

SEPHARDIC INSTITUTE

511 Ave. R Brooklyn, NY 11223-2093
Rabbi Moshe Shamah, Director

718 998 8171 Fax: 718 375 3263
Rabbi Ronald Barry, Administrator

בס"ד

Parashat Bo Part II On Exodus 13

1. “And You Shall Relate to Your Son On That Day”

The Torah places great emphasis on transmitting the particulars of the Exodus to one’s children. Among the Passover laws of Exodus 12–13, parents are charged three times to elaborate the essential details of G-d’s redemption of Israel from Egypt to their children (Exod. 12:26-27; 13:8; 13:14-15).

The called-for teachings – in large part to be incorporated into the annual celebration of the Passover festival – are not limited to relating the historical events. Rather, they encompass explanations of the commemorative rituals and symbols that are associated with the events. These include the Passover sacrifice, the festival, the partaking of matzoh and *maror* (bitter herbs) and abstaining from *hametz*, as well as the sacrifice of firstborn cattle and flock and the redemption of firstborn Israelite males, although the latter are not necessarily performed during the Passover festival week. Such instruction is designed to prompt the participants to sense G-d’s wondrous intervention to bring about the redemption, as well as to gain insight into His purposes. It is to lead to an expression of gratitude to G-d and inspire each new generation to appreciate His sovereignty and faithfulness as well as His desire that we dedicate ourselves to fulfill His will.

There is one other passage in the Torah – in Deuteronomy 6:20-25 – that calls upon parents to transmit the Exodus lessons to their children. It is the most elaborate passage of all, perhaps because it was not part of a larger Passover context. Later in this study we will discuss the intertextual relationship between it and our Exodus passages. All four statements are prominently incorporated in the Passover Haggadah.

Central to the Torah’s regulations of the annual national celebration recalling the Exodus (the Passover Seder) is the requirement *וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא* (‘‘And you shall relate to your son on that day, saying, ‘because of this...’’ [Exod. 13:8]), blending history, gratitude and purpose. What is the correct interpretation of this verse?

The opening clause ‘‘And you shall relate to your son on that day’’ refers to the day mentioned several verses earlier, ‘‘Remember this day on which you went forth from Egypt’’ (v. 3), the annual day that commemorates the Exodus. The Israelites had been bidden to recall that day by performing certain rituals associated with the Exodus events. Our verse prescribes that ‘‘on that day’’ every year ‘‘you shall relate to your son’’ the details that follow in that verse. Each father must accompany performance of the rituals with educating his children.

But it has long been a matter of dispute what is meant in the remainder of the verse: *בְּעִבּוֹר זֶה עָשָׂה ה' לִי בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרָיִם*. (For the sake of expedience but not to take an interpretative position at this point, the NJPS translation is here provided: ‘‘It is because of what the Lord did for me when I went forth from Egypt.’’) Specifically, what does the pronoun *zeh* (‘‘this’’) refer to? And what exactly is the concept the father is bidden to explain to his son? We will survey the opinions of some of the leading classical commentators.

1). **Onqelos:** His translation is so faithful to the original that it possesses the same ambiguity.

2). **Rashi, following the Midrash:** *Zeh* should be understood (as he invariably explains it), as referring to an item or items that can be pointed to. In this case it would be to the *pesah*, *matzoh* and *maror* that

should be imagined lying on an assumed *seder* table to which the father points as he makes his statement. *Ba'abur zeh* means “for the sake of these,” i.e., in order that I should fulfill these *misvot* (and, of course, others such as them), “G-d did for me [what He did] when I went forth from Egypt.” The concept underlying what the father tells his son is a major declaration regarding the commandments, going far beyond a detail of the particular laws at hand. The father defines G-d’s purpose for what He did in redeeming Israel from Egypt: It was for the nation to observe these *misvot* [and the lawgiving]. Not that Israel performs *misvot* because G-d redeemed them, but G-d redeemed them so that they should perform *misvot*.

Rashi’s interpretation in peshat is problematic. The passage does not mention the *Pesah* sacrifice nor the *maror* – they are part of the ceremonials of the occasion but not specified in our context. Matzoh is mentioned in the two previous verses, but not the matzoh specific to the *seder* night, only the broad laws of eating matzoh for seven days and being rid of *hametz*. Three verses before (v. 5) there is a general instructional clause וְעַבַּדְתָּ אֶת ה' עֲבָדְתָּהּ הַזֹּאת (“and you shall perform this service”) which Rashi interprets as referring to the *Pesah* sacrifice, and which he considers to be what the *zeh* of verse 8 refers to. However, interpreting the pronoun *hazot* (“this”) of verse 5 as referring to the *Pesah* sacrifice is also problematic, given that *Pesah* is not mentioned in this passage. Ibn Ezra, followed by many translations including the NJPS, understands the verse 5 *hazot* as referring to what immediately follows – the laws of eating matzoh and not having *hametz* for seven days.

