There are two historical events that are the basis of our entire religion – Yetziat Mitzrayim and Ma’amad Har Sinai. On these two occasions, G-d demonstrated the truth of all of the ikarei emunah (the principles of faith) to the Jewish people. He showed that He exists, is aware of worldly events, and has the ability to intervene by meting out sechar veOnesh, punishing the reshaim and rewarding the tzaddikim. Furthermore, G-d confirmed that He alone possesses the ability to change the laws of nature. G-d thereby verified that He is the Creator; otherwise, He would not have dominion over nature.

At this time, G-d also taught Bnei Yisrael the ikar of geulah. The yeseid of biat haMashiach is that G-d not only created the world but that He has an ongoing involvement in it. He wants to see mankind ultimately fulfill its purpose in bringing the world to a proper resolution. At the time of Yetziat Mitzrayim, G-d stepped in to punish Pharaoh and redeem the Jewish people, and He will similarly lead the world to an ultimate geulah in the times of Mashiach.

Through G-d’s direct intervention, we also learn the ikanim of יא Malone ישנא, the idea that Klal Yisrael is not subservient to the dominion of the stars and constellations, as well as the fact that Klal Yisrael is the Am HaNivchar (Chosen Nation). Finally, the ikanim of the truth of nevuah (prophecy), the primacy of nevuat Moshe, and Torah min haShamayim are predicated on Ma’amad Har Sinai.

How do we know that our religion is the true religion? Rav Yehudah HaLevi stresses the fact that we have a historical tradition that began with an event witnessed by a great mass of people – 600,000 men between the ages of 20 and 60, in addition to those younger and older, women, and the eirev rav. This great mass of people experienced firsthand the 10 Plagues, Yetziat Mitzrayim, Kriyat Yam Suf, and Ma’amad Har Sinai, and this is how our religion was established.

This historical tradition was passed down to us by our parents and grandparents, who told us about these events. Our ancestors were not a band of drunkards and liars. We know our parents and grandparents to be honest, trustworthy people. They did not lie to us!

The Christians claim that Oto Halsh performed miracles, but those purported miracles were supposedly witnessed by only a few disciples. Mohammad’s prophecy was similarly only a personal experience. In contrast, the incidents recounted in the Chumash were witnessed by millions of people, and that is why we have a much stronger historical tradition than all the other religions.

Based on this understanding, Rambam interprets the verse in Shir HaShirim, “Turn, turn, O Shulamit (perfect one); turn, turn, that we may see you.” The nations of the world say to the Jewish people, “Turn away from G-d. Why do you not follow our religion? We also have a historical tradition!” The verse concludes “What will you see in the Shulamit like a dance of the camps?” The Jewish people respond, “If you were to demonstrate something commensurate with Ma’amad Har Sinai, where there was machane Shechина opposite machane Yisrael – namely, a historical tradition witnessed by millions of people – we could follow your religion. But you cannot. We know the authenticity of our religion.”

Rambam further notes that the word ‘return’ appears four times in the verse, to hint that Klal Yisrael will be coerced to abandon its faith four times – during the rule of each of the four kingdoms that will subjugate us, the last of which we are still currently experiencing. Yet G-d has promised us that even as they force us to adopt their faith, the Torah will never be removed from us, as the verse says “for it shall not be forgotten from the mouth of its offspring.” It is for this reason that Rambam maintains that there is a mitzvah to read the parasha of Ma’amad Har Sinai once a year.

These two events – Yetziat Mitzrayim and Ma’amad Har Sinai – are crucial to teach us all of the ikarei emunah. That is why we have a daily mitzvah to mention Yetziat Mitzrayim and a special mitzvah on Pesach night of sippur, to relate the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim at great length and with much elaboration, and especially to transmit it to succeeding generations.

This essay is adapted from Rav Schachter on the Haggadah.

2. Iggeret Teiman 3.
3. 7:1.
6. See Derech Pikudecha, mitzvat asei 21, cholek hamachshavah, in the name of Maharam Chagiz.

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