



*Zekhirat Yetzi'at Mitzrayim* – the Daily Remembrance of the Exodus  
By David Silverberg

The final section of Parashat Re'ei (16:1-17) discusses the three pilgrimage festivals (Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot) and several of the laws that apply on these occasions. Though the laws presented here by and large relate specifically to these special occasions, we find one verse that appears to extend the theme of one of the festivals to the entire year. In the context of the laws of Pesach, the Torah writes, "You shall not eat leaven with it [the paschal offering]; for seven days you shall eat with it matza, the bread of poverty, for you departed Egypt hurriedly – so that you will remember the day when you left Egypt all the days of your life" (16:3). The observance of the Pesach rituals is intended to engrave upon our hearts and minds the event of the Exodus, so that its memory remains with us "all the days of your life." Not only on Pesach must a Jew recall the Exodus; he must bring it to mind each day of his life.

Accordingly, a famous Mishna in Masekhet Berakhot (12b), which appears as well in the Pesach Haggadah, cites this verse in the context of the obligation of *zekhirat yetziat Mitzrayim*, to verbally recall the Exodus each day. The Mishna discusses the obligation of the daily *shema* recitation, particularly the third paragraph ("Vayomer" – Bamidbar 15:37-41), which concludes with the verse, "I am the Lord your God who has taken you from Egypt to be for you a God; I am the Lord your God." The recitation of this third paragraph of *shema* fulfills the obligation to recall the Exodus each day, as it briefly mentions this event in its concluding verse. The Mishna records a debate as to whether we may deduce from the verse's emphasis on recalling the Exodus "all the days of your life" that the obligation applies even at nighttime, in addition to the daytime. Of course, normative Halakha accepts the position that the recitation of this third paragraph of *shema* must be conducted even during the evening prayer service, as the *zekhirat yetziat Mitzrayim* obligation obtains even at night.

Maimonides' view concerning the precise definition and classification of this *mitzva* has generated a vast literature over the centuries of halakhic scholarship. Towards the beginning of Hilkhot Keri'at Shema ("Laws of the *Shema* Recitation" – 1:3), Maimonides explicitly codifies the obligation of *zekhirat yetziat Mitzrayim* and appears to cite the aforementioned verse from Parashat Re'ei as its Biblical source: "It is a *mitzva* to mention the Exodus by day and by night, as it says, 'so that you will remember the day when you left Egypt all the days of your life'." Seemingly, then, Maimonides, following the straightforward implication of the Mishna in Berakhot, viewed *zekhirat yetziat Mitzrayim* as a Biblical imperative. Yet, this obligation earns no mention in Maimonides' *Sefer Ha-mitzvot*, where he lists the Torah's 613 commandments. Why didn't Maimonides assign in this work an entry for *zekhirat yetziat Mitzrayim*?

As mentioned, an entire literature has emerged addressing Maimonides' perspective on this obligation. Generally speaking, the answers that have been suggested fall into two basic categories. Some scholars argued that *zekhirat yetziat Mitzrayim* lacks the necessary credentials for inclusion in Maimonides' listing of the commandments. Maimonides introduces *Sefer Ha-mitzvot* with a list of fourteen guidelines on the basis of which he arrived at his enumeration of the *mitzvot*. Thus, some writers have suggested that the obligation of *zekhirat yetziat Mitzrayim* might not meet all fourteen criteria, for various reasons, and was therefore omitted from *Sefer Ha-mitzvot*. The second general approach argues that *zekhirat Yetziat Mitzrayim* does not warrant an independent entry in Maimonides' list because it is subsumed under a different entry. In the view of these scholars, this obligation constitutes but a component of some other *mitzva*, and Maimonides therefore did not assign it a separate

entry. Needless to say, these different approaches will yield important ramifications concerning the essential nature and definition of the *zekhirat yetziat Mitzrayim* obligation.

We will present here six approaches taken by different scholars in attempting to explain Maimonides' position. The first four suggest various features of *zekhirat yetziat Mitzrayim* that violate one or more of Maimonides' fourteen criteria, whereas the final two classify this obligation together with a different *mitzva*, thus rendering it undeserving of an independent entry in *Sefer Ha-mitzvot*.

