

End The Lockdown: Opening the Door at the Seder

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For our family, one of the most anticipated parts of the Haggadah takes place after the meal and *after* much of the Haggadah has been recited. Most of us are quite tired by then, since we just completed bentsching and the drinking of the third cup, and drowsiness has certainly begun to set in. At that moment, usually around midnight, there is a sudden rush of excitement, and the enthusiasm of the Seder is rekindled upon filling the fourth cup and the special Kos Shel Eliyahu, Elijah's Cup. We quickly, urgently, leave our dining area, open the door wide and go stand outside, reciting the "*Shefoch Chamasecha*" paragraph, as the cool, outside air reinvigorates us further.

How many of us grew up watching the table and the door so carefully, eagerly awaiting Eliyahu HaNavi, Elijah the Prophet, to stealthily enter our house and drink a little of our Seder wine? Most smiling parents make that time even more magical by surreptitiously shaking the table, watching the wine in the cup move as we imagine Eliyahu taking a sip. For those of us blessed to have Holocaust survivors at our table, or older grandparents who went through persecutions at the hands of our oppressors, we poignantly realize the gravity of the moment and what we are saying: Pour out your wrath on those that have destroyed the Jewish people and our homes.

This strange and wonderful part of the Seder is a combination of so many

thoughts and ideas, yet it takes just a short time to perform. The Seder night is known as the *leil shimurim*, a night of protection. Indeed, we have been saved countless times in our history from our enemies and tormentors on this Seder night.

But what does *leil shimurim* mean? What role does Eliyahu play? And why open the door?

Leil Shimurim

Rabbi Moshe Isserles, the Rama, (in *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 480:1), cites that the mid-fifteenth century commentator, Rabbi Israel of Bruna, the Mahari Bruna, based upon the practice of the Ohr Zarua, mentioned opening the door to remind us that tonight is the night of protection. The *Aruch Hashulchan* (480:1) adds we stand up and invite Eliyahu in by saying *boruch haba* (welcome!). The Chofetz Chaim, in the *Mishna Berura* (seif kattan 10), explains that we are to have no fear of anything on this night and hence we open our doors. Indeed, the *Sefer Hamanhig* (Hilchos Pesach, Siman 2) and the *Ohr Zarua* (Chelek 2 Siman 234) say we leave all the doors of the house unlocked and open to demonstrate that real safety can come only from Hashem, and not barriers or bolts. Others (*Chok Yaakov* 480:6 and *Shulchan Aruch HaRav* 480:5) point out that if you live in a really bad neighborhood, you cannot rely on a miracle and you must lock the doors. However, even there, we at least symbolically demonstrate our commitment and confidence in Hashem as our Divine Protector by opening the doors to recite this paragraph.

This idea, that Pesach Seder night is a "*leil shimurim*," has halachic

ramifications. As a night of protection, we do not need to recite the entire "*Krias Shema al Hamitah*" prayers that are usually said before going to sleep as a method to invoke G-d's protection. We need only read the paragraphs of Shema and "*Birchas Hamapil*" because on this night we enjoy special protection from G-d (Rama, *Orach Chaim* 481:2).

The Ibn Ezra states that "guarding" means wakefulness and we should ideally refrain from sleep and stay awake all night to praise Hashem. While this is difficult to do after a meaningful but long Seder, many righteous individuals do try and stay up until slumber overtakes them while they are learning. A word to the wise — it might not be prudent to publicize this to those overstimulated and overtired children who do *not* want to go to sleep.

Future Redemption

Opening the door and greeting Eliyahu *also* signals the future redemption is near. Shimurim is a plural word, and it is used twice in the following pasuk:

לַיְל שְׁמֹרִים הוּא לָהּ לְהוֹצִיאָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם הוּא הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה לָהּ שְׁמֹרִים לְכֹל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְדוֹרָתָם.
There was a night of vigil for God, to bring them out of Egypt. This night remains for The Israelites a vigil to God for all generations.

Shemos 12:42

We often emphasize a particularly desired and strong idea by reiterating the words. Furthermore, it is a night that is guarded for *all* Israel for *all* generations.

Darchei Moshe (*Orach Chaim* 480) quotes the *Ohr Zarua*, who says in the name of Rav Nissim Gaon that this demonstrates our total belief that Hashem will save us in the future.

