זה עשה ה' לי בצאתי ממצרים (שמות יג, ח)

<sup>2</sup> עיין דברי חז"ל לגבי החדש הזה לכם וגם אצל זה קלי ואנוהו ועוד הרבה מקומות

<sup>3</sup> מכילתא דרבי ישמעאל בא – מסכתא דפסחא פרשה יז

<sup>4</sup> רוב המפרשים מסבירים שזה חסרון במצות סיפור יציאת מצרים אבל יש שרצו לטעון שהוא חסרון במצות עצמן

<sup>5</sup> ...למה לא הגדת לי כי אשתך היא (בראשית יב, יח)

<sup>6</sup> תרגום אונקלוס, תרגום ירושלמי ותרגום יונתן

<sup>7</sup> ...ויגיד משה את דברי העם אל ה' (שמות יט ט)

A simple solution would be to explain the word V'Higaditi as having a slightly stronger sense of telling and to mean "I declare".<sup>8</sup> That would have the Pasuk then read, "...and you will say to him (the Kohen), I declare to God..." While this seems to provide an elegant solution to the problem, it is somewhat strange that one needs to inform the Kohen (ואמרת אליו) of their impending declaration which is directed to God. In addition, is that not already implicit in the mere fact that it is a declaration (והגדתי)? It would have been much more coherent if the Pasuk had read "and you will say, I declare to God" (ואמרת, והגדתי לה).

To solve the problems raised above, the Targum Yerushalmi and Yonatan both move away from translating the word literally and instead construe the word V'Higaditi as meaning to give thanks and praise. A similar sentiment is found in the Ibn Ezra who says it is a type of thanksgiving and the Chizkuni who understands it to mean I am appreciative. Accordingly, the Pasuk would then read, "and you will say to him, I am grateful to God..." All of these explanations, solve the seeming duplication by defining the word contextually rather than literally. This view is best summarized by Rav Chaim Paltiel who says that maybe is this one of the verses in the Torah that is missing words, but conveys its message implicitly as if to say, "I declare today that I am thankful to God..."<sup>9</sup>

The most compelling explanation is brought in one line by the Seforno where he refers the reader to a story about King David.<sup>10</sup> The anecdote is set post the defeat of Avshalom at the hands King David's troops. Upon hearing the news of Avshalom's defeat and death, King David goes into mourning over the loss of his son in the civil war. He cries out bitterly over and over again, "my son Avshalom." King David's troops' excitement over their victory is quashed by his mournful reaction and the Pasuk describes that "the victory was turned to mourning...and the troops had to steal their way into the city, the way a defeated army sneaks into a city after suffering a humiliating defeat." Yoav, King David's general, confronts the king and chastises him for his behavior. He explains that the king has inappropriately shown love for his adversaries while despising his supporters. That is because you have said (והגדת) today that you have no ministers and servants, for had Avshalom survived today and had we all perished, you would have been happy. The strange part of the Pasuk is the usage of the verb V'Higaditi when King David never made any statement resembling that which Yoav accuses him of voicing. All the commentaries note that one has to understand V'Higaditi in that context as meaning that King David through his mournful actions made a declaration akin to that which Yoav intimates. King David's behavior, not his words, communicated to his troops his preference for Avshalom over them. In other words, V'Higaditi is a demonstrable action that conveys a message.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the Seforno explains that by the Bikurim the word V'Higaditi means that I have made known through my actions that God brought me to the Land he promised to my forefathers. All the commentators subsequent to the Seforno<sup>12</sup> follow his lead and explicate on the word V'Higaditi in an analogous fashion, but the truth is that hints of his compelling explanation are found in earlier Rishonim. The Targum Unkelos translates the word V'Higaditi as V'Haveti (והויתתי) which is the Aramaic for "to point to or to show". Both the Ibn Ezra and the Ramban say that the V'Higaditi is evidenced by the fruits presented by the pilgrim.<sup>13</sup> Rav Paltiel explains the etymology of the word stemming from Yaakov's blessing to the tribe of Gad<sup>14</sup> as meaning a troop or large quantity of fruits that is brought to show that God granted me the opportunity to come to this Land. The understanding of the Pasuk by the Bikurim would now be, "...you will say to him (Kohen) that I have told God..." not through my words, but rather through my actions. My bringing of the first fruits to the Temple publicly demonstrates my acknowledgement that I am the beneficiary of God's great munificence and only through His benevolence and generosity am I endowed this Land that has produced these fruits that I present before him today. Without uttering a word, it is an act that conveys thanksgiving.

