

Three times in Parshat Bo we are commanded to tell the story of the Exodus from Egypt to our children.

The first time is in the commandment to sacrifice the Paschal lamb in future generations, we are told that should our child ask us "What are you doing this service for?", we should respond with the the Exodus story.

Another time is upon performing the mitzvah of the offering or redemption of the first born, we are told that should our child ask us "What is this?", we should respond with the Exodus story.

A third time is after Israel left Egypt, Moses puts forth the commandment of the week long holiday of eating matzah to be observed annually upon the arrival of Israel in its land. After describing the holiday commandment, Moses says "And you shall tell your child on that day, 'it was with these items that God provided me when I left Egypt.'" In all 3 of the above obligations of transmission, the emphasis is placed on relating the event to the next generation (179).

There is one place in this week's reading where the obligation mentioned is to remember: "Remember this day that you left Egypt from the house of slavery." (206) Our Sages dispute what practical obligation emanates from this verse. According to the Mechilta of Rabbi Yishmael, as well as Rashi, this obligates us to recite the final paragraph of the Shma, which mentions the Exodus, daily. Following this approach, this obligation is not connected to the mitzvah of telling the Exodus story to our children.

However, according to the Mechilta of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, as well as Maimonides, this verse is merely another verse obligating us to tell the Exodus story. In fact, when Maimonides mentions the mitzvah of retelling the Exodus, this is the first verse he brings.(307)

What is unique about this verse in obligating the telling of the Exodus story is twofold. First of all, this verse obligates our telling the story to ourselves, not to the next generation. It squarely states that while the mitzvah demands that we pass the story on to our children, first and foremost we must be sure to know the story ourselves. It is only when we ourselves know what we are talking about, and have the story properly in hand, that we can then go on to pass it to the next generation. It is not impossible to imagine (407)those who may feel that the main thing is to pass it on, without taking account of whether one knows the story oneself. Following the approach of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai and Maimonides, the obligation is stated the required self fulfillment of the mitzvah before relating it to our progeny and students. Second of all, the language of command is not one of telling, but rather one of remembering. Remembering may well demand the verbalization of the story to oneself, as the Mishnah explicitly requires. But it certainly does not end there. Remembering demands an internalization of the content of the story so that it is internally experienced. It would appear that the obligation of each Jew to perceive oneself as if he or she personally exited Egypt, as stated in the Hagadah, would come according to Bar Yochai and Maimonides from this verse, the obligation to Remember. Furthermore. while the obligation to retell the story is specific to the Seder night, the obligation to remember the Exodus, mentioned several times in the Torah outside of the Passover context, seems to be continuous. We are always responsible to remember that we were once slaves in Egypt, and that we are no longer there, only because God redeemed us. This memory is meant to affect all our actions and everything we do in life.

comments: menachemschrader@gmail.com