To lessen the question on Rashi it has been noted that עֲבָדְתָּהּ may refer to a sacrifice and thus imply the *Pesah* more than it does other laws, but that is tenuous and does not fully solve the problem.

3). Ibn Ezra comments as follows: “The explanation of *ba'abur zeh* is that for the sake of this service of eating matzoh and not eating *hametz*, which are the beginning of the laws that Hashem has commanded us, Hashem did wonders for us such that He brought us forth from Egypt. The meaning is that He did not bring us forth from Egypt except for the purpose of serving Him, as stated (Exod. 3:12): ‘When you bring the nation forth from Egypt you shall serve G-d on

this mountain,’ and as stated (Num. 15:41): ‘Who brought you forth from the Land of Egypt to be your G-d.’”

Ibn Ezra’s understanding of the conceptual message that the father is enjoined to transmit to his son is similar to that of Rashi. As far as the *zeh* is concerned, however, Ibn Ezra understands it as referring to the laws of the previous two verses, matzoh and *hametz*, so that the questions asked of Rashi do not apply to him.

4). Rashbam, Ramban’s first interpretation: The father explains to his son why he does the service referred to in v. 5 (“and you shall perform this service”) and fulfills those laws mentioned in the preceding verses, eating matzoh for seven days (v. 6) and being rid of *hametz* (v. 7). Although nothing in our verse 8 states, “I do these rituals because,” the reader is expected to understand that to be the intention and mentally supply those words. In essence, the father says: “I do these rituals because of what Hashem did for me in my leaving Egypt.” In addition, before the word עָשָׂה (“did”) the reader must supply the word אֲשֶׁר, meaning “that which,” or “what,” as if written בְּעִבּוּר זֶה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה ה' לִי, “because of that which Hashem did for me.”

Others have considered the assumption of such an elided clause, critical to the meaning of the verse, to be too problematic, especially with the relative pronoun (*asher*) also missing. And once the word *asher* is regarded as if present, the *zeh* becomes superfluous.

However, when one is engaged in doing something in the presence of his son, such as removing *hametz* from his property, eating matzoh or celebrating the festival, it can easily be imagined that to some extent he could let his actions speak for him. He could begin his explanation with “because,” understood to mean “I am (or, we are) doing this because.” Perhaps the *zeh* might then take on the meaning of “that.”

5). Ramban, second interpretation: *Ba'abur* here means “like.” Relate to your son “like this (and this and so on) Hashem did for me,” meaning the father should relate the many wonders G-d did. However, such a usage of *ba'abur* has not been proven and has not been accepted by the commentators.

6). Yonah Ibn Janah: Reverse the order of the two words *ba'abur zeh*, to be understood as if they were written *zeh ba'abur*. The father would be telling his son: “This” – the laws mentioned in the previous two verses, eating matzoh and not having *hametz* – “is because of what Hashem did for me.” Here, also, *אֲשֶׁר* must be understood as if preceded by *asher* as in interpretation #4 above, and the conceptual upshot is identical to it. But it does not require mentally filling in the introductory phrase, since the *zeh* at the beginning of the clause would have the meaning of “This that I am doing.” However, the legitimacy of transposing words has been considered questionable so this interpretation has not been widely accepted.

7). Rabbi S. R. Hirsch: The father will tell his son in the future, *ba'abur zeh* because I made a commitment in Egypt to these practices, which you see us engaged in at this time, as well as to all the other *misvot*, G-d redeemed me from Egypt.

Surprisingly, Malbim cites Ibn Ezra’s view as similar to this explanation of Hirsch: “Because of the *Pesah* commandments that I fulfilled in Egypt, G-d redeemed me,” and opposes Ibn Ezra’s view on the basis of his analysis of the difference between the words *בְּעַבְוֹר* and *בְּגִלְל*. *Biglal* means “because,” plain and simple. *Ba'abur*, however, he defines as meaning “for the sake of,” subordinate to the object that follows and implying purpose. However, Ibn Ezra does not interpret the verse as Hirsch does, and his reading of *ba'abur* in our verse coincides with that of the Malbim.

