



IS IT REALLY NEVER TOO LATE?

The holiday of Pesach Sheni (Second Passover) famously teaches that it is never too late. Is that also true of the worst sins and crimes?

This is a story of someone who received a message from heaven that it was too late, and yet he still received another chance.



JEWISH INSIGHTS

A TASTE OF THE REBBE'S TEACHINGS



BEHAALOTCHA

Part 1: The Second Passover

Source 1 Numbers 9:6-12

There were men who were ritually unclean [because of contact with] a dead person, and therefore could not make the Passover sacrifice on that day. So they approached Moses and Aaron on that day. Those men said to him, “We are ritually unclean [because of contact] with a dead person; [but] why should we be excluded so as not to bring the offering of the L-rd in its appointed time, with all the children of Israel? Moses said to them, “Wait, and I will hear what the L-rd instructs concerning you.” The L-rd spoke to Moses saying: Speak to the children of Israel saying, Any person who becomes unclean from [contact with] the dead, or is on a distant journey, whether among you or in future generations, he shall make a Passover sacrifice for the L-rd. In the second month, on the fourteenth day, in the afternoon, they shall make it; they shall eat it with unleavened cakes and bitter herbs. They shall not leave over anything from it until the next morning, and they shall not break any of its bones. They shall make it in accordance with all the statutes connected with the Passover sacrifice.

וַיְהִי אֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ טְמֵאִים
לְנֶפֶשׁ אָדָם וְלֹא־יָכְלוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת־
הַפֶּסַח בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא וַיִּקְרְבוּ לְפָנָי
מִשָּׁה וּלְפָנָי אֶהְרֹן בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא:
וַיֹּאמְרוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים הֲהִמָּה אֵלָיו
אֲנַחְנוּ טְמֵאִים לְנֶפֶשׁ אָדָם לָמָּה
נִגְרַע לְבַלְתִּי הַקְרִיב אֶת־קִרְבָּן
ה' בְּמַעַדוֹ בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:
וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם מִשָּׁה עָמְדוּ
וְאֲשַׁמְעָה מִה־יְצִוָה ה' לָכֶם:
וַיַּדְבֵּר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: דַּבֵּר
אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר אִישׁ אִישׁ
כִּי־יְהִי־טֵמֵא לְנֶפֶשׁ אוֹ בְּדֶרֶךְ
רְחֹקָה לָכֶם אוֹ לְדֶרֶתִיכֶם וַעֲשֵׂה
פֶסַח לָהּ: בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשֵּׁנִי בְּאַרְבָּעָה
עָשָׂר יוֹם בֵּין הָעַרְבִים יַעֲשׂוּ אֹתוֹ
עַל־מִצּוֹת וּמִרְרִים יֹאכְלֵהוּ: לֹא־
יִשְׂאִירוּ מִמֶּנּוּ עַד־בֹּקֶר וַעֲצֹם
לֹא יִשְׁבְּרוּ־בוֹ כְּכֹל־חֻקַּת הַפֶּסַח
יַעֲשׂוּ אֹתוֹ:

Source 2 Talmud, Tractate Sukkah, 25a

It was taught: “There were men who were ritually unclean [because of contact with] a dead person.” Who were they?

They were the bearers of Joseph’s coffin. This is the statement of Rabbi Yosi of the Galilee.

Rabbi Akiva says: They were Mishael and Elzaphan, who dealt with the bodies of Nadav and Avihu [after they were burned in the Holy of Holies].

Rabbi Yitzchak says...they were engaged in tending to a corpse whose burial is a mitzvah, [i.e., which has no one else available to bury it], and their seventh day of impurity occurred precisely on the eve of Passover, as it is stated: “And they could not observe the Pesach on that day.” On that day they could not observe it; on the next day they could observe it.

תְּנִיא, וַיְהִי אֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ
טְמֵאִים לְנֶפֶשׁ אָדָם וְגו' אוֹתָם
אֲנָשִׁים מִי הָיוּ?

נושאי אֲרוֹנוֹ שֶׁל יוֹסֵף הָיוּ, דְּבָרֵי
רַבִּי יוֹסִי הַגָּלִילִי.

רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא אוֹמֵר, מִישָׁאֵל
וְאֶלְצָפָן הָיוּ, שֶׁהָיוּ עוֹסְקִין בְּנֹדֶב
וְאֶבְיָהוּא.

רַבִּי יִצְחָק אוֹמֵר...עוֹסְקִין בְּמַת
מִצְוָה הָיוּ, שֶׁחָל שְׁבִיעֵי שְׁלֵהוֹן
לְהִיּוֹת בְּעֶרֶב פֶּסַח, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר וְלֹא
יָכְלוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת הַפֶּסַח בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא.
בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא אֵין יְכוּלִין לַעֲשׂוֹת,
הָא לְמַחֵר יְכוּלִין לַעֲשׂוֹת.