## 1) A Rabbinic Obligation

The late Rabbi Yosef Kapach, in his annotation to *Mishneh Torah*, contends that Maimonides relegated *zekhirat yetziat Mitzrayim* to the status of a *mitzva mi-de-rabbanan*, an obligation mandated by *Chazal*, rather than by the Torah itself. The very first principle formulated by Maimonides for determining the 613 commandments dictates that this list includes only laws that originated from the Torah. Provisions and obligations enacted by the Sages must not be equated with Torah law, and therefore remain outside the framework of the *taryag mitzvot* (613 commandments).

Rabbi Kapach arrives at this otherwise startling conclusion based on a careful reading of Maimonides' commentary to the aforementioned Mishna in Berakhot. The Mishna records the following statement of Rabbi Elazar Ben Azarya:

Here, I am around seventy years old, and I did not have the privilege of reciting the Exodus [the final paragraph of *shema*] until Ben Zoma expounded upon it [as follows]: "so that you will remember the day when you left Egypt all the days of your life" – "the days of your life" refers to the days; "all the days of your life" refers to the nights.

Rabbi Elazar here expresses his frustration over having been unaware that the obligation to recall the Exodus applies even at nighttime, until he heard Ben Zoma deduce this extension from the phrase "all the days of your life." Maimonides, in his commentary to this Mishna, explains Rabbi Elazar's remarks to mean, "I was not privileged to know the allusion in the Scripture to the obligation of reciting the section of *tzitzit* [the third paragraph of *shema*] at night." Maimonides speaks of Ben Zoma's inference from the verse as an "allusion" ("*remez*"). Generally, this term is used in reference to an *asmakhta* – a secondary reading of a verse whereby it subtly alludes to a law enacted much later, by *Chazal*. Seemingly, then, the Torah itself does not obligate an individual to recall the Exodus each day; it was the Sages who enacted this obligation, and merely found a subtle hint in the Biblical text to their enactment.

Of course, one might counter that Maimonides' understanding of Ben Zoma's inference need not reflect his approach to the entire institution of *zekhirat yetziat Mitzrayim*. Even if, indeed, the obligation to recall the Exodus during the evening hours originates from rabbinic enactment, and not from the Torah itself, the essential obligation of *zekhirat yetziat Mitzrayim* may very well constitute a Biblical imperative. What more, as cited above, Maimonides explicitly invokes this verse in the context of this obligation: "It is a *mitzva* to mention the Exodus by day and by night, as it says, 'so that you will remember the day when you left Egypt all the days of your life.'" If this verse constitutes but an *asmakhta* – a hint discovered by the Sages for a law they enacted – Maimonides would seemingly have no reason to cite this verse in codifying this obligation. It would thus appear that Maimonides indeed viewed *zekhirat yetziat Mitzrayim* as a Torah obligation, as the straightforward reading of the Mishna in Berakhot indicates.

## 2) The Formalization of a Torah Ideal

In a slightly different vein, other writers claimed that *zekhirat yetziat Mitzrayim* constitutes a Torah ideal which *Chazal* formalized into the context of a specific obligation. Rabbi Meir Simcha Ha-kohen of Dvinsk, Lithuania, in his work on *Mishneh Torah* entitled *Or Samei'ach*, noted that in the verse in

Parashat Re'ei cited in the Mishna and by Maimonides, the Torah does not issue a direct command to recall the Exodus. It rather points to this concern – that this momentous event would remain etched in our memories for all time – as the basis for the Pesach rituals. Thus, the *Or Samei'ach* writes, the Torah does not specifically obligate daily recollection of the Exodus, but clearly casts it as a desired ideal. There are certain overarching ideals that encompass the totality of the religious consciousness and experience envisioned by the Torah, which cannot be thrust into the narrow framework of a single *mitzva*. (Several weeks ago, we saw that some scholars invoked this notion to justify Maimonides' omission of residence in *Eretz Yisrael* from his listing of the commandments.) The Sages, however, in an effort to ensure our pursuit and implementation of these ideals, introduced specific contexts for the practical observance of these Torah values. One example that comes to mind is Maimonides' presentation of the specific obligations involving *chesed* (kindness), such as visiting the ill, caring for the dead, and celebrating with a bride and groom. Maimonides writes (Hilkhot Avel 14:1) that all these acts of kindness fulfill the Biblical imperative to "love your fellow as yourself," but the specific obligations were instituted by *Chazal*.

