

# A SECOND CHANCE AT PESACH

*by Rabbi Yaakov Menken*

*"G-d spoke to Moshe in the Sinai desert, in the second year of the Exodus from Egypt, in the first month, saying, let the children of Israel make the Pesach sacrifice at its proper time... And there were men who were impure due to contact with a dead man, and they could not make the Pesach [Passover] sacrifice on that day, and they came before Moshe and Aharon on that day. They said to him, we are impure due to contact with a dead man; why are we worse, that we should not bring a sacrifice before G-d in its time, among the children of Israel?" [Bamidbar 9:1-7]*

The Medrash says that these were holy individuals. Although we could have learned these laws directly from Moshe, like all of the others, "a merit comes at the hands of the meritorious." For this reason, the opportunity of the second Pesach came to us in conjunction with their story.

How did they become impure? In Tractate Sukkah, the Talmud says that they were engaged in the burial of a "Mes Mitzvah" -- a dead body with no one else to bury it. Doing the final act of kindness for such an individual takes precedence even over the Pesach sacrifice, so they took this task upon themselves -- knowing full well that it would render them impure and unable to fulfill the later Mitzvah.

Purification to enter the Temple or Tabernacle was a seven-day process, and their last day was Erev Pesach. We know this because the Torah says that "they could not make the Pesach sacrifice on that day." On that day, says the Talmud, they could not make the sacrifice, but on the morrow they could.

Why wife's grandfather, Rav Tzvi Elimelech Hertzberg zt"l, says that the greatness of these individuals lay in their willingness to look at their obligations today, and not to worry unduly about tomorrow. They certainly knew that they would be impure on the eve of Pesach, and thus unable to offer the sacrifice. They also knew, however, that their immediate obligation was to help the deceased reach his or her final rest. So, because of their high spiritual level, they refused to shirk the burial of a "Mes Mitzvah," even though they knew that they would be giving up on their opportunity to participate in the Pesach offering with everyone else.

This, says Rav Hertzberg, is why the verses repeat the expression "on that day:" "they could not make the Pesach sacrifice on that day, and they came before Moshe and Aharon on that day." These were people who looked at their obligations "on that day." They came to Moshe and Aharon and said, "we

are people who live 'on that day,' not living in the future, and that's why we knew that we would become impure and not be able to offer the Pesach," and yet they performed their obligation anyway.

Think about the self-sacrifice that was involved. The people who performed the burial knew that they would miss the first-ever sacrifice of the Pesach offering (for the Exodus had happened just the year before). And yet they did the burial -- a kindness for an individual who would show no gratitude, and who had no known relatives who would offer thanks on his behalf.

They worried about the dead person, and they worried about their Mitzvah on that day rather than the next. This level of self-sacrifice, and of interest in others even at their own expense, was one of the merits that caused their story to be recorded for all eternity.

Good Shabbos,  
Rabbi Yaakov Menken

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