

Leil Shimurim - A Night of Guarding

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The night of the fifteenth of Nissan is commonly known as Leil HaSeder. The Torah (Shemos 12, 42) refers to it as Leil Shimurim - a night of guarding. The Gemora (Pesochim 109b) explains that the night of Pesach is one on which we are guarded from harmful forces of all kinds. This applies not only when Klal Yisroel were in Mitzrayim but also to every Leil Pesach from then to the present day.¹

Rashi (Shemos 12, 42) comments that the word 'shimurim' also means to wait expectantly for something. Hashem waited from the time of his promise to Avrohom Avinu at the Bris Bein HaBesorim until its fulfilment hundreds of years later.

The idea of Leil Shimurim is expressed by a variety of minhogim at the Seder.

The Tzeida Laderech (Maamar 4, Perek 12) writes that when Leil HaSeder coincides with Shabbos, we do not say Birkas M'ein Sheva (after the conclusion of the silent Shemona Esrei of Maariv) as this was originally instituted so that everyone would leave shul together and not have to worry about mazikim (demons). Since it is Leil Shimurim, this reason does not apply.

Many Jews had the custom to leave the doors of their homes open on Seder night. The Maaseh Rokeach (p.19a) quotes the Megillas Setarim who explains this minhag as a display of anticipation of the arrival of Eliyahu Hanovi to inform us of the coming of Moshiach. When Eliyahu comes, we will go out to greet him without any delay. The Raavan (Sefer Hamanhig, Hilchos Pesach, 2) explains that this emphatic display of our firm belief is in itself a merit that will help to bring the geulah (final redemption).

The Mogein Avrohom (481, 2) cites a minhag from the Sefer Maharil not to lock the door as securely as usual, though only when there is no question of danger as one should not rely on miracles. The Chok Yaakov (480, 6) who lived only a century later wrote that the minhag had already been abandoned due to the widespread danger of thieves. Even so, many retain the custom to open the door at least to say the paragraph Shefoch Chamosecha, with the idea of the Raavan in mind (see Rema 480, citing Mahari Bruna).

The Rema (475, 1) writes that the minhag Ashkenaz is not to dip the matzah into salt on Seder night as it is pas naki, clean bread, which does not require salt. The Chok Yaakov (475, 4) quoting the Maharil says that it is to show our love of the mitzvah of matzah, whilst the Levush wrote that it is because matzah is called 'lechem oni', - poor man's bread, and therefore we do not add anything to it.

However, the Leket Yosher² (p.84b) gives an entirely different reason based upon Tosfos in Brochos (40a 'havei melach')

who quotes a Midrash that explains why we usually have salt with our bread. Whilst Jews sit at their tables waiting for others to wash their hands and are without mitzvos, the Satan uses the opportunity to incite the Midas HaDin (strict judgement) against them, but the 'Bris Melach'³ guards them. The Leket Yosher explains that on this night we do not need bris of salt to guard us, as it is Leil Shimurim.

The Rema (481, 2) writes that on Leil Shimurim we don't recite the usual tefillos and pesukim before going to sleep, only the parsha of Shema. (The Mogein Avrohom notes that one should also say Bircas Hamapil.) The Machatzis Hashekel stresses that one should not say more than this, in an attempt to be stringent, as it will have the opposite effect. Saying more tefillos, would give the impression that one doesn't believe in the idea of Leil Shimurim.

The Gemora in Chulin (5b) says that Hakodosh Boruch Hu does not allow even the animals of Tzaddikim to mistakenly eat forbidden foods, and all the more so, the Tzaddikim themselves.

Additionally, the Maharal of Prague explains that we wear a Kittel at the Seder to acquire an elevated level of avodas Hashem, similar to the Cohen Godol who wore white clothes during the avodah of Yom Kippur. Rav Pinchos of Koritz said that the purpose of wearing a white Kittel is so that we may be compared to Malochim (angels), who according to the Zohar HaKodosh come down with Hashem to see how we perform the Seder.

Surely, on account of both Leil Shimurim and at a time when we should be on a lofty plain, Hashem should protect us from eating any Chometz unintentionally. Why is it that we are so concerned and careful about this at every moment?

Tosfos in Shabbos (12a) explains that the protection mentioned by the Gemora in Chulin is limited to foods that are intrinsically forbidden, i.e. non-kosher animals or non-kosher wine, however, when the food is prohibited only due to it being a specific time of year, such as abstaining from eating Chometz on Pesach, the protection is not guaranteed.

The message seems to be that when it comes to external forces, Hashem will shield us on Pesach, but when it comes to 'guarding the matzah' that is the very mitzvah that has been given to us to fulfil. If Hashem were to intervene it would remove our responsibility and thereby diminish our reward.

¹ In addition, refer to the dispute of R' Yehoshua and R' Eliezer (Rosh Hashana 11b).

² Leket Yosher is a collection of minhogim and pesukim of Rav Yisroel Isserlin the

'Terumas HaDeshen' compiled by his close talmid Rav Yosef ben Moshe (1423-1490?).

³ See Vayikra 2, 13 and Rema O.C. 167, 5.

