

Dear Chavraya,

From out of her own pain at the time of our family's upheaval, as I sought to rebuild my life, a child most dear to me cried, "You had your chance." Perhaps some day, when time has soothed the scars, we will be able to acknowledge together that the Jewish way in life allows for second chances.

In this week's Torah portion, *Parashat B'ha'alotcha*, there are a few brief lines that I have always read as an affirmation of second chances. These lines concern the mitzvah of *Pesach Sheni/Second Pesach*, offered as a second chance to make the Pesach offering for those who were unable to do it at the actual time of Pesach. Occurring exactly one month after the communal celebration, two reasons are given as to why a person might need *Pesach Sheni*. Someone might have been ritually impure or on a distant journey and would thereby have been unable to make the Pesach offering in the *Beis Hamikdash/the Holy Temple*.

While technically *Pesach Sheni* is not operative today in the absence of the *Beis Hamikdash*, given but a very minor liturgical nod, its symbolic meaning offers healing to the wounded soul. It also offers instruction for living that helps to palliate the fear of failure. Chassidic teaching often reminds us that if the Torah is eternal we need to explore those facets of Torah that seem time specific until we find even there a dimension that is beyond time. In regard to the one who is ritually impure or on a distant journey, although time-specific on one hand, the Torah offers *Pesach Sheni* to the generations, *to you or to your descendants/lachem o l'dorotaychem*. It is an invitation and an opportunity to see the sunshine that was yet blocked for us at an earlier time. The words for invitation and for chance/opportunity in Hebrew are both formed of the same root, *z'man/time*. In time we are given a second chance, a new opportunity.

There are times when we are each as the one who is *b'derech r'chokah*, meaning literally *in a distant way*. Far from where we want to be at a given time in our lives, whether from a better place within ourselves or from others, we are not barred forever from the sanctuary of new possibility. The gates will open to us, inviting us to enter and to bring near the offering of our hearts. Of the *distant way*, the early Chassidic master, the Toldos Yakov Yosef, teaches that it is when we are unable to connect with others, *she eyno l'hitchaber*.

God does not expect us to be perfect, and nor should we of ourselves or of others. The psalmist reminds us that we are *a little lower than the angels*. Striving toward meaning, we are vulnerable human beings, offered the beauty of Creation each morning that we might see ourselves in its magnificent web. When tasting of life's bitter herbs and redemption seems so far, and we are in a distant way from Pesach, *Pesach Sheni* will yet come. For each one of us and for the one beloved who then with a child's anguish cried, "You had your chance," yes, there is the promise of a second chance.

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Victor