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A VORT FROM THE ROSH YESHIVA

מורינו הרה"ג ר' אברהם גורביץ שליט"א

תענית בכורים

The firstborns fast on Erev Pesach, and the reason for this is to remember the miracle of being saved from Makkas Bechoros. (Tur 470)

The Rosh Yeshiva *shlita* cites the Be'er Yosef who questions the *halachah* regarding the fasting of the firstborns to commemorate their salvation from the affliction that Hashem inflicted on all the Egyptian firstborns. He argues, that, to honour this *nes*, it would be more appropriate to celebrate a Yom Tov on such a day, rather than observe a fast day. In fact, as noted in Megillas Tanis, days on which miracles occurred are designated as Yom Tov and fasting is prohibited. Additionally, he raises the question of why such a fast day would be instituted during the month of Nissan when fasting is generally forbidden.

He clarifies the meaning behind this fast day based on an explanation of Rabbeinu Yonah. The Gemara (*Berachos 4b*) teaches that the *berachah* of הַשְּׂכִיבֵנוּ is not considered an interruption between גְּאוּלָּה and תְּפִילָּה, as it is regarded as כְּגְאוּלָּה אֲרִיכְתָא – an extension of the preceding blessing of redemption. Rabbeinu Yonah explains that during Hashem's punishment of the Egyptians with Makkas Bechoros, Klal Yisroel were terrified that, due to their sins, they too would be struck by the destructive Malach. They therefore davened to Hashem to uphold His promise to spare them the fate of the Egyptians around them. In response to this *tefillah*, Chazal instituted the *berachah* of הַשְּׂכִיבֵנוּ, allowing us to beseech Hashem for protection during our comings and goings. Since this *berachah* is related to the davening offered at the time of the *geulah* from Mitzrayim, it is not considered an interruption.

According to Rabbeinu Yonah that the entire Klal Yisroel were in fear during Makkas Bechoros and davening for salvation, we can certainly assume that the *bechorim* were particularly afraid. Therefore, it is likely that the firstborns spent the 14th of Nissan fasting and praying, aware of the impending plague that would strike that night. If all of Klal Yisroel felt fear, the *bechorim* would have been motivated to take even more spiritual action to ensure their safety. Thus, just as Chazal instituted the *berachah* of הַשְּׂכִיבֵנוּ in recognition of the *tefillah* at the time of the *geulah*, they also established Tanis Bechorim on the 14th of Nissan. This mirrors the way the firstborns fasted and davened in those days, and so they continue to fast today.

This explanation addresses the question of why we commemorate the miracle of their salvation with a fast day rather than a Yom Tov. This is not merely a commemoration of their miraculous salvation; instead, it is a re-enactment of the 14th of Nissan - a day when the *bechorim* observed fasting and prayer to secure their survival.

However, this explanation does not resolve how this fast could be instituted during Nissan, a time when fasting is generally prohibited. To answer this, we can turn to an insight from the Chasam Sofer (*Pesachim 108*), who compares this fast day to Tanis Esther. Just as we fast on Tanis Esther, even

though it is not a day suitable for fasting, the *bechorim* also fast on Tanis Bechorim, despite it also being a day not usually appropriate for fasting. The reason for this exception regarding Tanis Esther is that the fast commemorates the custom of Klal Yisroel fasting when waging war against Amalek. Similarly, Tanis Bechorim commemorates the fasting that the *bechorim* - and every father of a young *bechor* - observed to be saved from Makkas Bechoros. The prohibition against fasting on these days only applies to fasts observed as a response to sorrow or sin. In this case, however, that is not applicable. We are observing the fast that Klal Yisroel fulfilled in the past as a means of davening for salvation.



מצות סיפור יציאת מצרים

Throughout the year, we are commanded to recall Yetzias Mitzrayim every day. This *mitzvah* requires us to mention it not only during the day but also at night. However, on Pesach, we receive an additional command to recount Yetzias Mitzrayim specifically during the Seder at night. (This must be a new *mitzvah* since it can only be fulfilled specifically at night, unlike the year-long obligation.)

This raises an important question: Why does the Torah issue a specific commandment to retell the story of leaving Mitzrayim on Pesach night, at the Seder? What does this new obligation entail that would not have already been covered by the regular nightly *mitzvah*?

The Rosh Yeshiva *shlita* references the Emek Brachah, who heard from the Brisker Rav how his father R' Chaim would begin the Seder each year by explaining to his family that there are three major differences between the routine nightly mention of Yetzias Mitzrayim and the specific retelling that occurs on Seder night.

