YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA

**Parashat Bo**

**Sicha of HarAV Mosheh Lichtenstein**

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**In memory of Irit bat Yitele *z"l*   
whose *yahrzeit* is 6 Shevat  
by Family Rueff**

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**Dedicated in memory of Miriam Heller *z"l*   
whose *yahrzeit* falls on the seventh of Shevat,  
by her niece, Vivian Singer.**

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**“As a Memorial Between Your Eyes”**

Summarized by Aviad Lipstadt

Translated by David Strauss

**Introduction**

Chapter 12 of the book of *Shemot* discusses the festival of Pesach, with an emphasis on the Paschal offering. The people of Israel are commanded to commemorate the exodus from Egypt and the miracles associated with it – because it is possible that without such a commandment, they might forget even the great miracles and kindnesses that God performed for them. As the Torah states:

And this day shall be to you for a memorial (*zikaron*), and you shall keep it a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall keep it a feast by an ordinance forever. (*Shemot* 12:10)

Indeed, there is no doubt that without active effort, even the most significant events eventually fade into the abyss of oblivion. For example, we will read in the next *parasha* about the splitting of the Sea of Suf, and as we know, the Midrash states that "a maidservant saw at the sea what [even] Yechezkel the prophet did not see" (see *Yalkut* *Shimoni* *Beshalach* 244), and in any case, we would expect such an event to be engraved in the hearts of the people forever. However, as Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk noted with his characteristic sharpness, that maidservant remained a maidservant even after she saw what Yechezkel did not see, whereas Yechezkel merited his high standing even though he did not see what others saw at the splitting of the Sea of Suf.

As mentioned, the reason for this is simple: it is difficult to carry the memory of a single event and continue to live with constant awareness of it for the long term. The festival of Pesach was serves to counter this challenge: once a year, the people of Israel must gather together to mark and celebrate the miracle of the exodus from Egypt, and thank God for it.

**The Difference Between Story and Memory**

In the next chapter, however, the Torah commands another mitzva that is to serve as a memorial of the exodus from Egypt – the mitzvaof *tefillin.* The role of *tefillin* is to be "a sign to you upon your hand, and for a memorial (*zikaron*) between your eyes" (*Shemot* 13:9), and in that way, the strong hand with which God took us out of Egypt will be remembered.

What is the need for an additional mitzva to serve as a reminder of the exodus from Egypt? Why can't we suffice with celebrating Pesach in order to keep the memory of the exodus alive?

It seems that the key word that will allow us to solve this problem is the word *zikaron*,"memory." In order to explain the duplication, we must show that each of the two commandments reflects a different kind of memory.

The difference between the mitzvaof reciting the Haggada on Pesach and the rest of the *mitzvot* of remembrance is commonly explained in light of the difference between telling a story, as we do on Pesach, and creating a memorial, as we do through other *mitzvot*. What is the difference between a memory and a story?

In his commentary to the Haggada, the Netziv explains that there is no fundamental difference between the two words. A story is a type of memory, but one that is made in a more distinct and powerful way. A person can briefly recall a story every day, and absorb the messages contained in it. For example, I can recount an entire conversation with only a few words: "the crying baby." A brief mention of an entire conversation can suffice to arouse and stimulate the memory.

Once a year, however, I must retell a complete conversation and refresh the messages of paying attention to and being concerned about others. It seems that the festival of Pesach plays a similar role: we remember the exodus every day when we recite the *Shema*, but once a year, we deepen that memory with an entire night dedicated to it.

In the school of Brisk, a slightly different distinction is made between the night of the *seder* and the remembrance of the exodus that occurs every day in a slightly different manner. A story refers to the past, with the narrator describing at length all the details of an event that has already taken place. This is what we do on the night of the *seder*, when we delve into the exodus from Egypt and remember all the miracles and wonders that were performed on our behalf. Memory, on the other hand, refers not to the past, but to the present. Memory is a "filter" through which we see the current reality and interpret it in light of the past. Memory is not a defined act, but a reality and a complete way of life: man lives his life in the light of the memory of the past, and in that way, he relives the event that he remembers.

We can illustrate this by comparison with the memory of the Holocaust. We live the memory of the Holocaust through both memory and story. First of all, we must make sure to tell the stories of the Holocaust, and not forget the horrors that took place in it. Once a year, the state even devotes an entire day to delving into the stories of the Holocaust – so that we should remember them all year long. But in addition to remembering the events themselves, we also try to live our lives in the light of the events of the Holocaust: at every turn, we are reminded of the Holocaust and of the relationship between our days and the period of the Holocaust. Every event, positive or negative, is examined in light of the Holocaust and passes through its "filter."

In the world of Halakha, the obligation to remember finds expression in accordance with both models. The memory of Amalek, for example, should be reflected in two ways: First, one must remember the injustice done by Amalek, and the way in which he attacked Israel in the wilderness. However, it is not enough just to tell the story of Amalek; it must be an ongoing part of our memories. We must burn the existence of evil in the world into our consciousness, determine and in its light the policy that must be implemented each and every day.

