

The Missing Complaint

Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe
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G-d spoke to Moses in the Sinai desert, in the first month of the second year following their Exodus from the land of Egypt, saying: "The children of Israel shall prepare the Passover [offering] at its appointed time. On the fourteenth of this month, in the afternoon ... in accordance with all its decrees and laws...."

There were, however, certain individuals who had become ritually impure... and could not prepare the Passover offering on that day. They approached Moses and Aaron ... and they said: "...Why should we be deprived and not be able to present G-d's offering in its time, amongst the children of Israel?" – Numbers 9:1-7

The Torah goes on to describe how G-d responded to their plea by establishing a "Second Passover" on the 14th of Iyar (exactly one month after the original Passover), to serve as a second opportunity for all who were "ritually impure, or on a distant road" and were therefore unable to bring the Passover offering "in its proper time."

The Talmud points out that the above verses appear in the Torah out of chronological context. The events leading to the establishment of the Second Passover took place in the month of Nissan in the year 2449 from creation (1312 BCE); chronologically, this would place them in the very first chapter of the book of Numbers. Instead, Numbers begins with an account of the census taken of the Jewish people a month *later*, in Iyar of that year. From this the Talmud derives the rule that "There is no earlier and later in Torah."¹

Why, indeed, aren't these events transcribed in the order in which they occurred? Our sages explain that the Torah does not wish to begin the book of Numbers with something that is "a disgrace for Israel. For in the forty years that the people of Israel were in the desert, this was the only Passover offering they brought."²

Why did the Jewish people reconcile themselves to the divine decree?

But why should this be regarded as a "disgrace"? The reason that our ancestors brought no other Passover offering until they entered the Land of Israel was that G-d did not allow them to. G-d had instructed that the annual Passover offering should be observed only "When you come into the land that G-d shall give to you";³ the first two Passovers—the one observed in Egypt, and the one held in the desert on the following year—were exceptions to this rule, specifically commanded by G-d. So of what deficiency in Israel's behavior are our sages speaking?

The answer lies in the story of the "Second Passover" itself. A group of Jews had found themselves in a state which, by divine decree, absolved them from the duty to bring the Passover offering. Yet they refused to reconcile themselves to this. They refused to accept that this avenue of relationship with G-d should be closed to them. And their impassioned plea and demand, "Why should we be deprived?", swayed G-d to establish a

new institution, the "Second Passover," to enable them, and all who will find themselves in a similar situation in future generations, to "present G-d's offering in its time, amongst the children of Israel."

Therein lies the "disgrace" in those thirty-eight Passoverless years in the Sinai Desert. Why did the Jewish people reconcile themselves to the divine decree? Why did they accept this void in their relationship with G-d? Why did they not clamor for the opportunity to serve Him in the full and optimum manner that the mitzvot of the Torah describe?

The Lesson

For more than nineteen hundred years now, our Passovers have been incomplete. We eat the matzah and the bitter herbs, we drink the four cups of wine, ask and answer the four questions, but a central component of the festival observances—the Passover offering—is absent from our *seder* table. For G-d has hidden His face from us, has removed the Holy Temple, the seat of His manifest presence on physical earth, from our midst.

The lesson of the "displaced" 9th chapter of Numbers is clear: G-d desires and expects of us that we refuse to reconcile ourselves to the decree of *galut* and its diminution of His manifest involvement in our lives. He desires and expects of us that we storm the gates of heaven with the plea and demand: "Why shall we be deprived?!"⁴

FOOTNOTES

1. Talmud, Pesachim 6b; Rashi on Numbers 9:1.
2. Sifri on Numbers, *ibid.*; Rashi, *ibid.*
3. Exodus 12:25; see Rashi on verse.
4. Based on an address by the Rebbe, Sivan 11, 5741 (June 13, 1981), (Likkutei Sichot, vol. XXIII p. 62-72).

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Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson; adapted by Yanki Tauber.

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