

THE MITZVAH OF HAGGADAH

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I

TWO OBLIGATIONS OF HAGGADAH

There is a Mitzvah in the Torah to relate the story of the Exodus from Egypt on Pessah. Rambam's formula in describing this Mitzvah is as follows:

"It is a Positive Commandment in the Torah to relate the miracles and wonders that were done for our fathers in Egypt on the fifteenth night of Nissan (Pessah night)...It is a Mitzvah to inform the children..." (MT Hametz uMatza 7:1-2)

Rambam here describes two different Mitzvot:

1. *To tell the story among the adults (who, we assume, already know it) and*
2. *to inform the children (who don't know it yet.)*

Nevertheless, Rambam reckons these two acts as one Mitzvah. It seems that Rambam feels that relating the story and informing the children about it are part of one basic Mitzvah. This is anomalous, as it subsumes education and informed discussion under one heading. This is comparable to including a discussion between Nobel Prize-winning scientists and an eighth grade science class in one category: "Talking About Science." This is, clearly, an unacceptable grouping; in an eighth grade science class, the teacher is informed and the student is not. It is her job to pass on her knowledge to the students; they are the "receivers" and she is the "transmitter." Conversely, the Nobel laureates are all well-versed in the specific area they are discussing; they are exchanging ideas in an academic format. Rambam's categorization needs clarification.

II

THE MISSING B'RAKHAH

The Mitzvah of relating the Exodus has another enigma built in to its structure, as follows. In the structure of blessings ordained by Hazal, there are three kinds of Berakhot:

3. **Birkot haNehenin:** Berakhot we make before eating or drinking.
4. **Birkot haShevach:** Berakhot we recite when we want to thank God (e.g. **Shehechyanu**) or praise Him for something we have enjoyed (e.g. Birkat haMazon).
5. **Birkot haMitzvot:** Berakhot recited before performing Mitzvot. We recite these Berakhot to designate the act we are about to do as a fulfillment of God's will.

Before we eat Matza, we recite **...asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav vetzivanu al akhilat Matzah** - blessing God who has made us holy through His Mitzvot and commanded us to eat Matzah. This formula applies to many Mitzvot, like shaking the Lulav, hearing the Shofar, lighting Shabbat and Hanukka candles, etc. Now, since telling the story of the Exodus is a Mitzvah in the Torah (mentioned six times!), you would think that we would say a Berakhah: **...asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav vetzivanu al hahagadah** - blessing God who has made us holy through His Mitzvot and commanded us to tell the story. There is no such Berakhah, and none is recited at the Seder prior to telling the story. There are several explanations for this deviation, I would like to suggest three in this shiur.

III

A: HAGGADAH AND TALMUD TORAH

One way of understanding the Mitzvah of telling the story on Pessah is related to the Mitzvah of studying Torah. Every Jew is obligated to study Torah day and night. That study can focus on the laws of returning lost items, Ramban's commentary on Bereshit, or the order of the blessings in the Amidah. On Seder night, the Mitzvah of studying Torah which devolves upon every Jew but can be fulfilled by studying any part of Torah, has a hook in it. "Tonight," the Law says, "the only Torah with which you can fulfill the Mitzvah is Torah which is about the Exodus. Tonight you will not study the laws of prayer, or the philosophy of Job, or the sweet Psalms of David; tonight you will read the book of Shemot and the Rabbinic explanations, commentaries and legends associated with the Exodus." In other words, on Seder night, the Mitzvah of Talmud Torah has strictly defined parameters.

Once we accept this categorization, it is clear why we don't recite a Berakhah before telling the story. Since it is part of the Mitzvah of Talmud Torah, and we've already studied Torah that day, we've also recited the blessing: **...asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu la'asok b'divrei Torah** - blessing God who has made us holy through His Mitzvot and commanded us to be involved in the study of Torah. The Mitzvah of telling the story has been preceded with a blessing; earlier in the day when we studied Torah that morning. Since we've subsumed Haggadah under Talmud Torah, any definition of the Mitzvah of studying Torah will, ipso facto, define the Mitzvah of Haggadah (relating the story).

TWO TYPES OF TALMUD TORAH

The Mitzvah of Talmud Torah is mentioned in the Torah twice, in two slightly different ways:

*...teach them (the words of Torah) to your children and speak of them...(Devarim 6:7) and
...teach them (the words of Torah) to your children that they will speak of them (ibid 11:19).*

The difference here is clear: In the first command, we are told to do two separate things: to teach and to study Torah. In the second command, the two become one: we teach our children **that they may study**.

THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

This dualistic command underscores the Torah's philosophy about education. Education is for everyone: no one is so well-informed that they can stop studying the Torah. We teach so that our students will know how to study; but we also teach because that keeps us studying. A successful teacher is an eternal student. To reach growing minds, we have to keep ours nurtured and flexible. That's why the Mitzvah of Talmud Torah includes teaching and studying. They are inseparable; indeed, they are mutually dependent.

Now we look at Rambam's formula and everything is clear.

*It is a Mitzvah to relate...
it is a Mitzvah to inform...*

The value of discussion, even among the "well-informed", lies in the possibilities for new information to be unearthed. Our Rabbis said: "There can be no session of the House of Study without some new teaching." (BT Hagigah 3a) Conversely, our aim in teaching is not only to give you information or even the skills to obtain further information on your own. Our ultimate goal is to give our students Ahavat Torah - a Love for Torah so strong that the student will never stop studying her ways. The student who is a recipient of Torah from his teachers, is soon in a position to share it with others. In order to do that, the student must remain just that: a student of the Torah. Successful education depends on the cultivation of two great loves: a love for the subject and a love for the students. Ahavat Torah and Ahavat Yisra'el: A love for Torah and a love for the Jewish people.

IV

B: HAGGADAH AND K'RIAT SH'MA

BACK TO THE RAMBAM

Let's revisit Rambam's formulation and add a few questions to those we raised before:

It is a Mitzvat Aseh from the Torah to relate the miracles and wonders which were done for our forefathers in Egypt on the fifteenth of Nissan; as it says: 'Remember this day in which you left Egypt'(Shemot 13:3) just as it says: 'Remember the day of Shabbat.' (ibid 20:8)...It is a Mitzvah to inform the children, even if they don't inquire; as it says: 'Tell your son'... (MT Hametz uMatza 7:1-2)

Rambam's formula here raises several questions. One of them was asked above: Why does Rambam include the educational Mitzvah ("Inform the children") and the discussive Mitzvah ("...relate the miracles") under one rubric. In the previous section, I answered that there is a mutual interdependence between informed discussion and novel study; that, given the right circumstances, even the most informed member of the Academy can learn from a discussion. There are other questions to be raised here:

6. Why does Rambam quote the verse **Remember...** as the primary source for the Mitzvah of Haggadah? In the Haggadah itself, quoting the Mekilta, the major source utilized is the phrase **Tell your son...** which Rambam uses in secondary role.
7. Why does Rambam compare the **Remember** of the Exodus to the **Remember** of Shabbat? Isn't it enough to quote the verse to demonstrate that it is a Mitzvah in the Torah to remember the Exodus?
8. A question which is extrinsic to Rambam's formula, and which was also asked last week, relates to the Mitzvah-accouterments of Haggadah. Since relating the story of the Exodus is a Mitzvah in the Torah, why do we not recite a B'rakhah beforehand, as we do for many of the Mitzvot? (see Teshuvot Rashba #18)

A WEAKNESS IN THE "HAGGADAH-AS-TALMUD-TORAH" ARGUMENT

Let us try to clarify the nature of the Mitzvah of Haggadah. Above, I suggested that Haggadah is a redefinition of the Mitzvah of Talmud Torah: to wit, for this night, all Talmud Torah must focus on Pessah-related issues. I am not suggesting that one does not fulfill the Mitzvah of Talmud Torah by studying Massekhet Bava Metzia or Sefer Iyyov on Seder night; rather, the Torah establishes the ideal format for study for this night. This theory, while answering the question of the lack-of-B'rakhah before the Mitzvah, is weak for the following reasons: There are other times during which certain areas of study are prescribed, such as within 30 days prior to any major festival; nevertheless, this study is not considered a separate Mitzvah. At best, it can be considered a dovetailing of the Mitzvot of Talmud Torah and (by way of example) Sukkah. Furthermore, if Haggadah were only a subset of the Mitzvah of Talmud Torah, women would be exempted from the obligation. There is no explicit source to that effect, and we regard women as equally obligated in all Mitzvot of the Seder (except,

perhaps, Hasseba [reclining]).