Source 3 Hayom Yom: Iyar 14, Pesach Sheini

The theme of the “Second Passover” is that it is never too late. It is always possible to rectify. Even if one was ritually impure, or far away, and even if this lacking was deliberate—nonetheless he can correct it.

פֶּסַח שְׁנִי עֲנִינוּ אִיז - עַם אִיז נִיטָא
קָיִין “פֶּאֲרַפְאֵלְעוֹן”, מַעֲוֹ קַעֲוֹ אֲלַעַ
מֶאֶל פֶּאֲרִיכְטֵעֵן. אֲפִילוֹ מִי שֶׁהָיָה
טְמֵא, מִי שֶׁהָיָה בְּדֶרֶךְ רְחוּקָה.
אוֹן אֲפִילוֹ “לְכֶם”, אִז דָּאָס אִיז
גַּעֲוִיעֵן בְּרִצּוֹנוֹ, פּוֹנְדֶּעֶס טוֹוּעֵגֶעֶן
קַעֲוֹ מַעֲוֹ מִתְקוֹן זִיין.

>> The Rebbe

It's Never Too Late — We Mean You!

My father-in-law, the previous Rebbe, famously said: The “Second Passover” teaches us that it is never too late. You can always rectify your improper conduct of the past.

This is true for every individual:

There might be certain areas of your past behavior that were not up to par. Nonetheless, you must know that it is not too late. You can still fix the past.

And since you heard this teaching of my father-in-law, the Rebbe, it applies, first and foremost, to you. You can and must fix your past behavior. In other words, do not think that this teaching is only directed at the Jewish nation at large. Yes, it certainly does pertain to everyone as a collective. However, the fact that you heard about it demonstrates that first and foremost, it applies to you.

There Is Always Room — If You Want

However, if you want to indeed take the lesson of the “Second Passover” and fix the past, the first step is to realize that your past conduct was incorrect and to want to change that.

We see this in the story of the “Second Passover.” Moses did not initiate the suggestion that a second paschal service be held. It came only after the complaint of the Jews who were impure and unable to bring the paschal sacrifice. They needed to recognize what they lacked and have a desire to correct the situation.

It was only once they were bothered by their situation that the “Second Passover” came into existence. Their protest was accepted, and they were given the opportunity to complete what they had missed.

This demonstrates the greatness of every Jew:

Even if you are in a lowly state, you raise your voice and demand, “Why should I lose out,” and ultimately your demand will be accepted.

At first glance, why did the Jews in the desert feel they deserved a second chance? They knew they were impure, and moreover, they were at fault!

The answer is the inside of a Jew is always pristine. Improper behavior is merely external and cannot change your essence in the slightest. Since a Jew remains lofty inside, they were able to demand that they not lose out.

At the same time, however, they needed to feel that something was wrong, spurring them to protest. Only then were they given the opportunity to effect a change.

An important rule when studying Torah is that if you are too embarrassed to ask, you will never learn. The same applies to repentance. Do not be embarrassed. Demand that you want to change the past, “Why should I lose out,” and G-d will enable you to do so.

Part 2: The Wayward Son

Source 4 Talmud Yerushalmi, Chagigah, 9B

Rabbi Meir was sitting expounding in the study hall of Tiberias. His master Elisha passed by riding on a horse on Shabbat. They came and said to Rabbi Meir: “Your master is outside.” He stopped his teaching and went out to him. Elisha asked him: “What were you expounding today?”

...Elisha said to him: “Enough, Meir! Until here is the Shabbat boundary.” Rabbi Meir said to him: “How do you know?” He replied: “I have been counting the steps of my horse, and he has walked two thousand cubits.”

Rabbi Meir said to him: “You have all this wisdom, and you will not repent?” Elisha responded: “I am not able to.” Rabbi Meir asked: “Why?” He replied: “Because one time I rode passed the Holy of Holies on my horse on Yom Kippur that fell on Shabbat, and I heard a heavenly voice coming out of the Holy of Holies saying: “Return children—except Elisha ben Avuyah, who knew my power and rebelled against me.”

How did this all come about? One time, he was sitting and studying in the Valley of Gennesaret, and he saw a person go up to the top of a palm tree, take a mother bird with her children, and come down from there in peace.

רבי מאיר הוה יתיב דרש בבית מדרשא דטיבריה. עבר אלישע רביה רכיב על סוסיא ביום שובתא, אתון ואמרין ליה, הא רבך לבר. פסק ליה מן דרשה ונפק לגביה. אמר ליה מה הויתה דרש יומא דין?

