



**RABBI JUDAH**

**MISCHEL**

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# Pesach: Anticipation

A Jewish beggar befriended a gentile companion and the two paired up to travel around collecting funds together. The gentile was German, so the two were able to converse in Yiddish. As Pesach drew near, the Jewish beggar hatched a scheme, “Look, on the night of our holiday, you should dress up as Jew and accompany me to the synagogue. You’ll certainly be invited for a “Seder” — that’s a meal where Jews spare no expense to honor the holiday. They celebrate with all the trimmings of a feast fit for the sons and daughters of a king. I’m telling you, you’ll get the greatest meal of your life for free!”

Seder night arrived, and as expected, the German was invited by a generous family. Looking forward to the delicacies that awaited him at the festive meal, the gentile in disguise set out with his hosts. Strangely, after just one cup of wine and a small piece of boiled potato dipped in salt water, they began to recite and discuss some Hebrew pamphlet that he didn’t understand. Hours passed, as

they recited and talked and sang, and he sat there frustrated, confused and desperate to eat.

Finally, they stopped talking and got up and washed their hands. It was finally time to eat! His host broke a big cracker and passed it around. Everyone started eating it with their eyes closed as if it was the most delicious bread, but as he scarfed it down, he almost gagged, it tasted so stale and dry! Confounded, he awaited the next course; surely it would be a large serving of succulent meat. But to his shock, the hostess brought out heaping portions of... horseradish? Famished, he took a mouthful, which seared his tongue and nostrils and almost made him wretch. “That’s it,” he said to himself, “I cannot take any more of this “royal feast”! That was clearly the entire meal, and it was absolutely terrible.” He leapt up and ran from the house, gasping, “Cursed Jews! After all that intolerable religious stuff, that’s all they can serve me?” He went back to the shul where he had arranged to meet up with his partner after their meals. Fuming and hungry, he fell asleep.

After a few hours, the Yid arrived, happy and full, humming a tune. “So *nu*,” he smiled, waking up the German, “How was your Seder?” The German angrily recounted his experience and shouted at him for deceiving him.

“What? You fool,” laughed the Yid. “If only you had waited just a little bit longer! In *mamash* just a few moments, you would

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have eaten like a king, as I did!”

(*Stories of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov*, #23).

לֵיל שְׁמִירִים הוּא לַה' לְהוֹצִיאֵם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם הוּא הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה  
לַה' שְׁמִירִים לְכָל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְדֹרֹתָם:

“It was a *leil shimurim*, a ‘night of anticipation’ for God to take them out of the land of Egypt” (*Shemos*, 12:42)

Rashi comments: שהיה הקב"ה שומר ומצפה לו, לקיים הבטחתו להוציאם מארץ מצרים, “*HaKadosh Baruch Hu* was **waiting for and anticipating** that night in order to fulfill His promise to take them out of the land of Egypt.” In other words, Seder Night is “God’s Night”, the appointed time that Hashem promised Avraham Avinu: “On this night I will redeem your children.”


R’ Prof. Yitzchak Twersky, The Tolner Rebbe of Boston, zy’a, extends Rashi’s interpretation as a direct call to action for us. Just as the *Ribbono Shel Olam* was filled with longing, as it were, eagerly awaiting the arrival of the time to fulfill His commitment to us — then it is a form of *ve-halachta b’drerachav*, “walking in God’s ways”, for us to cultivate anticipation for the opportunity and the merit of fulfilling our commitment to Him. We mirror Hashem’s commitment by celebrating Pesach and fulfilling the mitzvos of the night.

Parallel to the term *shimurim* is Moshe Rabbeinu’s review of the directive of *shamor*, to ‘observe’ Pesach:

שְׁמֹר אֶת־חֹדֶשׁ הָאָבִיב וְעִשִּׂיתָ פֶּסַח לַה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ כִּי בַחֹדֶשׁ  
הָאָבִיב הוֹצִיאָךְ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִמִּצְרַיִם לַיְלָה

“Observe the month of spring, and make the Pesach offering to Hashem, for in the month of spring, Hashem brought you out of Egypt at night. (*Devarim*, 16:1)

The Abarbanel expresses the implied



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meaning in *shamor* most beautifully:

שמור את חודש האביב...שיתאווה ויכסוף הדברים ההם  
קודם בואם, וישמח עמם אחרי הנעתם

“*Shamor* the month of spring’ ...It is a mark of positive events that one craves and anticipates them before they arrive, and is joyous after they have arrived, as it says, בָּצֵלוּ, חִמְדָּתִי וְיִשְׁבָּתִי, ‘I craved to sit in his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my palate’ (*Shir haShirim*, 2:3). So too did He commanded us with “*shamor*” in the month of spring — we should crave and anticipate its coming and rejoice in our celebration of the Yom Tov once it has arrived.”

Typically, the word *shamor* is translated as ‘guard’ or ‘watch’. When Yosef relates his dreams, sharing them with his father and brothers, the Torah tells us that Yaakov שמר את הדבר, “watched over the matter”. Rashi comments on the Torah’s choice of language

and explains that Yaakov Avinu was ‘guarding’ the dream, ממתין ומצפה מתי יבוא, ‘eagerly awaiting the time when Yosef’s dreams would come true,’ anticipating and craving for these lofty visions to manifest into reality.

In describing his own experience as an uninformed guest at a Pesach Seder, social commentator Sebastian Maniscalco describes his frustration and bewilderment. Instead of sitting down to the holiday dinner he had hungrily anticipated, he was confronted with two hours of recital and reading material, a little celery, crackers and a strange bitter jam. Overcome with impatience, he blurts out, “I respect the Jews, but let’s have the *Italians* cater the Passover meal, alright?”

Rav Tuvia Bolton, the beloved musician, storyteller and head of Yeshiva Ohr Temimim in Kfar Chabad has likened all of Jewish history until now to one long Pesach seder. We have sat patiently at the table for millennia, yearning and learning and reliving the story of our past salvation from Egypt, sustained by “bread of faith”. Yet, our hunger for the *Geulah Sheleimah*, the Complete Redemption, has never been satiated. Even while eating more than our share of *maror*, the bitterness and strange suffering of exile, we patiently continued to draw strength from sharing the story of our Exodus from Egypt, our national origin story. And in the company of our family and friends, we have expressed our endless craving for Geulah.

Pesach Night, *Leil Shimurim*, is an opportune time for us to strengthen ourselves and continue to hold onto our holy anticipation and yearning for redemption — to hang on just a little bit longer, with resolute faith that the sumptuous main course is about to be served. ■



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