HAGGADAH & K'RIAT SH'MA

An alternative approach is suggested in the Haggadah itself:

There was a story concerning R. Elazar, R. Yehoshua, R. Akiva, R. Tarfon and R. Elazar b. Azariah. They were reclining in B'nei B'rak and were recounting the story of the Exodus that entire night until their students came and proclaimed:

Masters, it is time for the morning reading of the Sh'ma.

One might ask, of what relevance is the time for the morning Sh'ma to the discussion of the Exodus? One possible answer is based upon the theory of the Ba'al haMa'or (R. Zerahia haLevi; 12th century Provence). The Ba'al haMa'or is of the opinion that the time parameters for the night and morning readings of the Sh'ma boundary each other; i.e., at the point at which night is over, morning begins. Therefore, once it is time to read the morning Sh'ma, the time for the night Sh'ma is finished. The relevance will become clear immediately.

REMEMBERING THE EXODUS EVERY DAY AND NIGHT

There is a Mitzvah in the Torah, to remember the Exodus every day and every night. The disagreement between R. Elazar b. Azariah and the Sages (Mishna Berakhot 1:5) about the commemoration every night is recorded in the Haggadah. As we have already entertained the notion of Haggadah as a redefinition of a pre-existent Mitzvah, let us apply that notion here. Theory:

Haggadah is a redefinition of the Mitzvah of remembering the Exodus every night. Whereas, on every other night, we can fulfill the Mitzvah with one verse from the Torah, tonight it is extended to the entire night.

Since the nightly (and daily) Mitzvah of Exodus-commemoration is defined, temporally, by the Sh'ma; it follows that the extended Mitzvah on Seder night is also defined by the Sh'ma. Hence, if the time for the morning Sh'ma has arrived, the time for the night Sh'ma, and the time for the extended commemoration of the Exodus, has passed. This explains why the students halted their masters' discussion of the Exodus with the phrase: "Masters, it is time for the morning reading of the Sh'ma."

This also explains the inclusion of the story with the five Sages in B'nei B'rak and the disagreement between R. Elazar b. Azaria and the Sages in the Haggadah. They are both included, as a preface to the Maggid, to help us understand the nature of the Mitzvah we are about to fulfill.

Utilizing this theory, we can answer why there is no B'rakhah recited over the Mitzvah of Haggadah: Since Haggadah is an extension of another Mitzvah, whatever B'rakhah we recite for that Mitzvah

should suffice. Since we say the Sh'ma in Ma'ariv, and it is prefaced by the Ahavat Olam, it is preceded by a B'rakhah. This theory is only valid according to those Rishonim who maintain, like Ramban (Hiddushei Ramban al HaShas, Berakhot ch. 3 s.v. *K'var haya minhag*) and some of the Ge'onim (R. Amram Ga'on, quoted in Rosh, Berakhot 1:1) that the B'rakhah before the Sh'ma functions as a Birkat haMitzvah. According to Rambam, Rashba, Tosafot and many others, Sh'ma does not need a B'rakhah recited beforehand, as will be explained in the next two pages. Following our theory, if the Sh'ma does not require a B'rakhah, neither does Haggadah.

V

C: HAGGADAH AS AN "OBJECT-INDEPENDENT" MITZVAH

RAMBAM'S EQUATION BETWEEN BIRKOT HANEHENIN AND BIRKOT HAMITZVOT

Just as we recite a blessing over pleasurable items, so we recite a blessing over each Mitzvah and then we perform it. (MT Berakhot 1:3)

Rabbi Soloveitchik zt"l raised the following challenge to this formulation of Rambam: How can Rambam compare ("Just as..") the function of blessings recited before eating and drinking to that of blessings recited before doing Mitzvot? The Gemara (BT Berakhot 35a-b) indicates that the blessing recited before eating is a form of gaining permission to benefit from God's world. Contradistinctively, the blessing recited before performing a Mitzvah would seem to be a form of praise and thanks to God for the opportunity to serve Him. The Rov answered that there is a different function to the blessings before Mitzvot; they also serve as a "permit", as will be explained further on.

USING OBJECTS FOR MITZVOT

There is a basic problem inherent in many Mitzvot. How can we utilize physical objects for a spiritual purpose?