Similarly, the *Or Samei'ach* contends, *zekhirat yetzi'at Mitzrayim* indeed exists on the level of Torah law, but as a broad, overarching ideal, rather than a specific imperative. It was the Sages who later formalized this ideal in the framework of a particular obligation. Maimonides therefore does not list this requirement among the 613 Biblical obligations, since the Torah presents it as a general ideal, rather than a specific obligation. (Rabbi Nachum Rabinovitch, in his *Yad Peshuta* commentary to *Mishneh Torah*, explains along similar lines.)

### 3) Verbal and Mental Recollection

Rabbi Yosef Te'omim, author of the famous halakhic work *Peri Megadim*, postulates a much different, and somewhat questionable, theory to explain Maimonides' position. (This appears in the general introduction to the *Peri Megadim*, in the section dealing with the laws of *shema*.) He addresses the question raised by many writers concerning the relationship between the daily obligation of *zekhirat yetzi'at Mitzrayim*, and the annual *sippur yetzi'at Mitzrayim* conducted on Pesach. As we know, we are enjoined to tell the story of the Exodus each year on the first night of the Pesach festival (and, in the Diaspora, on the second night, as well). But if the obligation of *zekhirat yetzi'at Mitzrayim* already demands recalling this event each day and night, why must the Torah introduce a separate requirement to discuss the Exodus on Pesach night?

According to the *Peri Megadim*, the daily remembrance of the Exodus, unlike the unique obligation that applies on Pesach, does not demand verbal recollection. Although *Chazal* established the verbal recitation of the third paragraph of *shema* as the means for fulfilling the daily obligation, technically speaking, one satisfies the Torah requirement through mere mental contemplation. As far as the Torah obligation of *zekhirat yetzi'at Mitzrayim* is concerned, our nation's departure from Egypt must enter one's mind at some point by day and by night. Since this obligation imposes no concrete demand, requiring in but a general sense that one bring the Exodus to mind, Maimonides felt it did not earn entry in his listing of the commandments. The obligation of *sippur yetzi'at Mitzrayim*, by contrast, which demands verbal recollection on Pesach night, is, indeed, included in Maimonides' listing of the *mitzvot* (*mitzvat ase* 157).

One may challenge the *Peri Megadim*'s theory on two counts. For one thing, as the *Peri Megadim* himself asks, Maimonides indeed includes in his list a number of *mitzvot* that one fulfills silently, such as belief in the Creator, the love of God, and fear of God. It thus stands to reason that the absence of a verbal obligation should not prevent the inclusion of *zekhirat yetzi'at Mitzrayim* from Maimonides' *Sefer Ha-mitzvot*. Secondly, it is far from simple that one can satisfy the Torah obligation of *zekhirat yetzi'at Mitzrayim* through mere mental contemplation. Indeed, the classic halakhic work *Sha'agat Aryeh* (chapter 13) writes explicitly that this obligation in fact requires verbalization, and simply thinking about the Exodus does not suffice.

#### 4) A “Temporary” Obligation

As we cited earlier, the Mishna in Berakhot cites Ben Zoma’s inference from the verse’s emphatic phraseology – “**all** the days of your life” – that one must recall the Exodus both by day and by night. But the Mishna then proceeds to cite utilize the otherwise superfluous word “all” to arrive at a different conclusion. According to the *Chakhamim*, the Torah’s emphasis here alludes to the application of *zekhirat yetziat Mitzrayim* even in the Messianic era. By stressing the need to recall the Exodus “all the days of your life,” the Torah indicates that this obligation will remain in force even after the arrival of Mashiach.

It emerges, then, that Ben Zoma, who interprets “all” as extending the obligation to the nighttime hours, rather than to the Messianic era, denies the relevance of *zekhirat yetziat Mitzrayim* after Mashiach’s arrival. Indeed, the Gemara records an exchange between Ben Zoma and his colleagues, wherein Ben Zoma cites a prophecy of Yirmiyahu (23:7-8) foreseeing the time when Israel will no longer recall the Exodus from Egypt, as their focus will shift onto the wonders of the final redemption. According to Ben Zoma, then, the *mitzva* of *zekhirat yetziat Mitzrayim* has a limited timeframe, remaining in effect only until the onset of the Messianic era.