8). S.D. Luzzato: The Rashbam and Ramban (#4 above) are basically correct but there is no problem of an elided *asher*. The Hebrew *zayin* sound corresponds to one of the *dalet* sounds in Aramaic (consider: *זָה-דָּהָב*; *זָה-אֹרֶז*; *זָה-אֹרֶז*; *זָה-אֹרֶז*). Accordingly, the Hebrew *זֶה* is derived from *זָה* while *זֶה* is derived from *זָה* and *זָה*, words which also carry the meaning of “that” or “which.” Thus the words *זֶה* and *זָה* also sometimes possess a meaning of *אֲשֶׁר*. (His examples for *zu* meaning *asher* are: Exod. 15:13, 16; Isa. 43:21; Ps. 142:4; for *zeh*: Ps. 74:2; 104:8; Job 19:19.)

His examples have not all been seen as compelling, although it seems to be widely accepted that *zeh* does sometimes serve in a similar capacity to “that.”

Wolf Heidenheim in *Havanat Hamikra** supported the view propounded by Rashi and Ibn Ezra concerning the relationship between G-d’s acts and the *misvot* from a word analysis: “*Biglal* is always related to the preceding cause which is responsible for attaining some other end. *Ba'avur* is related to the sequel...Accordingly, unlike *ba'avur...biglal* is never followed by a future tense, since it refers always to an earlier, past cause, and not to the attainment of another object. In our case (*ba'avur*), *zeh* will refer to the desired object...‘for the sake of which G-d did for me.’” However, these definitions have not been accepted as an absolute rule.

Many have thought that such a theological principle defining G-d’s purpose of redeeming Israel as Rashi and Ibn Ezra propose, if it indeed was intended, would deserve a more formal proclamation. It constitutes too monumental a concept to be somewhat incidentally tucked in with the “remembrances” and “signs” of the passage, merely within the prescribed future statement of the father to his son. Especially as “remembrances” and “signs” usually point in another direction. On the other hand, it may be argued that such a principle is merely an application of the overarching concept of G-d’s selecting Israel to be His nation to serve him.

In conclusion: Despite lacking much in the text, interpretation #4 has been most widely accepted as the *peshat*. It is considered part of the Torah’s style to sometimes omit a clause that may be understood. This interpretation is the basis of most modern translations including the old and new JPS as well as those of Koren, Fox and Alter.

2. Linkage Between Exodus 13 and Deuteronomy 6–7

There is a large degree of correspondence between a portion of Exodus 13, particularly verses 8-9, and a portion of Deuteronomy 6, beginning with the *Shem'a Yisrael* passage. This is manifest in both subject matter and literary formulations. Thus, *וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ* (“you shall relate to your son” [Exod. 13:8]) parallels *וְשִׁנַּנְתָּם לְבָנֶיךָ* (“you shall teach them to your sons” [Deut. 6:7]). The following Exodus verse (9) begins with, “And it shall be for you a sign on your hand and a reminder on your forehead”*** (*וְהָיָה לְךָ לְאוֹת עַל יָדְךָ*) (וְיִזְכְּרוּן בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ). This corresponds to the verse

following *וְשָׂנְנָתָם* in the *Shem 'a* passage: “You shall tie them as a sign on your hand and they shall be a frontlet (an ornament or symbol) on your forehead” (*וּקְשַׁרְתָּם לְאוֹת עַל יָדְךָ וְהָיוּ לְטוֹטְפֹת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ*).

However, in the Exodus verse, leaving aside the issue of whether the “sign on your hand and a reminder on your forehead” is a metaphoric expression or a literal prescription, the meaning of the clause is not apparent. What exactly is it that shall be the sign and the reminder? There is no explicit candidate for the “sign and reminder” in the previous verse. In addition, the linkage of verse 9 to verse 8 is not clear – what is the connection between recounting the Exodus events to your son (whichever explanation is selected) and “It shall be for you a sign on your hand and a reminder on your forehead”? Of course the “sign and reminder” must refer to the events associated with the Exodus from Egypt and their commemorative laws that the father was commanded to relate to his son. But there is nothing tangible in the text that may serve as the referent. There is a bit of disconnect and a syntactic “bump in the road.”

In Deuteronomy, on the other hand, the corresponding statement of being a sign on your hand and a frontlet on your forehead has a clear antecedent preceding it in *הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה*, (“these words”). Indeed, the phrase “these words” (the words of the *Shem 'a Yisrael* verse or of the preceding Decalogue) is the referent for all the instructional clauses that follow in the paragraph. These words should be “on your heart” (take them seriously), you should “teach them to your son,” “speak about them,” “tie them as a sign on your hand and they shall be a frontlet on your forehead,” and “write them on the doorposts of your home and gates.” It therefore appears that the Exodus formulation was drawn from that of Deuteronomy, making an application (or broadening) of an instruction that was a natural, organic component in its original context. (And therefore Deuteronomy’s “a sign on your hand” and “a frontlet on your forehead” was capable of being understood as intended literally). With a degree of literary latitude – “poetic license” – the Deuteronomy locution was fit into the Exodus context. Hence, it did not require an immediately direct referent. The result establishes linkage with its source while leaving detectable traces of the process so that the sensitive reader may appreciate the association.