The heavens are God's and the earth He gave to Man. (Psalms 24:1)

That which belongs to the world of the spirit stays spiritual, and that which belongs to the material world stays material. How can we possibly raise a palm branch, light an oil lamp or eat an unleavened cracker and maintain that we are, fundamentally, performing a religious/spiritual act?

The answer is as clear as the question: The same God who created the realms of spirituality and materialism and who decreed that the twain shall not meet nor cross; the same God who set up the

obstacle required Man to overcome them. "God required a dwelling-place for Himself among the lowly worlds" (Midrash Tanhuma, Parashat Naso 16) is one Midrashic explanation for the Creation. God set up "higher" and "lower" worlds and gave Man the key to-and the job of opening-the door that connects them.

To that end, He gave us the Torah which is replete with commands oriented to a physical existence. The charge is repeated: "Be holy, for I am Holy." God adjures us to take our physical existence and sanctify it by emulating the Spiritual. This is, clearly, a thin line to walk. How does one bring his dirty clothes into the Palace without soiling the royal rug? How can man carry his physical needs, desires and objects into the Presence of the King without defiling that Presence? Ever aware of that danger, the Rabbis instituted the consciousness-raising practice of reciting a blessing before performing a Mitzvah involving a physical object.

BIRKAT HAMITZVOT AS A "MATIR" FOR THE MITZVAH

Rambam's formula is now understood; just as the blessing over food functions as a "permit" to enjoy God's world and to use it for our own pleasure, so the blessing recited before performing a Mitzvah "permits" us to use His physical creations to approach His Presence and do His Will.

OBJECT-DEPENDENT AND OBJECT-INDEPENDENT MITZVOT

There are, essentially two types of Positive Mitzvot. Many Mitzvot require the use of a physical object to perform them. By way of example, eating Matza is a Mitzvah that cannot possibly be fulfilled without the physical Matza. Conversely, there are Mitzvot that are independent of any object. A prime example is the Mitzvah of Prayer. Prayer involves the soul, the heart and the mind.

This distinction is also found in various types of commemoration found in the Torah.

Write this for a Zikaron (commemoration) in a scroll (Shemot 17:14).

It is from this verse that the Halakhic requirement of remembering Amalek in a formalized reading from the Torah is derived (see also BT Megilla 18a). The scroll of the Torah is a physical object which has Halakhically acceptable parameters which define its validity. On the other hand, the Mitzvah of Kiddush on Shabbat is another commemoration:

Zakhor (remember) the day of Shabbat... (Shemot 20:8)

This commemoration exists independently of any physical object: the Mitzvah is to mention the sanctity of Shabbat on Shabbat. (MT Shabbat 29:1; this is, of course, only the fundamental Mitzva. The Rabbis, in order to enhance the Mitzva, determined that it be recited over a cup of wine.)

Following our explanation of the function of blessings before doing Mitzvot, it is reasonable that only those Mitzvot which depend upon a physical object require a blessing. A quick review of those

Mitzvot which require a blessing and those which don't will bear this out. (There are several apparent exceptions, such as Sefirat Ha'Omer and Hallel. A full treatment of these exceptions is beyond the scope of this shiur)

There are two perspectives to the Mitzvah of Haggadah. The one, with which we are all familiar, is mentioned in the Torah four times-educate the children, each according to his own ability. There is, however, a more basic Mitzvah which de-circumstancifies the requirement of Haggadah:

Zakhor (remember) this day... (Shemot 13:3)

Rambam introduced the Mitzvah with this verse because it serves as a more general definition of the Mitzvah. Rambam is, however, bothered by the word **Zakhor**. Is it the **Zakhor** of Amalek, surely an enemy in the spirit of Pharaoh? Or is it the **Zakhor** of Shabbat, as valuable a celebration of the Creator as is Pessah? Where the Gemara states: *One must mention the Exodus during the Kiddush* (BT Pesachim 117b) and compares the common **Zakhor** to support this Halakha, Rambam finds his answer.

All is now clear. Rambam is not satisfied with the quote: **Zakhor** this day because it is unclear which kind of Zekhirah is intended. Therefore, he compares this Zekhirah to the classic Zekhirah which is not object-dependent. Ergo, no blessing is recited before performing this Mitzvah. It is possible that the objects which are part of the Mitzvah (Pessah, Matza and Maror) are really part of the educational aspect. Quite a few apparent inconsistencies in the Haggadah become clear with proper application of this distinction.