Going back to the question as to why was Mikra Bikurim chosen to be the center-piece of Magid. The reason that Chazal likely selected this text as the platform for the Mitzva of Sippur Yetziyat Mitzrayim is because it is a story of a future generation in the Land of Israel that brings their first fruits to the Temple. Upon reaching the Courtyard of the Temple, he then to paraphrase says "...that we were enslaved in Egypt under harsh conditions and God miraculously took us out of Egypt..." Despite the farmer never having been in Egypt, the individual speaks as if he is giving a first-person account of his Exodus from Egypt. This is exactly the goal of Chazal on the night of Pesach to have the participants in the Seder reach the climatic point at the end of Maggid and to feel as if they personally left Egypt to such an extent that they personally can say Hallel. We now understand why it was chosen as the central text for Maggid.

<sup>8</sup> נראה שזו דעת הרמב"ן בפירוש השני שלו לזהגדתי, הגדתי לכהן ולכל העומדים האלה...וההגדה לשמו...כי הוא הביאני אליו לעבדו בארץ

<sup>9</sup> וגם משהו דומה ברמב"ן... הגדתי והודית...  
<sup>10</sup> שמואל ב יט א-ח

<sup>11</sup> עיין עוד ומעשה ידיו מגיד הרקיע (תהילים יט,ב) וגם ואתה הגדת היום אשר עשיתה אתי טובה (שמואל א כד,יח)  
<sup>12</sup> עיין בכלי יקר, במלבי"ם ועוד

<sup>13</sup> והעד הפרי (אבן עזרא) בפרי זה שהבאתי הגדתי והודיתי (רמב"ן)  
<sup>14</sup> גד גדוד יגודנו והוא יגד עקב (בראשית מט,יט)

Now returning to our discussion of the Mitzva of Sippur Yetziyat Mitzrayim, interestingly, the Torah conveys the imperative to tell the story of the Exodus to one's children on Pesach night using the verb V'Higadita (והגדת). In light of the definition of V'Higaditi we discussed above, it is possible to explain this Mitvah as being a conveyance via action rather than just through words.<sup>15</sup> Through this we can explain many of the requirements of the Seder night. First of all, the usage of Mikra Bikurim as the center-piece for Magid is now enhanced by this explanation. Not only is it a future generation thanking God for taking them out of Egypt even though they were not present at the Exodus, but it also uses a similar tool of communication whereby one's actions are the medium of communicating thanksgiving to God. In addition, Raban Gamliel's requirement that there be props at the Seder that facilitate explanations for their presence is premised on this concept that there need to be tangible items and activities undertaken by the parents that demonstrably convey the educational goals of the night to the children. Lastly, the requirement mentioned in the Mishna that each individual has to see themselves (לראות את עצמו), and more potently the Rambam's formulation that one must exhibit themselves (להראות את עצמו)<sup>16</sup>, as if they left Egypt on this night (כאילו הוא יצא ממצרים) is really a derivative of the commandment to "tell over" (סיפור) the story of the Exodus. Actions, activities and props that convey the story of the Exodus to the next generation also engender an experiential and emotional sense of leaving Egypt in those that are presenting the message. That presentation should be so real that it should naturally result in a spontaneous Hallel to God. In that way, both the teacher and student can experience the night as envisioned by Chazal -- as if they themselves left Egypt.

Shabbat Shalom  
Chag Kasher V'Sameach

<sup>15</sup> מעניין שאצל מצות הבאת הביכורים הרמב"ן פירש והגדתי כספרתי והאבן עזרא הסביר את הטעם של והגדתי כדי שישמעו הקטנים

<sup>16</sup> רמב"ם הלכות חמץ ומצה פרק ז הלכה ו

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