Rabbi Chayim Soloveitchik of Brisk (as cited by his grandson, Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, in a lecture transcribed in the first volume of *Shiurim Le-zekher Abba Mari z”l*) suggested that for this reason Maimonides omitted *zekhirat yetziat Mitzrayim* from his list of 613 commandments. Maimonides asserts as the third of his fourteen guidelines for counting the 613 commandments that temporarily binding provisions must not be included in this list. Now Maimonides explicitly rules that one must recall the Exodus both by day and by night, in accordance with Ben Zoma’s position. By extension, then, he must accept the corollary to Ben Zoma’s view, namely, that the obligation will cease to apply with the arrival of Mashiach. Therefore, since the obligation to recall the Exodus does not obtain for all time, it does not satisfy the criteria for inclusion in *Sefer Ha-mitzvot*.

It should be noted, however, that Rabbi Soloveitchik’s analysis is predicated upon a questionable assumption regarding Ben Zoma’s position. It presumes that according to Ben Zoma, the obligation to recall the Exodus will be void in the Messianic era, and not merely modified. One might argue that Ben Zoma defined *zekhirat yetziat Mitzrayim* in more general terms, as an obligation to recall the most recent redemption from exile. For the time being, this demands recalling the Exodus from Egypt, but once Mashiach arrives, this *mitzva* will entail the daily remembrance of that redemption. If this is the case, then even Ben Zoma perceived *zekhirat yetziat Mitzrayim* as an eternally binding obligation. It will remain in effect even after Israel’s final redemption, and only its practical observance will change in accordance with the *mitzva*’s definition, which requires recalling the most recent liberation of the Jewish people.

#### 5) Combining *Zekhira* and *Sippur*

As we discussed in our introductory remarks, some scholars suggested that Maimonides combined the obligation of *zekhirat yetziat Mitzrayim* with another *mitzva*, such that it did not earn a separate entry in *Sefer Ha-mitzvot*. Rabbi Yitzchak of Karlin (early 19<sup>th</sup> century), in his celebrated work on the Talmud, *Keren Ora*, suggests that *zekhirat yetziat Mitzrayim* essentially constitutes a component of the *mitzva* of *sippur yetziat Mitzrayim* – to discuss the Exodus on Pesach. In other words, the Torah sought to ensure the eternal memory of this event, and to that end established that it be discussed in elaborate form on Pesach eve, and mentioned very briefly on a daily basis. Though practically these two components differ significantly from one another, as the Pesach obligation of *sippur* entails much more intensive involvement in the Exodus story, they together comprise a single *mitzva*, which demands remembering the Exodus. Naturally, then, Maimonides did assign a separate entry to *zekhirat yetziat Mitzrayim* in his listing of the commandments, as this obligation is already included in the *mitzva* of *sippur yetziat Mitzrayim*.

One might draw support for the *Keren Ora*'s theory from Maimonides' text of the Passover Haggadah, which he includes in his *Mishneh Torah* (in Hilkhos Chametz U-matza). As noted earlier, this Mishna is cited verbatim in the Passover Haggadah. Maimonides, however, in his text of the Haggadah, adds a single word towards the beginning of this passage which sheds new light on the context of Rabbi Elazar's comment towards the beginning of the Mishna. In prevalent editions of the Haggadah, this passage begins, "*Amar Rabbi Elazar Ben Azarya*" – "Rabbi Elazar Ben Azarya said..." Maimonides, however, writes, "*Amar lahem Rabbi Elazar Ben Azarya*" – "Rabbi Elazar Ben Azarya said **to them**..." It seems clear that Maimonides understood this passage as a continuation of the immediately preceding section of the Haggadah, which told of five scholars assembled in Bnei-Brak – one of whom was Rabbi Elazar Ben Azarya – who spent the entire first night of Passover telling about the Exodus. Evidently, according to Maimonides, it was during that momentous evening that Rabbi Elazar turned to his colleagues and expressed his thoughts regarding the issue of mentioning the Exodus at night.

What is significant about Maimonides' text is that it suggests a close relationship between the two *mitzvot* of *zekhira* and *sippur* – the daily mention of the Exodus, and the more elaborate discussion required on Pesach. It stands to reason that the Haggadah tells of the sages' nightlong seder to demonstrate the value in prolonging one's study of the Exodus on Pesach night. (Indeed, just prior to this narrative, the Haggadah asserts that "whoever elaborates in telling about the Exodus is praiseworthy." Presumably, the account of the nightlong seder is added to exemplify the desired "elaboration.") As we prepare to begin telling the story of the Exodus, we are given a sense of how much there is to tell, as evidenced by the five rabbis who would have continued into the morning hours had their students not interrupted them at dawn. Interestingly enough, during this nightlong involvement in *sippur yetziat Mitzrayim*, these scholars found it appropriate to discuss as well the laws of the daily *zekhirat yetziat Mitzrayim*. Why would they disrupt their engagement in the obligation of *sippur* to analyze the laws of an entirely different *mitzva*? Possibly, they spent time during this night discussing *zekhira* because, as the *Keren Ora* contended, it is essentially part of the same *mitzva* as *sippur*. Once we accept the premise that *zekhira* and *sippur* constitute two components of a single obligation, we can more readily understand why, according to Maimonides, these sages included a discussion about *zekhirat yetziat Mitzrayim* amidst their fulfillment of *sippur yetziat Mitzrayim*.