Sefas Emes (Pesach 5652) adds that we open the door because the future *geulah* (redemption) will be open for all (especially us!) to see the downfall of our enemies. This is the opposite of what occurred in Egypt, where klal Yisroel was specifically told (Shemos 12:22) not to leave the house until the morning. The “morning” homiletically refers to the *geulah* — only when the *geulah* comes will we merit seeing the open miracle of redemption.

The Ramchal, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, in his epic *Mesilas Yeshtarim* (7th Perek), points out that external actions help stimulate internal thoughts. The *Mishnah Brura* (480:10) states that the opening of the door and the filling of Kos Eliyahu are connected — just like we were redeemed in Mitzrayim, so too will Eliyahu herald the redemption in the future. Likewise, the *Pesach Meuvin* (Siman 361) and the *Mateh Moshe* (Siman 655) say we open the door to demonstrate our true belief that Moshiach is coming imminently. What better way to demonstrate that than to open our doors to welcome in Eliyahu, his forebearer. When Eliyahu comes, he will find the door wide open as we anxiously await his arrival. This action is a *zechus* that will indeed hasten his arrival. They both bring a Yerushalmi (*Kesubos*, 12th Perek, halacha 3) that Rabbi Yirmiyah told his family to bury him in the finest clothing, wearing shoes and with his staff, so when Moshiach comes he would be immediately ready to welcome him. We demonstrate that same alacrity of spirit by opening our doors Seder night, truly hoping and expecting to really see Eliyahu on the other side! The *Korban Eidah* and *Pnei Moshe* on that Yerushalmi add that this was to strengthen the people's belief in Moshiach as a real entity, not just a

mythical fable.

We all eagerly look forward to our own personal *yetzias Mitzrayim* as we fervently pray for the end of the difficult COVID-19 pandemic, and that we can emerge from the bondage of repeated lockdowns and quarantine. Many of us spent the first Pesach relatively alone, huddled together in small nuclear family units while we waited anxiously for Hashem to protect us from the plague of COVID. Told to lock down and stay inside, we felt safe indoors. Each of us can recall the effect the pandemic has had on our *yomim tovim* — the uncertainties and challenges.

Yet this year, as we iy”H open our doors in every sense and as we hopefully can welcome in other family, friends and guests again, we can experience a true *leil shimurim*, highlighted iy”H by us heralding into our homes and the collective Jewish people the ultimate guest, Eliyahu Hanavi, signaling the coming of Mashiach *Tzidkeinu* and final *geulah*.

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Tail-Recursion in the Haggadah: A Computer Science Perspective

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During my teenage years and into early adulthood, I attended various “Pesach programs” at Upstate New York hotels, first as a guest with my family, and subsequently working

as a *mashgiach*. A few decades later, I still vividly recall the scene that would repeat itself each year toward the end of the Sedarim: a large table of several dozen older singles would energetically and enthusiastically sing, “Who knows one? I know one! One is Hashem ... in the heavens and the earth.” A prominent outreach rabbi would leave his seat in the back of the dining room, where he too was vacationing with his family, to join the group at the front of the dining room, encouraging them along to sing even more energetically and enthusiastically.

This song — known in Hebrew as *Echad Mi Yodea* — is part of a series of *piyutim* (liturgical poems) that are appended to the halakhically mandated text of the Haggadah. Rabbi Tzidkiyah b. Avraham Anav (Rome, 13th century) records in his magnum opus *Shibbolei Haleket*, that it is “customary to say *piyutim* arranged with praise and thanksgiving, and so it is worthy to increase.” Various Medieval authorities identified specific *piyutim* that should be recited, ultimately culminating in a list of seven that were accepted as normative in Ashkenaz: *Chasal Siddur Pesach*, *Az Rov Nissim*, *Ometz Gevurotekha*, *Ki Lo Na’eh*, *Adir Hu*, *Echad Mi Yodea*, and *Chad Gadya*.¹ While these *piyutim* weren't necessarily customary in Sefardic lands, nonetheless, Rabbi Chaim Yosef David Azulai (“Chida,” 18th century) famously came to the defense of *Chad Gadya*, and the critique of an individual who disparaged it, noting that a “*gaon* distinguished in his generation” formulated more than ten “sweet and lovely” commentaries on *Chad Gadya*, and further attests to the “authority of the greatness of the *piyutim* of Ashkenaz.”²

Two of these *piyutim* — *Echad Mi*