

DIMENSIONS IN CHUMASH

Parshas Re'eh

The Missing Mitzvah

The Obligation of Remembering the Exodus Every Day

לְמַעַן תִּזְכֹּר אֶת יוֹם צֵאתְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ

In order that you will remember the day of the Exodus from the land of Egypt all the days of your life¹

INTRODUCTION

The above verse is well-known to us from the Pesach Haggadah, which records a dispute between R' Elazar ben Azariah and the Sages regarding whether the inclusionary word “כל” refers to the night time as well or to the days of Mashiach. All are in agreement, however, that the verse itself denotes a mitzvah to remember the Exodus every day. As such, the commentators express wonder over the fact that Rambam, in his Sefer Hamitzvos, a work devoted to a codification and discussion of the six-hundred-and-thirteen mitzvos of the Torah, does not list this mitzvah among them. This is notwithstanding the fact that he codifies the obligation itself in Mishneh Torah. How are we do understand the conspicuous omission of this mitzvah from the list of mitzvos? As we will see, although this question would appear to be purely halachic in nature, the explanation of the matter is based firmly in the *parshanut* understanding of our verse.

MITZVAH-CRAFT: CRITERIA FOR INCLUSION AS A MITZVAH IN THE TORAH

The first approach to this question will take us into the fundamental question of how to define a mitzvah. The simple translation of this word is “commandment”. As such, in order for something to “qualify” as a mitzvah, it is not enough for it to be mentioned in the Torah, it has to be something that the Torah commanded.

A fascinating example of this idea relates to a verse earlier in our Parsha. As we know, one of the taryag mitzvos is building a Beis Hamikdash. What is the source for this mitzvah? The Rambam² presents the source as the verse on the beginning of Parshas Terumah “וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ – They shall make for Me a Sanctuary.”³ Now, that verse, in context, refers to the Mishkan the Jewish people made in the

1 Devarim 16:3.

2 Sefer Hamitzvos positive mitzvah 20. See also Mishneh Torah, hilchos beis habechirah 1:1.

3 Shemos 25:8.

wilderness. On the other hand, our Parsha makes much more explicit reference to the Beis Hamikdash specifically, as it says, “וְהָיָה הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם בּוֹ לְשֹׁכֵן שְׁמוֹ שָׁמָּה תִּבְיֵאוּ” – It shall be the place that Hashem your God shall choose to cause His name to dwell, there you shall bring etc.”⁴ Why would the Rambam not choose this more specific reference as his source? However, as R' Yosef Karo in his commentary Kessef Mishneh⁵ explains, the verse in our parsha, while referring more specifically to the Beis Hamikdash, does not actually command to build it – rather, it commands to bring offerings there – hence, it cannot serve as a source for the mitzvah. Therefore, the Rambam identifies the source as the earlier verse regarding the Mishkan which actually contains a command.⁶

A second example of this idea relates the mitzvah of daily prayer which, according to the Rambam, is a positive mitzvah of the Torah. Many will be familiar with the statement of the Talmud which explains the words from last week's parsha, “וּלְעַבְדוֹ בְּכָל לְבַבְכֶם” – and to serve Him with all your heart,⁷ as a reference to prayer, which is “עבודה שבלב” – service of the heart.⁸ Yet if we look in the Sefer Hamitzvos,⁹ we see that the Rambam identifies the source as the verse in Parshas Mishpatim “וְעַבַדְתֶּם אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם” – You shall serve Hashem your God,¹⁰ proceeding to then define the form of this service as prayer specifically based on the comment of the Gemara regarding “service of the heart”. Here, too, the Kessef Mishneh explains that the reason is the same. A mitzvah requires a command; hence, the Rambam cites the verse in Mishpatim which commands us to serve Hashem. Once we have established that Divine service in some form is a command, we can then use other verses to define it further, as the Rambam proceeds to do.

