

Parashat Bo 5783, 2023:

The Story of the Exodus

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Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon HaKohane, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Gittel Malka bat Moshe, Alexander Leib ben Benyamin Yosef, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Parashat Bo continues the Torah's emphasis on events leading up to *Yetziat Mitzraim* (the Departure from Egypt) that began in the prior two *parshiot* of *Sefer Shemot*. At this juncture, we are introduced to two *mitzvot* that portray the singular import of the Exodus: The first is the *mitzvah* of *Zechirat Yetziat Mitzraim* (13:3), the obligation to remember and mention the Exodus, and the second is the *mitzvah* of *Sippur Yetziat Mitzraim*, the recounting of the story of the Departure from Egypt (13:8).

The 13th century anonymous author of the *Sefer HaChinuch*, a work that analyzes the *Taryag Mitzvot* (the 613 Commandments), begins his discussion of *Sippur Yetziat Mitzraim* with this formulation:

The commandment to recount the Exodus from Egypt: To retell the story of the Exodus from Egypt on the night of the fifteenth of Nissan—each person according to their power of expression—to laud and to praise Hashem, may He be blessed, for all the miracles He performed for us there, as it is stated, “*V’he’gadatah l’vinchah...* (“And you shall tell your son,” *Sefer Shemot* 13:8),” translation with my emendations, https://www.sefaria.org/Sefer_HaChinukh.21.1?lang=bi)

The *Sefer HaChinuch* does not discuss *Zechirat Yetziat Mitzraim*, since it is nearly universally accepted among the *Monei HaMitzvot* (Compilers of the *Taryag Mitzvot*) that it is not counted among the 613 Commandments. In contrast, Rashi (1040-1105), in his gloss on the phrase, “*zachor et hayom hazeh asher y’tzatem m’mitzraim* (remember this day, on which you left Egypt, *Sefer*

Shemot 13:8),” makes it clear that this statement represents a *mitzvah* of the Torah. Basing himself upon *Midrash Mechilta d’Rabbi Yishmael*, Parashat Bo 16, he explains “This teaches us that we have a daily [obligation] to mention the Exodus from Egypt.” My *rebbe* and mentor, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik *zatzal* (1903-1993), known as “the Rav” by his students and followers, supports Rashi’s reading and notes that “regarding the truth of the matter, the *mitzvah* [that is, the daily obligation to mention the Exodus] was really stated in the verse, ‘*zachor et hayom hazeh*.’” (*Shiurim l’Zacher Abba Mori*, II, page 152, translation and brackets my own)

It is clear that the *mitzvot* of *Zechirat* and *Sippur Yetziat Mitzraim* are firmly based upon *pasukim* in our *parasha*. Yet, if the Torah commands us to remember and mention *Yetziat Mitzraim*, why are we also obligated in the *mitzvah* of *Sippur Yetziat Mitzraim*? To borrow from the language of the *Haggadah: Mah nishtanah mitzvat Zechirat Yetziat Mitzraim m’mitzvat Sippur Yetziat Mitzraim* (What is the difference between the *mitzvah* of *Zechirat Yetziat Mitzraim* and *Sippur Yetziat Mitzraim*)? The Rav states that his father, HaRav Moshe Soloveitchik *zatzal* (1879-1941) shared the opinion of his father, HaRav Chaim Soloveitchik *zatzal* (1853-1918) on this matter, and noted four differences between these two *mitzvot*:

1. *Zechirat Yetziat Mitzraim* is obligatory twice a day in the morning and at night, whereas *Sippur Yetziat Mitzraim* is mandatory only on the first night of Pesach (15th of Nissan).
2. *Zechirat Yetziat Mitzraim* is fulfilled by merely mentioning the event, while *Sippur Yetziat Mitzraim* must contain a recitation of the specific miracles and wonders that the Holy One blessed be He performed for us in Egypt.
3. *Zechirat Yetziat Mitzraim* is, a private *mitzvah*, that is, a person need only mention the Exodus to themselves. Based upon the actual wording of the source text, however, *Sippur Yetziat Mitzraim* diverges from this approach and requires that the story be told to one’s children and others present at the *Seder*.

4. *Zechirat Yetziat Mitzraim* is not “a standalone *mitzvah*.” Rather, it stems from the *mitzvah* of *Kriat Shema* and the fulfillment of *Kabbalat Ol Malchut Shamayim* (Acceptance of the Yoke of Heaven). *Sippur Yetziat Mitzraim*, however, is its own *mitzvah* and is, therefore, included in the *Taryag Mitzvot*.

The Rav added another distinction:

The obligation of remembering does not require a person to proclaim praise and thanks [to the Almighty,] whereas, *Sippur Yetziat Mitzraim* is not only [an act] wherein we recite the wonders and miracles that were done for us, rather, we have the additional responsibility to give praise and thanks [to Hashem] ... (*Shiurim l'Zacher Abba Mori*, I, page 2, translation and brackets my own)

Whenever we recite *Kriat Shema*, we have the opportunity to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *Zechirat Mitzraim*. May the Almighty help us do so with *kavanah* (focus and intent) and may this spiritual awareness lead to a powerful recognition of the wonders and miracles He performed for us at that time, enabling us to praise and thank Him when we recount the story of *Yetziat Mitzraim*. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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Please contact me at rdbe718@gmail.com to be added to my weekly email list.

*** My audio *shiurim* on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at:

<http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpvd>

*** I have posted 164 of Rabbi Soloveitchik's English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link: [The Rav](#)