Such intertextuality, what we may term “biblical midrash,” often of great sophistication, is a prominent feature of prophetic writing. (For examples of similar types of intertextuality, see our studies, *On Decalogue Variances* and *Parashat Kedoshim and the Decalogue*.)

3. Additional Linkage

Verse 16 of our Exodus passage contains a striking parallel to the verse 9 statement we have been dealing with. Whereas verse 9 called for “a sign on your hand and a reminder on your forehead” (*לְאוֹת עַל יָדְךָ וְלִזְכָּרוֹן*), verse 16 calls for “a sign on your hand and *totafot* on your forehead” (*לְאוֹת עַל יָדְכָה וְלִטוֹטְפֹת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ*), substituting *totafot* on the forehead for the *zikaron* of the earlier verse. Here also, in peshat, the linkage of verse 16 with the preceding verses, which spoke of the father answering his son’s question concerning the rituals of the firstborn, is not natural and smooth. Some have conjectured that since verse 16 is the conclusion to our overall passage, it is acceptable to have a somewhat disconnected repetition.

However, the explanation may very possibly be connected to a literary feature of Deuteronomy. There, the verse parallel to Exodus 13:9 – “tie them as a sign on your hand and they should be *totafot* on your forehead” (Deut. 6:8) – is also attested a second time, with slight modification. The second attestation is in the *Vehaya Im Shamo 'a Tishm 'u* passage (11:18). The latter passage essentially concludes an extensive section that begins with *Shem 'a*, a section that follows the Decalogue and elaborates and expounds on the covenant. Near its closing, *Vehaya Im Shamo 'a Tishm 'u* cites several verses from the *Shem 'a* passage, including the verse “tie them as a sign on your hand and they should be *totafot* on your forehead.” The second attestation – *וּקְשַׁרְתָּם אֹתָם לְאוֹת עַל יָדְכֶם וְהָיוּ לְטוֹטְפֹת בֵּין עֵינֵיכֶם* – essentially quotes the first and differs only with a shift from singular to plural. Both are syntactically fluent in their contexts. In Deuteronomy, *totafot* is used in both verses.

Hence, it seems possible that deployment of *totafot* in the second Exodus verse (Exod. 13:16) is another instance of drawing from Deuteronomy; the Exodus repetition is modeled on the Deuteronomy repetition, creating a fuller correspondence with it. It should be noted that the Exodus attestation of *totafot* together

with the two in Deuteronomy are the only three instances of *totafot* in Scripture.

It should also be noted that the Deuteronomy section we are positing as the source from which Exodus drew constitutes the Torah's most fundamental elaboration of the Decalogue and principles of the covenant (see our study on *Parashat Va'ethanan*).

Exodus 13:9 continues as follows: “in order that Hashem’s teaching should be in your mouth,” implying that we should constantly speak of His teaching. This is a more colorful way of expressing the thought that in Deuteronomy 6:7 is the continuation of “and you should teach them to your son,” namely, “and you should speak regarding them when sitting in your home, when walking on the road, when going to sleep and when rising” (וְדַבַּרְתָּ בָּם בְּשֹׁבְתְךָ (בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְלִקְחֶיךָ בְּדֶרֶךְ וְגו') (Deuteronomy statement is in a standard literary formulation while the Exodus parallel is poetic and hyperbolic. The sign and the remembrance of the preceding clause of that Exodus verse contribute to but do not constitute the vehicle that secures the fulfillment of “in order that Hashem’s teaching should be in your mouth.” It is the Deuteronomy prescription to constantly teach your son and discuss “these words” that naturally brings about the Exodus state of “in order that Hashem’s teaching should be in your mouth.” Thus, the Exodus verse that follows וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ (and you shall recount to your son”) appears to be citing the two Deuteronomy prescriptions that follow וְשִׁנַּנְתָּם לְבִנְיָךְ in classic chiasm fashion.

In light of the above we may more fully appreciate the third and final portion of Exodus 13:9, “for with a strong hand Hashem took you out of Egypt.” It appears to refer more to the previous verse of the father fulfilling his obligation to teach his son regarding what Hashem did for him than to the two preceding clauses of its own verse. This appears to support the notion just presented that those two preceding assertions constitute enrichment of the passage through allusions to and expansions of the Deuteronomy text, and to a certain extent are parenthetical.

