

Parashat Shelach Lecha 5780, 2020:

Remembering Yetziat Mitzrayim

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yecheiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, Chaya Sarah bat Reb Yechezkel Shraga, Shmuel Yosef ben Reuven, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, Moshe ben Itta Golda, Yocheved Dafneh bat Dinah Zehavah, Reuven Shmuel ben Leah and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Our *parasha* concludes with the well-known third paragraph of *Kriat Shema* whose focus is the *mitzvah* of *Tzitzit*. Its inclusion in the *Shema* during *Tefilat Shacharit* is understandable, as the *mitzvah* of *Tzitzit* is fulfilled at this time. Its recitation during *Tefilat Arvit* (*Ma'ariv*) is somewhat difficult to understand, however, since this *mitzvah* is not obligatory at night. If so, why is this final portion of our *parasha* a constitutive element of *Kriat Shema* during both the morning and evening prayers?

This problem was addressed by the Rambam (Maimonides, 1135-1204) in *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilchot Kriat Shema* 1:3:

Although the commandment of *Tzitzit* is not practiced at night, we nonetheless recite it [that is, this section] at this time, *mipnei sh'yaish bah zichron yetziat mitzrayim* — since it contains a mention of the Departure from Egypt; u'mitzvah l'hazkir yetziat mitzrayim b'yom u'b'lailah — and there is a commandment to commemorate the Exodus during the day and at night. As the Torah states: "...in order that you will remember the day you departed from the land of Egypt all the days of your life." (*Sefer Devarim* 16:3)

There are two crucial phrases in this *halacha*: "*u'mitzvah l'hazkir yetziat mitzrayim b'yom u'b'lailah*," and "*mipnei sh'yaish bah zichron yetziat mitzrayim*." The Rambam is teaching us that there is a commandment to mention the Exodus during the day and at night based upon the verse, "...in order that you will remember the day you departed from the land of

Egypt all the days of your life.” In addition, even though the time-bound *mitzvah* of *Tzitzit* is not practiced at night, its *pasukim* from our *parasha* are recited at this time *mipnei sh'yaish bah zichron yetziat mitzrayim* — since they contain a mention of *yetziat mitzrayim*.

We are now met with a classic Rabbinic problem that was given powerful voice by the celebrated Talmudic analyst and *posek*, Rabbi Yechezkel ben Yehudah HaLevi Landau (1713-1793) in his commentary on *Talmud Bavli, Berachot* 12b:

...and so, too, in the Rambam's listing of the *Taryag Mitzvot* — 613 Commandments, he counts the *mitzvah l'saper b'yetziat mitzrayim* — to tell the story of the Departure from Egypt on the first night of Passover as Positive Commandment 157, based upon the verse, “*v'he'gaddatah l'vinchah* — and you shall tell your son.” Yet, he does not count the daily commandment of *zechirat yetziat mitzrayim* — mentioning and commemorating the Exodus — that is based upon the phrase, “in order that you will remember...” at all [in his compendium of the *Taryag Mitzvot*]. And as of this moment, I have no idea as to his [the Rambam's] rationale for this.

In essence, Rav Landau asks, “Why does the Rambam include *l'saper b'yetziat mitzrayim* on the night of Passover and exclude the daily *mitzvah* of *zechirat yetziat mitzrayim* in his listing of the 613 Commandments?” We are fortunate he provides us with his solution to this quandary:

I applied my mind to this matter and reviewed it extensively. [Following this, I realized] that he [the Rambam] was certainly correct in his underlying rationale for not counting this *mitzvah* among the *Taryag Mitzvot*, since this commandment was never stated as an imperative [but rather as a narrative statement]. If, however, the Torah would have written, “**Remember** the day [rather than ‘in order that you will remember’],” then it would have been considered a *mitzvah* in its own right... (Translations and underlining my own)

In sum Rav Landau explains that the reason why the Rambam does not count the *mitzvah* of *zechirat yetziat mitzrayim* under the rubric of the *Taryag Mitzvot* is based on its wording, namely, as a narrative rather than an imperative formulation.

A different approach to Rav Landau's quandary was offered by my *rebbe* and mentor, Rabbi

Joseph B. Soloveitchik *zatzal* (1903-1993) in his work, *Shiurim Lezecher Abba Mori* (Vol. 1, pp. 1-7). Therein he cites his grandfather, Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik *zatzal* (1853-1918), who provides a conceptual framework as to why the Rambam does not include the *mitzvah* of *zechirat yetziat mitzrayim* in his compendium of the *Taryag Mitzvot*:

Rav Chaim Soloveitchik explained that remembering the Exodus is not a distinct *mitzvah* but rather forms part of the broader *mitzvah* of [*kabbalat ol malchut Shamayim*] accepting the yoke of heaven: G-d took us out of Egypt for the sole purpose of being our G-d. Thus, remembering the Exodus is included in the *mitzvah* of *Kerias Shema*, which is fundamentally an obligation to accept the yoke of heaven. (Translation, *Chumash Mesoras HaRav, Sefer Bamidbar*, page 127, underlining and brackets my own)

Both Rav Chaim and the Rav maintain that the *mitzvah* of *zechirat yetziat mitzrayim* is not listed in the Rambam's 613 Commandments because it "is not a distinct *mitzvah* but rather forms part of the broader *mitzvah* of accepting the yoke of heaven." In other words, it is a subset of *kabbalat ol malchut Shamayim*, and, therefore, cannot be counted as a separate *mitzvah* among the *Taryag Commandments*.

The Rav pointed out on numerous occasions that the inclusion or exclusion of a *mitzvah* as one of the *Taryag Mitzvot* was never a determinant of its actual import. In point of fact, all *mitzvot* are equally binding and have the same significance, regardless as to the conceptual category in which they may be placed. This is particularly of the moment since the Rambam and the Ramban, among others, disagree time and time again as to which *mitzvah* ought to be counted within the 613 Commandments. What is crucial is for us to recognize that all *mitzvot* are the words of the one and only *Elokim chayim* and, for this alone, we must ever strive to fulfill them. With the Almighty's help may this be so. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom and may Hashem in His great mercy remove the *magafah* from *klal Yisrael*

and from all the nations of the world.

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>
They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org> using the search criteria Etengoff and the *parasha*'s name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

*** My audio *shiurim* on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at:
<http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpyd>

*** 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.