

BEHAALOSCHA (NUMBERS 8:1-12:16)

Second Chance

2005 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

One month after the Eve of Passover is known as “Pesach Sheini”. In Temple times, this “Second Passover” provided an opportunity to those who had been unable to bring the Passover offering. Even today, when there is no opportunity to bring that offering, Pesach Sheini teaches us an important lesson:

“It’s now or never.” So goes the saying. A missed opportunity can’t be made up. As King Solomon writes, *“That which is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be included.”* (Ecclesiastes, 1:5) The Talmud understands this verse as meaning that when the time for performing a Mitzvah passes, it is too late; nothing can be done to right the wrong.

Offerings had to be brought at a set time in the Temple. Once you missed the deadline, that was it. Too late.

There is a Mitzvah to fast on Yom Kippur. You can’t say, on the day after Yom Kippur, “Oh, I was hungry yesterday, so I ate. I guess I’ll fast today instead.” Or, “Oh, last week was Rosh Hashanah, and I missed the sounding of the *Shofar*! I’ll just do it now!”

Sorry. It doesn’t work.

Some people in the desert were unhappy with this concept.

Moses was confronted by a group of people with a problem. Due to their involvement in the Mitzvah of burying the dead, they found themselves disqualified from bringing the Passover Offering.

Every year, on the Eve of Passover, a Passover Offering was to be brought in the Temple by every family. This offering may only be brought by someone who is in a state of ritual purity. If, for example, a person has come in contact with the dead, he may not participate in this ceremony without first undergoing a week-long purification process.

There were people ...who could not bring the Passover Offering on that day (i.e., the Eve of Passover) so they approached Moses and Aaron ...”We are contaminated through contact with a dead person; why should we lose out by not bringing G-d’s offering...among the Children of Israel?” (Numbers, 9:6-7)

“...*why should we lose out?*” These devout Israelites, busy with other Mitzvahs, wanted to do MORE. They wanted to express their gratitude to G-d for taking them out of Egypt. They wanted to get even closer to G-d than they were already, and they felt deprived by not being able to do more. Why couldn't they get another chance?

That chance was provided. Moses brought their inquiry to G-d, and G-d gave him the Mitzvah of *Pesach Sheini*, the “Second Passover.” Anyone who was either far from Jerusalem or ritually “contaminated” on the Eve of Passover was given the opportunity to present his offering a month later on the “*Second Passover*.” Like the first Passover Offering a month earlier, it had to be eaten with Matzah and bitter herbs.

Most commentaries indicate that the Mitzvah of Second Passover would have been given to Moses even had these people not come to him with their request. However, some suggest that this Mitzvah was given only because of that request.

Rabbi Shlomo HaKohen, the first Rebbe of Radomsk, (quoted in Sefer Iturei Torah) seems to take this approach. The Rebbe points out that the Passover offering is the only Mitzvah with a deadline where we are given a second chance after that deadline is missed. A group of people were pained over their inability to do a Mitzvah. They desperately wanted to do this Mitzvah, pleading, “*why should we lose out...*” by not being able to bring the Passover offering.

G-d's response? He gave them a second chance. They wanted to do this Mitzvah, so G-d gave them the Mitzvah.

Rabbi Yoseph Ber Soloveitchik was one of the great rabbinic geniuses of the 19th century. He served as the Rabbi of Slutzk, a position where he suffered considerable degradation from communal “leaders” who rejected his wisdom and Torah guidance. After he left Slutzk in 1874, he was quite certain that he would never again accept a rabbinical position.

In 1878, the city of Brisk sent a delegation to invite Rabbi Soloveitchik to serve as their rabbi. He refused. A very close friend, an esteemed rabbi who accompanied the delegation tried to convince him to change his mind. He refused. He had had enough of the rabbinate; he was not interested in the position.

Suddenly, one of his visitors cried out emotionally, “Rebbe, how can you turn us away when there are twenty-five thousand Jews in Brisk anxiously awaiting your arrival?”

Upon hearing these words, Rabbi Soloveitchik realized that he could not leave twenty-five thousand people waiting. He had no choice. He HAD to accept the position.

The Chofetz Chaim (A brief biography of the Chofetz Chaim can be found [here](#). Read his obituaries in the New York Times and Time magazine [here](#).) used to tell the above story about Rabbi Soloveitchik. He pointed out that Rabbi Soloveitchik refused to allow twenty-five thousand people to wait for him. Yet, he noted, the Jewish People have been waiting for two thousand years for the Messiah to come, and he hasn't arrived yet. What is taking so long? Is the Messiah any less considerate than Rabbi Soloveitchik??? Obviously, answered the Chofetz Chaim, there is a difference between the twenty-five thousand Jews of Brisk and us. The difference is that we're really not waiting!

The Temple has been lying in ruins for almost two thousand years. Two thousand Passovers without a Passover Offering. Two thousand "Second Passovers" without a Passover Offering. What is G-d waiting for?

Perhaps He's waiting for us to cry out, in pain and in anguish, "*Why should we lose out by not bringing G-d's offering...among the Children of Israel?*"

G-d saw how upset some of the Israelites felt due to their inability to bring the Passover Offering. As a result, He immediately answered their prayers and gave them the chance to bring it after all. If we genuinely express our desire to bring Offerings in the rebuilt Temple, if we REALLY feel that we are losing out by not having a Temple, will He immediately answer our prayers?

What do you say we try it and find out?!

Have a great Shabbos.

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