Returning to our verse, we note that although it explicitly mentions remembering the Exodus every day, it does not command us to do so. The earlier part of the verse mentions the mitzvos of Pesach: the prohibition against eating chametz (“לֹא תֹאכַל עָלֶיךָ חֻמֵץ”) and the mitzvah to eat matzah (“שֶׁבַע יָמִים תֹּאכַל עָלֶיךָ מַצּוֹת”). The verse then concludes, “In order that you will remember the day of the Exodus from the land of Egypt all the days of your life.” In other words, remembering the Exodus every day is mentioned as a result of fulfilling the mitzvos on Pesach, but not as mitzvah itself. This gives us a fascinating situation. On the one hand remembering the Exodus daily is mentioned explicitly in the Torah as the desired outcome of keeping the mitzvos of Pesach, and from that point of view, it would certainly be called “a mitzvah of the Torah.” However, in the absence of an actual command, it is not listed among the taryag mitzvos.¹¹

RASHI – IN AGREEMENT WITH THE RAMBAM?

Rashi on our verse, commenting on the words “לְמַעַן תִּזְכֹּר” – in order that you will remember,” writes:

על ידי אכילת הפסח והמצה את יום צאתך

In order that you will remember – through eating the Pesach offering and the matzah – the day of your Exodus.

We see that Rashi clearly explains the verse's reference to remembering the Exodus every day as an

4 Devarim 12:11.

5 Mishneh Torah ibid.

6 Indeed, commentators point out that although throughout the parshiyos in Chumash Shemos dealing with the Mishkan it is referred to as “the Mishkan,” this verse is exceptional in that it refers to building “a Mikdash (Sanctuary).” The reason for this is that, as per the Rambam, this verse serves as the source not only for building the Mishkan, but for all future Batei Mikdash as well, of which the Mishkan was the first.

7 Devarim 11:13.

8 See Taanis 2a.

9 Positive Mitzvah 5. See also Mishneh Torah, hilchos tefillah 1:1.

10 Shemos 23:25.

11 R' Yechezkel Landau of Prague (author of Responsa Noda b'Yehuda), commentary Tzlach to Berachos 12b.

outcome of fulfilling the mitzvos of Pesach and matzah, but not as a mitzvah in and of itself. In this regard, Rashi is in agreement with the Rambam, as explained above.

However, the entire matter becomes more intriguing when we consider another verse from earlier in the Torah. In the end of Parshas Bo, we read:

זְכוֹר אֶת הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר יָצִאתָ מִמִּצְרַיִם

Remember this day that you went out from Egypt.

Commenting on these words, Rashi, citing the Mechilta, says:

לְמַד שְׂמוֹכִירֵינוּ יְצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם כָּל יוֹם

We learn [from here] that we mention the Exodus from Egypt every day.

With these words, we can see that Rashi concurs with the Rambam in terms of general approach, namely, in order for something to be considered a mitzvah, it needs to be commanded. Hence, Rashi identifies the source of the Mitzvah as the command in Parshas Bo. Once it is established a mitzvah, verse in our parsha then available to provide the parameters of the mitzvah, i.e. whether it applies only by day or also at night, and during the days of Mashiach etc.¹²

RASHBA'S AMAZING PARSHANUT REVERSAL

In contrast to the above, a fascinating approach to our verse is found in the writings of one of the great Rishonim, the Rashba,¹³ whereby it emerges that the Torah is actually commanding us to remember the Exodus every day. The key to this approach lies in understanding the function of the word “למען – in order.” The verse mentions two things:

1. Fulfilling the mitzvos of Pesach.
2. Remembering the Exodus every day

In between these two things it uses the word “למען”. The question is: *What* is the Torah saying should happen “in order” for *what* to occur? The way we have read the verse so far it is commanding the first thing (the mitzvos of Pesach) in order for the second thing (remembering the Exodus) to happen, so that remembering the Exodus is not a mitzvah, but a result. However, the Rashba explains that, in fact, the cause and effect denoted by the term “in order” is *reversed*, so that the verse is to be read as follows: “Fulfill the mitzvos of Pesach, eating matzah and avoiding chametz; and ‘in order’ to ensure that this will happen, be sure to remember the Exodus every day of your lives!” As we can see, according to this approach, the daily remembering of the Exodus is also something the Torah is commanding us to do.