אמר ליה, דייך מאיר, עד כאן תחום שבת. אמר ליה, מן הן את ידע? אמר ליה, מן טלפי דסוסי דהוינא מני והולך אלפיים אמה.

אמר ליה, וכל הדא חכמתא אית בך, ולית את חזר בך? אמר ליה, לית אנא יכיל. אמר ליה, למה? אמר ליה, שפעם אחת הייתי עובר לפני בית קודש הקדשים רכוב על סוסי ביום הכיפורים שחל להיות בשבת, ושמעתי בת קול יצאה מבית קודש הקדשים ואומרת, “שובו בנים חוץ מאלישע בן אבויה שידע כחי ומרד בי.”

וכל דא מן הן אתת ליה? אלא פעם אחת היה יושב ושונה בבקעת גינוסר, וראה אדם אחד עלה לראש הדקל ונטל אם על הבנים וירד משם בשלום.

The next day, he saw a person go up to the top of a palm tree and take the children while sending away the mother. He came down from there, and a snake bit him, and he died. Elisha said: Torah states, "You shall send away the mother, and the children you shall take for yourself, in order that it be good for you and that you lengthen your days." Where is the good that he deserved? Where is his length of days?

He did not know that Rabbi Yaakov had already taught: "In order that it be good for you"—in the world-to-come, which is all good, "and that you lengthen your days"—in the eternal future...

A while later, Elisha became ill. They came and said to Rabbi Meir: "Your master is ill." He went to visit him and found him ill. Rabbi Meir said to him: "Will you not repent?" Elisha replied: "And if one repents, is he accepted?" Rabbi Meir answered [using a play on words]: "Is it not written 'You return man to pulp?—you are accepted until the crushing of life [i.e. death].'" At that moment, Elisha cried, and he passed away. Rabbi Meir was glad in his heart, and he said: "It seems he passed away repentant."

למחר ראה אדם אחר שעלה לראש הדקל ונטל את הבנים ושילח את האם וירד משם, והכישו נחש ומת. אמר, "כתיב (דברים כ"ב:ז) שלח תשלח את האם ואת הבנים תקח לך למען ייטב לך והארכת ימים. איכן היא טובתו של זה? איכן היא אריכות ימיו של זה?"

ולא היה יודע שדרשה ר' יעקב לפנים ממנו: למען ייטב לך לעולם הבא שכולו טוב. והארכת ימים לעתיד שכולו ארוך.

לאחר ימים חלה אלישע. אתון אומרון לר"מ, "הא רבך באיש". אזל בעי מבקרתיה, ואשכחיה באיש. אמר ליה, "לית את חזר בך?" אמר ליה, "ואין חזרין, מתקבלין?" אמר ליה, "ולא כן כתיב (תהילים צ:ג) 'תשב אנוש עד דכא', עד דיכדוכה של נפש מקבלין." באותה שעה בכה אלישע, ונפטר ומת. והיה ר"מ שמח בלבו ואומר, "דומה שמתוך תשובה נפטר."

>> The Rebbe

Repentance Even When Rejected

The importance of demanding another chance is highlighted by Elisha ben Avuya, a personality mentioned in the fourth chapter of Ethics of Our Fathers.

The Talmud tells us that Elisha was a scholar who left Judaism, after hearing a heavenly voice stating, “Return, wayward sons—except for Elisha.”

Acher’s reaction is understandable. After hearing such a grim statement, how could we expect anything different?

The answer: Despite the dire prediction of the heavenly voice that said he would never again be welcome, he should have protested that he be given a chance to repent. If he would have pushed his way in and truly tried, his repentance would have been accepted, heavenly voices notwithstanding.

Our Sages say, “Follow all your host’s instructions, except if he tells you to leave.” Despite the fact that he is the host—and you should therefore follow all of his other instructions—nonetheless, don’t listen to him if he tells you to leave.

On the same note, Elisha should have disregarded the voice saying that his repentance would be denied. G-d Himself tells us not to listen when your host tells you to leave. Elisha should not have listened to the Divine “host” telling him to leave the realm of holiness!

This is where Elisha went wrong. Instead of heeding the heavenly voice, he should have tried to repent. If he would have done his best and demanded that he be given another chance, his repentance would surely have been accepted. (Indeed, the sages Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Yochanan ultimately succeeded in bringing rest to Elisha’s soul.)

To summarize:

The Second Passover teaches us an important lesson. If your past conduct was lacking, not only can you change it in the present and future, you can change it in the past as well.

The prerequisite, though, is that you must demand another chance, knowing how perfect you truly are inside. When you do that, G-d will heed your request and give you the opportunity for change.

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מיזם של "משרד השלוחים"

נסד בימי השבעה לזכרון ולע"נ הרב גבריאל נח וזוגתו רבקה הי"ד
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