Verse 16 of our Exodus passage, which begins with the “sign and frontlet” clauses that parallel verse 9, also follows the father’s explanation to his son (vv.

14-15) and concludes with, “for by strength of hand Hashem brought us forth from Egypt,” virtually the same clause that concludes verse 9. As mentioned earlier, here also the “sign and frontlet” clauses do not smoothly connect to the preceding. Thus, the two Exodus paragraphs, which clearly comprise a unitary entity (despite the *petuha* break after v. 10), constitute a combination that in certain ways reflect the combination of the *Shem’a* and *Vehaya Im Shamo’a* passages from which they drew inspiration. (As Rabbi S. D. Sassoon pointed out, the two Exodus paragraphs contain 228 words [vv. 2-17, excluding the superscription], which is the *gematria* of בכור [firstborn], the word that denotes the underlying theme that unites the overall passage.)

The mezuzah verse that concludes the Deuteronomy 6 cluster (v. 9) does not have a parallel in Exodus 13, but does have one in the preceding chapter’s requirement of placing blood as a sign on the doorposts (Exod. 12:22-23).

Three verses before the וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ statement, but in the same passage, Israel’s forthcoming entry into the promised land was introduced with the formula וְהָיָה כִּי וְהָיָה כִּי (And when Hashem brings you to the land” [13:5]). This also corresponds to Deuteronomy, where the verse that immediately succeeds the *Shem’a* passage begins with virtually the identical words: וְהָיָה כִּי יְבִיאֲךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶל הָאָרֶץ (And when Hashem your G-d brings you to the land” [Deut. 6:10]). Both verses speak of the Deity’s fulfillment of His oath to the patriarchs with similar words. Both contexts praise the promised land in somewhat similar terms: in Exodus, it is “flowing with milk and honey,” while in Deuteronomy, it contains great riches ready to benefit the Israelites. As וְהָיָה כִּי יְבִיאֲךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ appears again in verse 11 of our chapter, so does the corresponding verse appear (without the word “*vehaya*”) a second time in Deuteronomy, shortly after the 6:10 attestation, in 7:1. This is not a common expression; besides these four instances, there is only one other attestation of this formula in Scripture, in Deuteronomy 11:29, shortly after the *Vehaya Im Shamo’a* passage.

Both our Exodus and Deuteronomy passages have the son asking questions. In Exodus 13:14 we have וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁאַלְךָ בְּנֶךָ מָחָר לֵאמֹר מָה (And when your son asks you tomorrow saying, what...). The six words beginning

with *ki* are identical to the six words that introduce the son's question in Deuteronomy 6:20. These are the only two instances of this literary construction in Scripture! In both cases the son asks concerning the meaning of laws; in Exodus he is focused on the dedication of the firstborn to G-d that is associated with the tenth plague while in Deuteronomy he frames his question in terms of the various categories of Torah law. The father's responses parallel each other; both refer to Pharaoh and slavery in Egypt and invoke the imagery of Hashem's "strong hand" in redemption.

In these two passages the Torah links the Exodus with the lawgiving, the two milestone events of biblical history.***

Endnotes

* Cited by Nehama Leibowitz, *Studies in Shemot: The Book of Exodus* [Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, Dept. for Torah Education and Culture in the Diaspora, 1976], 213

** The text has "between your eyes" for what is here translated "forehead." This is widely accepted and

traditional, based on solid exegetical grounds. One consideration is that the Torah's formulations prohibiting making bald spots use the phrase "between your eyes" in Deuteronomy 14:1 (obviously not precisely literal) and, although speaking of priests, "on their heads" in Leviticus 21:5. The latter usage is often employed by the prophets (e.g., Isa. 15:2; Jer. 48:37). In Ugaritic usage, "between the eyes" is paralleled with *godqod*.

*** These two passages appear to comprise a chiasm. The Exodus 13 discussion commemorates the Exodus before narration of the event, while the *Shem'a Yisrael* passage follows the narration of the lawgiving. The ensuing discussion in Deuteronomy 7 moves to G-d's exhortation against intimate interaction with idolaters, followed by the requirement to destroy the idolatrous sites in the land and concludes with כִּי עַם קָדוֹשׁ אַתָּה לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ ("for you are a sanctified nation to Hashem your G-d" [v. 6]). Is this possibly background or a parallel of sorts to קַדְשׁ לִי כָל בְּכוֹר ("Sanctify to Me every firstborn") that opens our Exodus passage (Exod. 13:2), given that firstborn sanctification commemorates G-d's judgments against the gods of Egypt?

©2010 Sephardic Institute