

The Dual Aspect of the Four Cups: A Core Idea of Pesach from the Rav

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If one drinks these four cups using undiluted wine, he fulfills the mitzva of four cups but not the mitzvah of freedom. If he drinks all four cups using diluted wine but drinks them simultaneously, he fulfills the mitzvah of freedom but not the mitzvah of four cups.

Rambam, Hilchos Chametz Umatza 7:9

ארבעה כוסות האלו צריך למזוג אותן כדי שתהיה שתיה עריבה הכל לפי היין ולפי דעת השותה, ולא יפחות בארבעתן מרביעית יין חי, שתה ארבעה כוסות אלו מיין שאינו מזוג יצא ידי ארבעה כוסות ולא יצא ידי חירות, שתה ארבעה כוסות מזוגין בבת אחת יצא ידי חירות ולא יצא ידי ארבעה כוסות.
רמב"ם, הלכות חמץ ומצה ז:ט

The Rambam's words are enigmatic. Why does the Rambam distinguish between the mitzva of four cups and the mitzva of freedom? Rav Chaim Soloveitchik explained that there are two separate mitzvos fulfilled when one drinks the four cups of wine at the seder. One mitzvah is the recitation of a special *beracha* over each cup of wine. A second mitzva is drinking the four cups in a manner expressive of freedom, *derech cheirus*. Normally, we say each of the four *berachos* separately: one at Kiddush, one after reciting *maggid*, one after Birkas Hamazon and one after Hallel. We fill the cup each time with diluted wine (i.e. wine that is pleasant to drink) and drink after the recitation of the *beracha*. By doing this, we fulfill both mitzvos. However, as the Rambam describes, the two mitzvos are divisible. If someone drinks very strong undiluted wine, he fulfills the mitzva of reciting a *beracha* on each cup of wine but lacks the mitzvah of drinking the cups *derech cheirus*. If someone drinks four cups of diluted wine but doesn't recite any of the four special *berachos*, he fulfills the mitzva of drinking four cups *derech cheirus* but fails to fulfill the mitzvah of reciting the *berachos*.

The Rav noted that this halachic distinction within the rabbinic mitzva of the four cups reflects a Torah distinction that we find in the biblical mitzva of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*, the mitzva to recount the story of the Exodus. The mitzva of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* has a dual aspect: one is education; the second is experiential.

And you shall tell your son on that day saying: because of this G-d did this for me when I left Egypt.

Shemos 13:8

והגדת לבנך ביום ההוא לאמר בעבור זה עשה ה' לי בצאתי ממצרים.
שמות יג:ח

We must teach our children, others and ourselves about *yetzias Mitzrayim*. The recitation of the Hagada is *talmud Torah* (Torah study) *par excellence*. We ask questions and give answers. We study and try to understand the story of the Exodus, its history, significance and meaning. This is all part of the education aspect of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*. It is a mitzva of the mind. For this reason, the Hagada tells us, כנגד ארבעה בנים דברה תורה, the Torah addresses four sons. Each of the sons represents a certain intellectual level. That section of the Hagada addresses the cognitive mitzva of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*.

There is another aspect of the mitzva of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*:

Every person in every generation must see himself as if he himself left Egypt.

Mishna, Pesachim 10:5

בכל דור ודור חייב אדם לראות את עצמו כאילו הוא יצא ממצרים.

משנה, פסחים י:ה

This obligation is reflective of the experiential aspect of the mitzva—to feel the Exodus as a real part of history, to personalize it and experience it emotionally. One must experience both the agony of the suffering brought about by the harsh slavery as well as the ecstasy of deliverance and freedom. This aspect is a mitzva of the heart, the emotional aspect of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*.

The Rambam has a slightly different version of the text:

Every person in every generation must display himself as if he himself just left the slavery of Egypt.

Rambam, Hilchos Chametz Umatza 7:6

בכל דור ודור חייב אדם להראות את עצמו כאילו הוא בעצמו יצא עתה משעבוד מצרים.

רמב"ם, הלכות חמץ ומצה ז:ו

The single letter added by the Rambam is very significant. According to the Rambam, the experience of *yetzias Mitzrayim* must be so real that it is not restricted only to the internal psychological world of emotional feelings and imagination, but it also bursts forth into physical expression.

When we eat the maror and cry tears, these are real tears of the slave. We see the wanton deaths of our brothers, sisters, parents and children, and cry out in emotional agony and pain. When we eat the matza and drink the wine while reclining, we feel the real joy of redemption and rejoice in religious ecstasy. This joy expresses itself as we burst into the song of Hallel and the other Pesach songs at the end of the seder.

These two aspects of the biblical mitzva of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* are reflected in the mitzva of drinking the four cups of wine. The mitzva of reciting four *berachos* is the intellectual expression of our thanks to G-d for His salvation. The drinking of the four cups of wine is the emotional and physical expression of our joy and appreciation.

The Pesach seder rejuvenates the Jew. It energizes us on all levels—spiritual, intellectual, emotional and physical—to understand and experience the blessings of *yetzias Mitzrayim* and being part of G-d's chosen holy people.