



Ohr Somayach Light Lines

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Light Insight

Special Feature

Passover, Take Two

For those who didn't manage to satiate their appetite for matzah on Passover, don't worry. In this week's Parsha, the Torah introduces the celebration of Pesach Sheni, Passover number two.

On the first anniversary of the Jewish People's miraculous departure from Egypt on their way to the Land of Israel, they celebrated Passover. Every household brought a Paschal lamb offering to the Tabernacle and ate from it on the very first seder night in history. Every household, that is, except for a very few in which the head of the household was ritually impure and unable to bring the offering. At that point, there was no such thing as Pesach Sheni, and as far as they knew, they had simply missed out.

Greatly distraught and anxious to bring the Paschal lamb as an offering to G-d, they assembled at Moses' tent. "Why shouldn't we have the opportunity to offer the Paschal lamb like the rest of the Jewish People?" Moses instructed them to wait while he asked G-d

what to do, and it was then that

G-d revealed a new festival called Pesach Sheni, just for people who were unable to celebrate Passover in its proper time. Exactly one month later, they would be allowed to bring the Paschal lamb offering, when they would no longer be ritually impure.

There is an interesting bit of Torah time travel here: When did this whole discussion take place? Twelve months after the Exodus from Egypt, as the verses explain. When does the Torah tell us about it? In the middle of Parshat Behaalotcha, the third Parsha in the Book of Numbers. The Book of Numbers, however, begins its narrative in the thirteenth month from the Exodus. The very first verse contains the date. Two Parshiot afterwards comes the first mention of Pesach Sheni, which happened a month previously. It is out of order.

Rashi, perhaps the greatest of the Torah's many commentaries, takes this opportunity to explain a basic principle of the written Torah: it is not necessarily in chronological order. However, anything that is out of chronological order must have a good reason. Why is the discussion of Pesach Sheni not the first event in

the Book of Numbers as it chronologically should be?

As Rashi explains, since the Jewish People only brought Paschal lamb offerings once in the forty years that they were in the desert, it would therefore be a disgrace to begin a Book of the Torah with a discussion of the Paschal lamb. Instead the Torah mentions it two Parshiot later in the middle of this week's Parsha, Behaalotcha.

How could it be that the Jewish People only brought one Paschal lamb in the first forty years after leaving Egypt? Certainly the people who themselves experienced the miraculous salvation from Egypt and stood at Mount Sinai were pretty observant Jews. Why only once?

The Talmud explains that every year except the first, they were prohibited from bringing the Paschal lamb. Since the newborns among them were not circumcised, and a household with uncircumcised males in it cannot bring the Paschal lamb, therefore they were not permitted to bring the offering those forty years.

Weren't circumcised? How could they not have circumcised their children? After the entire male population circumcised themselves (even as adults!) right

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before leaving Egypt, how could they not have continued to circumcise their children?

The Talmud explains that because of the danger to health posed by a circumcision in the desert, they were prohibited from doing so. Even today, circumcision is postponed in the face of any potential danger to the child's health. Perfectly understandable, therefore, why they didn't do it in the desert, and furthermore why they couldn't bring more than the first Paschal lamb.

Which, unfortunately, makes it very difficult to understand how Rashi could explain that it was a source of shame for the Jewish People. If they were prohibited by Torah law from doing circumcision and from bringing the Paschal lamb more than the first time, what possible reason could there be for them to be ashamed?

The answer is right here in the discussion of Pesach Sheni. When those few heads of households were prohibited from sacrificing the Paschal lamb because they were ritually impure, they were following the Torah's instructions. They were exempt from the obligation to bring the offering. Despite

their exemption, they assembled at Moses's tent and pleaded with him to ask G-d for an opportunity to bring the offering. Even though there was no known way for them to do so, they cried out to the Almighty to create an opportunity, to give them a chance to serve their Creator.

All those forty years in the desert, even though the Jewish People were exempt, they should have been crying out to G-d, "Give us the chance!" The Creator of the Universe, who wrote the laws of the Torah, can answer such an appeal, can create an opportunity that otherwise didn't exist. To sit back and be satisfied with an exemption from Divine service, rather than seizing the initiative to clamor for more opportunities — that's a source of shame.

When we feel like we don't have the chance or the knowledge or the capabilities to serve G-d properly, we can plead with Him, the Ultimate Creator, to give us that chance — and such a heartfelt appeal will be answered.

• *excerpted from a lecture
by Ohr Somayach Dean
Rabbi Mendel Weinbach*

Response Line

Pop's Music

*"Dancing With the Jews" wrote:
I should probably be ashamed for not knowing this, but
what is the literal translation of the title of the popular
Jewish wedding song, "Hava Nagilah?" Come to think
of it, they play this song at every wedding, Jewish or not.
So what does "Hava Nagilah" mean?*

Dear "Dancing With the Jews,"

Don't worry, the real meaning is deeper than it seems,

even if you understand the words!

*"Hava nagilah" — Come! Let's rejoice;
"V'nismicha" — and be happy; "Hava N'ranana" —
Come! Let's celebrate; "Uru Achim" — Arise, Brothers;
"B'lev Somayach" — with a happy heart!"*

Hava Nagilah was composed by Klausenberg chassidim. Initially it signified attainment of the attribute of *simcha*, happiness. Everyone wants to be happy, but many times we just can't seem to escape our everyday difficulties to stay that way for very long. To counter this, the chassidim stressed preparing oneself to rise above these difficulties and keep one's spirits high.

Later, the young Zionist movement adopted the song *Hava Nagilah*, and it eventually spread to signify celebration for Jews all over the world.