## 6) *Kabbalat Ol Malkhut Shamayim*

Finally, Rabbi Chayim Soloveitchik of Brisk suggested (in addition to the approach we cited earlier in his name) that the *zekhirat yetziat Mitzrayim* obligation is a component of the *mitzva* to recite the *shema* prayer. It is commonly understood that the *shema* recitation constitutes a declaration of *kabbalat ol malkhut Shamayim* – the formal acceptance of divine kingship. The first paragraph discusses the basic belief in God's existence and singularity, whereas the second affirms the doctrine of reward and punishment, an indispensable element of accepting God's authority. According to Rabbi Chayim Soloveitchik, the process of *kabbalat ol malkhut Shamayim* is not complete without bringing to mind our deliverance from Egypt through divine intervention.

This understanding of the *zekhirat yetziat Mitzrayim* obligation helps explain a basic anomaly regarding the *shema* recitation. Whenever we speak of *shema*, we refer to all three paragraphs, and in our prayer service the three are invariably recited together. At first glance, there seems to be little reason to conceptually associate the third paragraph with the first two. After all, the first two relate to *kabbalat ol malkhut Shamayim*, whereas the third serves to fulfill the separate obligation of *zekhirat yetziat Mitzrayim*. The fact that the three are always seen together as part of a single halakhic unit quite convincingly points us in the direction of Rabbi Chayim Soloveitchik's theory, namely, that *zekhirat yetziat Mitzrayim* essentially involves *kabbalat ol malkhut Shamayim*.

In fact, Maimonides' formulation of the *shema* obligation strongly suggests a fundamental relationship between all three paragraphs: "The recitation of these three sections in proper sequence is what is called 'the *shema* recitation'" (Hilkhos Keri'at Shema 1:3). It appears that the three paragraphs

all combine into the fulfillment of a single *mitzva*, a combination that becomes readily understandable in light of Rabbi Chayim Soloveitchik's contention.

Of course, this theory calls upon us to explain more fully how and why recalling the Exodus constitutes a necessary stage in the daily process of *kabbalat ol malkhut Shamayim*. Why must the memory of this event accompany our formal declaration of submission to divine authority?

The answer, perhaps, emerges from a passage in the *Mekhilta* (Parashat Yitro), commenting on the first of the Ten Commandments: "I am the Lord your God who took you from the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage." The *Mekhilta* explains this verse as a necessary preamble, so-to-speak, to the commandments. In this declaration God essentially affirms, "I am the One whose kingship you accepted in Egypt." Only once this has been confirmed, that *Benei Yisrael* had submitted to divine authority, could the Almighty then proceed to present His commands. It thus emerges that it was at the Exodus when *Benei Yisrael* for the first time as a nation formally accepted divine kingship and took upon themselves the yoke of God's rule. The first nationwide *kabbalat malkhut Shamayim* occurred when God liberated *Benei Yisrael* from Egyptian bondage, at which point they broke free from the service of Pharaoh and willfully entered the service of the King of kings.

For this reason, perhaps, our daily *kabbalat ol malkhut Shamayim* must include the memory of the Exodus from Egypt. Although we must formally declare submission to divine kingship each day, the substance of that acceptance must resemble the ancient *kabbalat ol malkhut Shamayim* of the Exodus. We accept God's rule just as our ancestors did in Egypt – with a keen awareness that He is the sole source of our freedom and redemption, that He is the sole divine power. The Hebrew slaves saw with their own eyes God's might and salvation, and entered a covenant with Him with confident enthusiasm, and the understanding that serving the Almighty is the greatest privilege they could hope for. As we accept divine kingship each morning, we bring to mind the memory of the Exodus, which establishes the model for true, sincere *kabbalat ol malkhut Shamayim* – the fervent belief in the inestimable value of serving the Almighty.