

## Pesach Sheni & Rabbinic Burn Out Rabbi Maury Grebenau

Our Parsha contains an uplifting story of a group of Jews who are not satisfied with missing an opportunity to do a Mitzva. They come to Moshe and ask that they be allowed to have a way to fulfill the Korban Pesach despite their ineligibility. They are Tamei (ritually impure) on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nissan when the sacrifice is brought and they are given a make up day, one month later. Rabbeiu Bachya points out that this incident and the solution given to them was very novel<sup>1</sup> and not at all something which could be anticipated. What exactly was the situation and what are we to learn from this novel solution?

The Gemara (Sukkah 25a) has a number of possibilities as to who this group was. What was their story? Why were they Tamei? One of the common ways to become Tamei is through contact with a dead body. The Gemara presents three options which all relate to this option: a) they were fulfilling Yosef's request to take his bones out of Egypt to Israel b) It was the Kohanim who pulled the bodies of Aharon's two sons out of the Mishkan after they were killed c) They had found a dead body without any relatives and so they were required to bury the body<sup>2</sup>.

The Netzi"v (Haemek Davar) explains that the Gemara is bothered by the fact that even if they became Tamei what was the reason they didn't just make sure to become pure before they needed to bring this Korban? He explain that according to the first two options they mistakenly believed that since they had become Tamei involved in a mitzvah this would not disqualify them from bringing the Pesach and they did not need to become pure<sup>3</sup>. The final opinion takes a different approach and says that it was a body they just found and so really there was not time to become pure before the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nissan.

The Meshech Chochma takes this point even further. He says that according to the opinion that they were transporting the bones of Yosef they were making an even greater claim. It can't be that our ability to remember Yetziat Mitzrayim could be compromised by the bones of the very Tzaddik that brought about our leaving Egypt. The Meshech Chochma seems to be saying that, in part, it was the merit of Yosef and the fact that he was promised that his bones would be taken out of Egypt which resulted in our exodus.

Rashi (9:7) comments that the reason this parsha was only taught once the individuals asked about it is the concept of "*megalgin zechus al yedei zakai*", we give more merit to the meritorious. With the idea of the Netzi"v this takes on even more meaning. These were individuals who had engaged in a Mitzva, perhaps one which was directly connected with

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<sup>1</sup> He contrasts it with B'nos Tzafchad where Moshe also does not immediately know the answer and confers with Hashem. In that instance we find that Chazal tell us that Moshe was being punished through not knowing the answer off the bat but here we find no mention of this. He explains that here there was no expectation for Moshe to know the answer due to the fact that the answer was not logical.

<sup>2</sup> The Ibn Ezra (Bamidbar 9:6) has a more peshat related explanation that with the size of the Jewish people certainly there were deaths each day and so this was family members of some who had died. This would also work with the Netziv's approach.

<sup>3</sup> The Seforno takes a similar approach and says that their claim was that since they became Tamei for a Mitzva how could this lead to a sin of them missing the korban? See also The Ohr HaChayim (Bamidbar 9:7).

Pesach. What initially seems like a lack of opportunity for them to be engaged further in mitzvot, ends up being an incredible opportunity. They are the ones to have the merit to have this mitzvah taught because of their question. Instead of losing out in performing the mitzvah of the korban Pesach, they are involved in introducing the related mitzvah of Pesach Sheni.

The Meshech Chochma explains further that Pesach is always seen as symbolic of Hashem's direct hand in the lives of humanity (*hashgacha pratit*). We move from being slaves of men to being under Hashem's direct care<sup>4</sup>. He says that this concept is central to the korban Pesach and is reflected in many of its details. It is brought in the Spring when nature seems to be at its height since this is the time to remind us that all is in Hashem's hands. Unlike many other korbanot, there is not a portion given to the Kohen, to drive home the point that we are all able to be on a high level of *hashgacha pratit* and we can all partake of this korban equally.

In this light, Pesach Sheni becomes a yearning for the experience of being close to Hashem. A second chance for those who through involved themselves with the needs of the community and were thus unprepared to be able to take advantage of an opportunity for their own mitzvot. This can frequently be a problem for rabbis and lay leaders leading congregations and schools because of the many demands placed upon them. At many rabbinic conferences there are sessions on insulating from the burn out which sometimes seems to be part of the profession.

This reminds me of the story of a rabbi who got up on Rosh HaShanah to let his congregation know that he did not have a drasha prepared. He had gotten a frantic call from a congregant in a dire circumstance early in the morning and had gotten home only minutes before the start of the holiday after doing what he could to assist the family. It is sometimes those most involved in supporting the community that do not always have time to prepare themselves for their own spiritual opportunities. Those in the field off counseling and helping others are frequently most at risk for burning out themselves. Pesach Sheni gives form to the yearning which is not always realized for being prepared and experiencing closeness with our Creator. It highlights the need to set aside time for ourselves as well even if we are engaged in encouraging others and leading ourselves. May we be blessed with opportunities to strengthen ourselves and others in our relationship with Hashem.

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<sup>4</sup> This idea appears in the Gemara in halachic context as well in the idea that we are slaves to Hashem and no longer to people. See Bava Kamma 116b and Bava Metzia 10a, for example.