

## Night of Watching and Anticipation

The first night of Pesach is called "leil shimurim" based on the verse in Shemos 12:42, which states: "It is a leil shimurim for Hashem to take them out from the land of Egypt; this is the night unto Hashem, shimurim for all the Children of Israel throughout their generations."<sup>1</sup>

Rashi explains this puzzling verse by breaking it into two parts. The first half of the verse references Hashem's steady anticipation since promising Avraham 430 years earlier that He would redeem his children on this night. In this sense, the root *sh-m-r* means to wait in hopeful anticipation, like the verse in *Bereishis* 37:11, which states with regard to Yosef: "His brothers were jealous of him [concerning his dream], but his father waited in anticipation (*shamar*) about the matter." So too, Hashem was looking forward to the night when He would fulfill His promise to Avraham and redeem *Bnei Yisrael* from Egypt. The second half of the verse separately addresses the fact that, just as *Bnei Yisrael* gained protection against the tenth plague by remaining in their homes that night (as referenced in *Shemos* 12:23), so too Pesach night would continue to serve as a protective night for them during all

generations.

Ramban, in contrast, interprets the verse as being unified. The first expression means that this is a night that was set aside or anticipated by Hashem for the redemption from Egypt. And the second expression means that, so too, *Bnei Yisrael* set this night apart for all generations by dedicating it to discussion about the redemption from Egypt through the *mitzvos* of this night.

I had an elderly friend who grew up in a Reform Jewish family in Germany during the 1930's. His brother, while camping with friends, was chased by Hitler youth. The brother and his friends ran to a town where he knocked on a door and was immediately given refuge from the violent rabble who were chasing him. They heard singing upstairs (the homes in that area generally had the dining rooms upstairs). They went upstairs and saw a seder, which the family invited them to join. As Ramban says, the night was dedicated to Hashem through the observances of the seder and, for my friend's brother, this provided not only physical refuge but also a spiritual one.

Sforno likewise interprets the

verse in unified fashion. However, he understands the second half as referring to the future redemption. Just as this was a *leil shimurim* that Hashem had anticipated for as long as *Bnei Yisrael* had remained in Egypt, so too Hashem waits in anticipation for the future redemption – and it is therefore a *leil shimurim* for all generations.

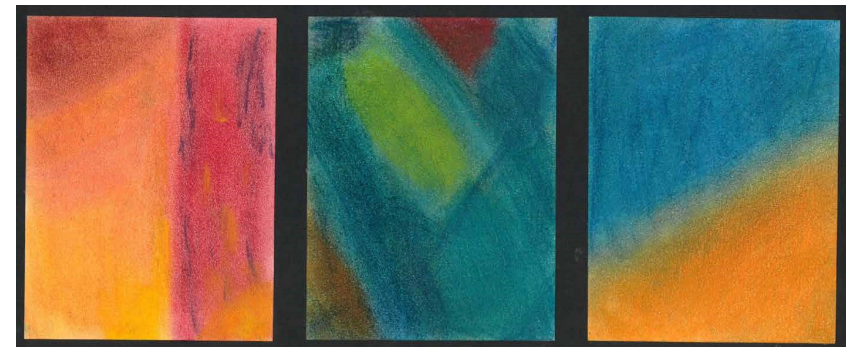
Thus, *leil shimurim* emerges as a night of anticipation. First, Hashem eagerly anticipated, as it were, the night when he would fulfill His promise to Avraham to redeem *Bnei Yisrael* from Egypt. In turn, this has become the night when He and we jointly recall the past redemption in anticipation of the future redemption. It is a night establishing that Hashem keeps His commitments to us and that we keep ours to Him, with watchfulness and anticipation, by safeguarding the *mitzvos* of Pesach night.

<sup>1</sup> This piece is based on the insights of HaRav Zvi Dov Kanotopsky zt"l and HaRav Yitzchak Twersky zt"l about this verse.



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Rabbi Paul Gelb received his J.D. from Columbia Law School as well as Semicha and an M.A. in Jewish History from Yeshiva University. Paul has practiced law for the past 20 years, specializing in business issues. He enjoys speaking and writing on issues of Jewish and general interest. He and his wife, Dr. Chana Gelb '92, are the proud parents of Eitan '22 and Nava '24.



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