

This Week's Parshah - Parshas Tzav

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Soroh Leah *bas* Matisyohu *a"h*

a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

Relating to Children – at the Seder

A halachic analysis of the parameters of the seasonal obligation to relate the Exodus narrative to one's children

As is well known, practiced and appreciated, the Seder night is characterized as a remarkable educational opportunity, a time of profound interaction as one generation relates to the next, in many senses of the word. Not only are we enjoined to discuss the narrative of Yetziyas Mitzrayim (leaving Egypt), but there is a specific mitzvah to relate these events to one's children. As the *passuk* states (*Shemos 13:8*): וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר בְּעֵבֹר זֶה – “And you shall tell your son on that day, saying: ‘Because of this, Hashem did for me as I left Mitzrayim.’”

International Complications

R' David Soloveitchik (*Me'orei Hamo'adim, Pesach*) addresses the following question, entailing a scenario that is not uncommon these days. A certain individual who lived abroad was visiting his children who lived in Eretz Yisrael. The Seder of the first night presented no problems, of course; it was the second night when things became interesting. This man's children were permanent residents of the Land; as such, they observed only one day of *yom tov* and hence needed to attend only one Seder. The father, a resident of the diaspora and visiting only temporarily in Eretz Yisrael, had two Sedarim to attend: one the first night and one the second.

This is where the issue arose: On the second night, the visiting father had to conduct a Seder; his children did not. What was he supposed to do vis-a-vis the obligation of “*v'higadeta l'vincha* – “you shall relate to your children”? Is this considered *his* obligation, such that he would have to bring his sons into the picture – despite the fact that for them, it was *chol hamo'ed* (intermediate festival days), and they had no formal Seder obligations? Or is the general obligation considered one that rests upon the children, i.e., *they* need to receive instruction from their father on this night? If that were the case, the “*v'higadeta l'vincha*” obligation would not be applicable here.

Basically, the question boils down to the following: Children, no doubt, are the most precious commodity of the Jewish people, the symbol of our continued existence and our future. When considering the overall mitzvah of “*v'higadeta l'vincha*,” however, we must analyze what technical, legalistic role they play in the mitzvah. Is it chiefly their obligation, such that, so to speak, it is up to them to solicit their father's telling of the story? If that is the case, then in our scenario, their presence at their father's second-night Seder is not necessary. Since the primary obligation is theirs anyway, tonight they have no obligation; they're off the hook and can go their merry way.

But the obligation could be understood from a completely different perspective, one that emanates chiefly from the father's standpoint. Take, for example, the mitzvah of the four *minim* (species) that are taken on Sukkos. That is an obligation that falls squarely on the individual, in which he uses a specific *cheftzah shel mitzvah*

(mitzvah item) – in this case a *lulav* and *esrog* – to fulfill his personal obligation. Perhaps it is the same with regard to the Passover obligation of “*v’higadeta l’vincha*.” In other words, it is chiefly the father’s personal obligation to relate the story of Yetziyas Mitzrayim; from a technical standpoint, his children in this case are no more than a “*cheftzah shel mitzah*,” his *lulav* and *esrog* with which he will fulfill his obligation. This is no mere intellectual hypothesizing but carries bona-fide ramifications: in the case of our overseas visitor, he would need to enlist his “Israeli” children if this were the case. Their personal obligation is actually irrelevant; for purposes of this mitzvah, they are his *lulav* and *esrog*. He needs children of his own present at his Seder in order to fulfill *his* obligation of relating the story to his children.

Off the Hook

R’ David rules leniently in this case. He bases his reasoning on a Talmudic passage stemming from the following Mishnah in Kiddushin (1:7):

כָּל מִצְוֹת הַבֵּן עַל הָאָב, אֲנָשִׁים תִּבְיִן וְנָשִׁים פְּטוּרוֹת.

“(The general rule is:) Any mitzvah involving one’s child, the obligation of which is incumbent on the parent – men are required to perform, while women are exempt.”

In other words, there are certain *mitzvos* that a parent must perform on behalf of his child. In such instances, it is the father’s (not mother’s) obligation to see that the deed is discharged.

What are these *mitzvos*? The Gemara (*Kiddushin 29a*) lists a number of examples: *milah* (circumcision), *pidyon haben* (redemption of the first-born), Torah education, etc. Conspicuously missing from the list, however, is what one would have assumed to be the quintessential “*mitzvas haben al ha’av*” – the mitzvah of “*v’higadeta l’vincha*,” – you shall relate to your child (about the Exodus).

Why, indeed, was this item omitted from the list? R’ David concludes that, apparently, this mitzvah is *not* one that is imposed on the father; rather, it is *the children’s own obligation* to solicit their father’s instruction.

In that case, then, they are indeed not considered simply the father’s *lulav* and *esrog*, means through which he carries out his personal obligation. Rather, they themselves carry their own obligation. Since the emphasis is placed on them, we examine their status of obligation. As such, in our scenario (residents of the Land on the second night of Pesach in Eretz Yisrael), they need not be in attendance at the Seder.

There is another ramification to this general question regarding the mitzvah of “*v’higadeta l’vincha*”: In a regular case (all family members reside in the same country, and share the Passover obligations on the same day), need one relate (the story) to *all* of one’s children? R’ David points out that this would seem to depend, once again, on the two possibilities discussed above. If we assume that it is primarily a mitzvah incumbent on the children, then they would *each* need to be told, for each of them has his own obligation. However, if it is the father’s obligation, and they are just “mitzvah objects,” the means through which he discharges his obligation, it would be an entirely different story. If this is the case, by even relating the story to one child – lo and behold, the father’s obligation has been discharged.