**Two Aspects of the Memory of the Exodus**

Now we must examine the way in which the story of the exodus should be remembered, which was a matter of disagreement among the *Tannaim*:

The exodus from Egypt is to be mentioned [in the *Shema*] at night. Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya said: I am about seventy years old, and I was never worthy to [find a reason why] the exodus from Egypt should be mentioned at night, until Ben Zoma expounded it. For it is stated: "That you may remember the day when you came forth out of the land of Egypt *all* the days of your life" (*Devarim* 16:3). "The days of your life" – [it would have meant only] the days; "all the days of your life" [includes] the nights [as well]. The Sages, however, say: "The days of your life" [refers to] this world; "all the days of your life" – to include the days of the Messiah. (*Berakhot* 12b)

Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya and the Sages disagree about when the exodus from Egypt must be mentioned. Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya maintains that it must be remembered twice a day, in the morning and at night. The double mention requires explanation, for there does not seem to be a need for a double mention simply in order to tell the story of the exodus in itself. Therefore, it stands to reason that we are dealing here not only with a memory, but also with the shaping of a person's consciousness. For this end, it does in fact stand to reason that it is necessary to repeat the message of the exodus twice a day.

However, we must still clarify the content that must be remembered and related with respect to the exodus from Egypt.

The Gemara records a dispute between the Sages and Ben Zoma about whether or not the exodus from Egypt will also be remembered in the days of the Messiah. Ben Zoma maintains that the exodus from Egypt will no longer be mentioned after the Messiah's arrival, whereas the Sages will continue to mention the exodus from Egypt even in the Messianic future. Why?

It seems that the basis of their disagreement lies in identifying the main message of the exodus. According to Ben Zoma, the exodus is a historical event in which the Israelites went out from slavery to freedom and from bondage to redemption. After the Messiah's arrival, history and the events of the past will have little meaning, and therefore we will no longer mention the exodus from Egypt.

The Sages, on the other hand, focus on a different point: in their opinion, the exodus from Egypt is the framework in which the nation of Israel was chosen. This was the moment when God defined Israel as His treasured nation that is duty-bound to serve him in an ongoing manner. The selection of Israel will continue to have consequences even in the days of the Messiah, and so there is reason to mention the exodus even after the Messiah's arrival.[[1]](#footnote-1)

In light of the distinctions between the two types of remembrance, we can return to the question we posed at the beginning of our discussion, about the doubling of the *mitzvot* of Pesach and *tefillin* as memorials for the exodus from Egypt. Pesach is an event at which we tell the story of the exodus from Egypt by relating to the memory of the past. On the other hand, while Pesach is directed toward the past, the role of *tefillin* is to be an ongoing memorial for the exodus, shaping the reality in which we live. *Tefillin* serve as a "sign": they remind us constantly that God chose us and redeemed us from Egypt, and in that way, we live on a daily basis with the consciousness of being the servants of God.

**Additional *Mitzvot* That Serve as Memorials**

In addition to Pesach and *tefillin*, a similar redundancy can also be found in other remembrances. As mentioned, for instance, the mitzva to remember Amalek is supposed to take place on two levels – that of story and that of remembrance.

The Ramban in *Parashat* *Ki Tisa* (*Devarim* 25:17) grapples with the question of when and how one fulfills the mitzvaof remembering Amalek. The Torah does not define any period of time when the story of Amalek must be remembered. Should the verses relating to this story be read every day, week, month, or year? The Ramban "throws up his hands" and concludes that there is no specific time when the deeds of Amalek must be remembered. The mitzvato remember Amalek has no defined mitzva act but is fulfilled continuously, as an obligation to live with a consciousness that recognizes the existence of Amalek as the representative of evil.

However, the *Tosafot* (*Megilla* 17a, s.v. *kol*) established that reading the Torah passage of *Zakhor* once a year is also a Torah obligation. It turns out that both obligations are from the Torah: the obligation of continuous remembrance noted by the Ramban, and the public reading once a year noted by the *Tosafot*.

The same duality of the two types of remembrance is found in the remembrance of Shabbat, which also takes place on two levels. First and foremost, we refrain from work for one day every week to mark Shabbat. However, the Torah also expects us to be constantly aware of Shabbat, which is the peak of the week. It is famously related about Shammai the Elder that "all his life he ate in honor of Shabbat. If he found a well-favored animal, he said: Let this be for Shabbat. [If afterwards] he found one better favored, he put aside the second [for Shabbat] and ate the first" (*Beitza* 16a). Shammai's whole week was directed towards Shabbat, so that even on weekdays, he lived in the consciousness of Shabbat.

The "general" consciousness of Shabbat applies not only during the week, but even on Shabbat itself. The Ramban in *Parashat Emor* (*Vayikra* 23:24) describes a scenario in which a person can desecrate the Shabbat without performing a single prohibited labor, by abandoning his awareness of Shabbat – a violation of "*shabbaton*," according to the Ramban.

Finally, we must pay attention to the most central memory, the memory of the revelation at Mount Sinai, where it was stated: "I am the Lord your God" (*Shemot* 20:2; *Devarim* 5:6). A person must live as if he were standing before God at all times, and thus he will also fulfill the commandment of "You shall be holy" (*Vayikra* 19:2). It is important that we know how to live our lives not only in accordance with the formal parameters, but also to choose the appropriate "filter" through which to contemplate reality and the challenges we face, the "filter" of being God's servants.

[This *sicha* was delivered on Shabbat *Parashat Bo* 5780.]

1. Note that this explanation does not accord precisely with the claim appearing in the Gemara there, that in the days of the Messiah, the remembrance of the exodus from Egypt will be secondary. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)