1. The daily *mitzvah* can be fulfilled even by making mention of Yetzias Mitzrayim in private. The Pesach *mitzvah*, however, must be accomplished through a dialogue, in a question-and-answer format, as the Torah states: 'וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁאַלְךָ בְּנֶךָ מָחָר לֵאמֹר מָה זֶה? וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו, בְּחֻזְק יָד הוֹצִיאָנוּ ה' מִמִּצְרָיִם מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים. "When your son will ask you at some future time, 'What is this? You shall say to him, 'With a strong hand Hashem removed us from Mitzrayim from the house of bondage.' " This requirement is implemented at the Seder when the child asks מָה נִשְׁתַּנֶּה, and the father answers עַבְדִּים הָיִינוּ. Even when one is not with others, the lone participant must "ask" himself the four questions and give the answers, as the Gemara stipulates (*Pesachim* 116a).
2. The requirement for retelling the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim on Pesach night is that it be told by first describing the initial indignity of Klal Yisroel, and then proceeding to discuss their subsequent prestige after leaving Mitzrayim - בְּשִׂבַח וּמְסִיִּים בְּגוֹת וּמְסִיִּים בְּשִׂבַח. There is no such requirement for the daily *mitzvah* of remembering Yetzias Mitzrayim.
3. The *mitzvah* on Pesach night must be done through a discussion of the rationale behind the three foods that we are commanded to consume on this night. This is done by reciting רַבֵּן גַּמְלִיאֵל הֵיאָה אוֹמֵר: כֹּל שְׁלֹא אָמַר שְׁלֹשָׁה דְּבָרִים אֵלָיו בְּפֶסַח, לֹא יֵצֵא יָדָיו חוֹבְתוֹ וְכו'. This is not the case, of course, for the regular, daily *mitzvah*.

These three components of the *mitzvah* of Pesach night are codified into *halachah* by the Rambam (*Hil. Chametz U'matzah*, 7). Therefore, since we *pasken* that מְצוֹת צְרִיכוֹת כֹּנְנָה, R' Chaim instructed

his family to have the intention to fulfil the *mitzvah* through these three elements performed on Pesach night.

Additionally, the Brisker Rav highlights another distinction between the obligation on Seder night and that of the rest of the year: the *mitzvah* of Sippur not only encompasses the retelling of the events but can also be fulfilled by discussing the *halachos* of Pesach. He derives this from the Tosefta, which is further referenced by the Tur (481).

In the year 5716, R' Leib *zatzal* was spending Pesach in Yerushalayim and visited the Brisker Rav. When prompted to share an insight from the Seder, R' Leib recounted a teaching from R' Simcha Zissel regarding the concept of *מְשַׁבֵּחַ הַרִי זֶה מִצְרַיִם* (– see below). The Brisker Rav commented that he was unsure whether one fulfils the *mitzvah* of Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim by sharing such an insight, but he was certain that discussing the *halachos* of Yetzias Mitzrayim surely fulfils his obligation!



כָּל הַמְרַבֵּה לְסַפֵּר בִּיצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם הָרִי זֶה מְשַׁבֵּחַ. (מגיד)

Whoever tells very much about Yetzias Mitzrayim is praiseworthy. (Maggid)

The Rambam (*Sefer HaMitzvos Aseh 157*) states that on the 15th night of Nissan, we are commanded to recount the miracles and wonders that Hashem performed. We must express our gratitude to Hashem for all that He has bestowed upon us. The Rambam mentions that whoever speaks at length on this topic “יִהְיֶה יוֹתֵר טוֹב” which means “will be better.” This wording appears to align with the following interpretation of R' Simcha Zissel of Kelm, rather than the simple understanding of these words presented in the Haggadah.

R' Simcha Zissel clarified that the phrase *מְשַׁבֵּחַ הַרִי זֶה מִצְרַיִם* does not refer to praising the act of extensively discussing Yetzias Mitzrayim. Instead, it means that the more a person elaborates on Yetzias Mitzrayim, the more they themselves become *מְשַׁבֵּחַ* - an improved and better person. This interpretation aligns with how Chazal use the term, such as in the phrase *קִרְקַע מְשׁוּבָּחַת*, meaning “improved land.” The more one speaks about Yetzias Mitzrayim and recounts the goodness that Hashem has shown us, the more one transforms themselves and draws closer to Hashem.



שְׁבִיעֵי שֵׁל פֶּסַח

אֶז יִשִּׁיר מֹשֶׁה וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת וְכוּ'. (שמות טו, א)

Then Moshe and the Bnei Yisroel chose to sing this song ... (Shemos 15:1)

Rashi questions why the Torah uses the word *יִשִּׁיר*, will sing, in the future tense, instead of the past tense - *שָׁר*, sang. After providing a basic understanding of the *possuk*, Rashi cites the Midrash, which states that this wording alludes to Tchiyas HaMeisim. Accordingly, the future tense is to be taken literally. Not only did Moshe and Klal Yisroel sing at that moment, but they would "sing again" after the Resurrection during the era of Moshiach.