Stunning!

It is most interesting to see this approach of the Rashba to the word “למען” echoed in the writings of one of his disciples, Rabbeinu Bachye. In Parshas Mishpatim,¹⁴ we find the following verse regarding

12 At this stage, we would be moved to return to the Rambam and re-ask: Why did he not codify the daily remembrance of the Exodus as a mitzvah, with the command in the verse in Parsha Bo as the source, as formulated by Rashi? The answer to this question is found in chapter 7 of hilchos chametz u'matzah, where the Rambam cites the verse in Parshas Bo as one of the sources for the mitzvah of recounting the Exodus on Seder Night! It turns out, that while the Rambam agrees with Rashi that this verse contains a mitzvah, according to him, it is not the daily mitzvah but the annual one. Hence, the daily remembrance remains without an explicit commands and is thus not included by the Rambam in taryag.

13 Chiddushei Aggados to Berachos 12b.

14 Shemos 23:12

Shabbos:

שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲשֶׂה מְעֵשֶׂיךָ וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי תִשְׁבֹּת לְמַעַן יָנוּחַ שׁוֹרְךָ וַחֲמֹרְךָ וַיִּנְפֹּשׂ בֶּן אִמָּתְךָ וְהַגֵּר

For six days you shall perform your [constructive] activities, and on the seventh day you shall cease, in order that your ox and your donkey shall rest, and the son of your maidservant and the sojourner shall find respite

What is this verse telling about the Shabbos? If we read it in a linear fashion, it seems to be saying that the reason the Jewish people are to abstain from labor on Shabbos is *in order to allow their livestock and servants to rest!* As far as we know, that is not the purpose of Shabbos at all! Rather, Rabbeinu Bachye explains that the verse begins by commanding us to rest and then continues to say that “in order” to allow for us to rest completely, our livestock and servants must as well.

REMEMBERING THE EXODUS AND THE MITZVAH OF SHEMA

An altogether different approach to the Rambam’s omission of remembering the Exodus from the list of *taryag* mitzvos is suggested by R’ Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk.¹⁵ The background to this approach is a principle set forth by the Rambam himself in Sefer Hamitzvos,¹⁶ whereby it possible for the Torah to command something, yet it is not listed as a mitzvah of *taryag* in its own right, since it is part of a larger mitzvah. Examples of this are the various stages of each korban commanded by the Torah, which do not constitute separate mitzvos, but are rather all included in the one mitzvah of that particular korban. Likewise, says R’ Chaim, Remembering the Exodus every day is part of a broader mitzvah. How so?

The goal of the Exodus from Egypt is stated in the final verse of the Shema:¹⁷

אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְהִיּוֹת לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים

I am Hashem your God Who took you out of the land of Egypt to be a God unto you

In the same way that the purpose of leaving Egypt was to become Hashem’s people, so too, the daily mitzvah of remembering that event is *part of the daily mitzvah of reciting the Shema*, where we affirm our acceptance of Hashem as our God. This, indeed, is the full impact of reciting the paragraph ending with the Exodus as the third paragraph of the *Shema*, for it indeed forms an integral part of that mitzvah and hence, is not codified by the Rambam as a mitzvah in its own right.

15 Cited by R’ Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, Shiurim le’Zecher Aba Mari z”l, vol. 1 sec. 1. This approach is also found in the commentary Meromei Sadeh of the Netziv to Sotah 32a, Responsa Beis Yitzchak (R’ Yitzchak Shmelkes) Orach Chaim sec. 12 and Ohr Sameach, hilchos kriyas shema 1:3.

16 Shores 12. The Rambam prefaces his listing and discussion of the mitzvos with fourteen “shorashim”, which are the criteria by which something is listed a mitzvah of taryag.

17 Bamidbar 15:41.