

The Business of Second Chances

I cannot tell you how many people come up to me and ask “What does Judaism think about . . . ?” or “What is the right way to . . . ?” or “What is the Jewish way to . . . ?” – what is lost in any answer that I could possibly give in most cases is that Judaism, as a pretty firm rule (!), makes room for real life. That is, for me, a large part of its power: Judaism does not ask us to conform to some heavenly realm but rather asks us to bring a little of Heaven into this often less-than-perfect existence.

How do we do that . . . what do we know of Heaven? We can only know God by the holy moments we experience in our lives. Often cluttered by meaningless and turgid details, our lives can seem to be set in a desert of holiness, so much so that even the word itself seems scary or foreign to us. I assure you, however, that our lives are filled with holy moments only waiting for us to notice them.

And so, as is often the case, our own Jewish calendar gives us a reminder of how we might recapture meaning, holiness, and even happiness in the little known holiday we encounter this month: *Pesach Sheni* (Second Passover). Fixed in our year cycle as far back as the Torah itself, *Pesach Sheni* allowed for those who could not celebrate the Passover sacrifice on the appointed day to do so exactly one month later.

The message is clear: Second chances matter. If God gave us a mechanism for second chances, then we can do no less than offer the same to each other.

And here is the simplest way to bring a little more holiness into our lives: In the month ahead, let's set aside a regular day and time each week to examine our lives (nothing too in-depth, just a close look will do). When we take a second look at our lives, perhaps making a course correction or two, we increase the opportunity for holiness, for love, for a higher (and happier) frame of reference to permeate our very being.

Our tradition, our way, as Jews is to provide second chances for those who could not perform “as they should.” This may not be a popular position to hold in a world that seems increasingly willing to jettison anyone whose behavior slips below our expectations for them. I ask in response: Can we do any less when we see how God treated our ancestors, a rebellious and stiff-necked people who quickly forgot the graciousness and blessings bestowed upon them? God made our ancestors into a nation despite their insolence and pettiness. When we are annoyed by or angry with a situation or a person, we might try to cultivate a greater sense of patience and forgiveness. No one is perfect, of course, but neither are we free from trying to be better tomorrow than we are today.

Pesach Sheni stands in our calendar as a reminder for us to say proudly: “As a Jew, I am in the business of second chances.”

Rabbi Gerald R. Fox