

## **Second Chances**

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### *Pesah Sheni*

There were some who had been in intimate touch with the human soul and thus could not bring the Passover offering on its prescribed day. They approached Moses and Aaron on that very day. They said to him, "We have been in intimate touch with a human soul. Why, then, should we be kept from bringing G\*d's offering at its prescribed time, along with the rest of the Israelites?"

"Hold on," replied Moses. "Stand up, and I shall hear what G\*d will command you." (Numbers 9:6-8)

These folk had no intention of exempting themselves from bringing the Passover offering. Indeed, they had no intention of bringing themselves into "ritual unclean-ness" (the traditional translation, but perhaps "a state of disrupted spirituality" is more accurate). But they had to deal with the needs of one who had passed from this life. (That is what the euphemism "a human soul" is understood to mean.) And intimate contact with the Source of Life and Death is the primary cause of that disrupted spirituality.

So they could not bring the Passover offering, and they came to Moses and Aaron to ask what they could do about it. Interestingly, although they are described as approaching both Moses and Aaron, their question is directed to "him," not to "them;" apparently, Aaron stood back and let Moses handle all such questions. And Moses tells the questioners that he will join them in standing and hearing what G\*d will tell them.

Because these individuals were so eager to fulfill G\*d's Command to bring the Passover offering, they earned a personal answer from G\*d, rather than having their response come through the vehicle of Moses.

What a beautiful sequence. Those who were spiritually unable to bring the Passover offering came to Moses and Aaron *on the very day of the offering* to ask what they could do. Aaron then vanishes, deferring to Moses. And Moses, realizing instantly the high level of G\*d-connection these individuals had reached, defers to them and says that he himself will stand by and listen to what G\*d will say directly to them.

The Jewish tradition prescribes that, when a life is at stake, all other Commandments (with the exceptions of the prohibitions of murder, idolatry, and adultery) are laid aside. And we do not consider such action to be a violation of the Laws, nor even an exception to the Laws, but an integral part of the Laws. When preserving a life – even the possibility of preserving a life – necessitates lighting a fire on the Sabbath, or even eating a ham and cheese sandwich on Yom Kippur, that action is not a violation of the Sabbath or of Yom Kippur, but an integral part of the observance of those days, for the Torah tells us that we are to live by the Laws – to live by them and not to die because of them.

But these folk had not been engaged in treating someone who was ill or injured; they were not engaged in preserving a life, but in caring for one who had died. It was not, therefore, an observance of the Passover offering, but, technically, a violation of the Command to bring the offering. Still, because they were engaged in providing what we today would call “pastoral care” – seeing to the needs of the dead and, one can reasonably extrapolate, of the bereaved family – they had raised their own spirituality to a level that entitled them to receive a response directly from G\*d and not merely through the intermediary of Moses.

And what was G\*d’s response? **If anyone among the Israelites is in a state of disrupted spirituality due to contact with the dead, or is on a distant journey, whether now or in future generations, such persons must have the opportunity to bring the Passover offering as well.** When do they do so? A month later, and they are instructed to bring the Passover offering at that time, in exactly the same manner as the “regular” Passover offering is brought.

What a wonderful concept! A second chance! *Pesah Sheni*, we call it in Hebrew, a Second Passover. And it reminds us that there is always a second chance, that Judaism recognizes no “final” defeat or disability. As our master and teacher Rebbe Nahman of Breslov (1772-1810) teaches, there is never a reason for despair.

May the “second chance” Festival of *Pesah Sheni* bring us all to a realization of our many – oh, so many – second chances.

Shalom.