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The mitzvah of the Pesach sacrifice is unique in many ways. But the most powerful expression of its special position in Jewish life is the obligation of Pesach Sheni. The opportunity to fulfill the mitzvah of bringing the Pesach the following month if one misses it on the proper date is unique in the Mitzvot of the Torah. Should one miss fasting on Yom Kippur, legitimately or not, there is no way of making up for it. Should one not hear the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, there is no make up date. Should one miss living in the Sukkah on Sukkot, there is no date to compensate for that omission. Even regarding the rabbinic holidays, Chanukah and Purim, where one might have thought Chazal might have designed a make up date for those who missed out, fulfillment is required on the day itself, and cannot be delayed.

The Mitzvah of Pesach sheni pushes us to see the fulfillment of the Korban Pesach as having far greater importance than we might otherwise have thought. Missing it is not merely a lack of fulfillment. A further indication of its disproportionate importance is that it is one of only two positive commandments that if not observed carries the punishment of "Karet", being cut off from the Jewish people.

God identifies Himself to the Jewish people at the beginning of the 10 Commandments as "I am the Lord your God who took you out of the land Egypt, from the house of slavery." As is pointed out by the Kuzari, God's identification to us as our redeemer rather than as Creator of the universe is essential to our belief in God. A belief in God disconnected to His being our redeemer and saviour, removes God from the realm of our history and lives, and leaves Him in the realm of the philosophical. The primary expression realizing God as our redeemer comes from the continual emphasis on the Exodus. And of course, the primary reminder of the Exodus throughout Jewish history has been the Seder, when the story of the Exodus is retold and relived by once again sacrificing the Pesach, as we did in Egypt. Missing out on this mitzvah is not merely a lost mitzvah opportunity. It is to miss out on the reliving of the central experience of Pesach at the time of the Tabernacle and the Temple. While today we fulfill Pesach to the best of our ability by eating the Matzah and Maror, putting commemorations of the Pesach and Chagigah on the Seder plate, and telling the story, at the time of the exodus to miss out on the Pesach itself was to miss the centerpiece of the evening.

For those who due to impurity could not participate, the problem was not merely cognitive or experiential. Missing out on the Pesach meant being cut out of the national commemoration of the Exodus. The Karet which stood as a punishment for those who on their whim did not participate was the punitive expression of what they had wrought upon themselves; cutting themselves off from the Jewish people. Participating in the Pesach was basic to being part of the Jewish nation.

It is no wonder that participation in the Pesach Seder today is the most widely kept Jewish ritual. It harks back to the essential identification as a Jew.

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