

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF JEWISH WOMEN

NCJ  FLORIDA

Religious
Action
Center
of Reform Judaism 

Pesach Sheni and Second Chances **A reading for your Passover Seder**

Pesach Sheni

God spoke to Moses in the Sinai desert ... saying: "The children of Israel should 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 persons who had become ritually impure through contact with a dead body and therefore 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 God's offering in its time, with the children of Israel?"

And Moses said to them: "Wait here, and I will hear what God will command concerning you."

And God spoke to Moses, saying: "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: Any person who is contaminated by death, or is on a distant road, whether among you now or in future generations, shall prepare a Passover offering to G-d.

They shall prepare it on the afternoon of the fourteenth day of the second month, and shall eat it with matzahs and bitter herbs...." (Numbers 9:1-12)

A second chance.

Passover is unlike other Jewish holidays. It is the most widely observed Jewish holiday, one largely observed at home, and the only holiday where the Torah gives a second chance for those who missed its initial observance. Perhaps this is because it's a holiday that defines who we are through telling our story, giving us boundaries, and calling us to justice. Passover is the story of our liberation from captivity, from oppression to freedom. We recall what it was like to be viewed with fear, mistreated and given no rights. This memory calls us to stand up to bigotry and injustice.

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn (1880-1950), the 6th Lubavitcher Rebbe, taught that the true significance of the Second Passover is to teach us that it is never too late to rectify a past failing. He understood this passage of Torah to be referring not just to those on a physically "distant road" but those who had strayed from the path; he understood the words those who were "contaminated by death" to be a metaphor referring to those who felt dead inside and struggled to feel God's love.

We have an obligation to make sure that others have a chance to be full participants in the rites of our community, both religious and secular. This means giving people a second chance, the essence of Passover Sheni.

Passover Sheni, this year occurs on April 29th (the 14th of Iyar). On that day, let us think of those who are in need of a second chance. Let us think of those who, perhaps, have strayed from the path, who have been in captivity, who have been viewed with fear but now are a part of us.

Let us turn our minds to those who are asking to participate in one of the fundamental rights of American society - the right to vote. This Passover Sheni, let's hear the call for justice for those who have served their debt to society and are in need of a second chance.

And so we may ask, Mah nishtanah ha-aretz ha-zeh? Why is this state different from other states?

- Florida has one of the most punitive disenfranchisement policies in the country. As a result, over 1.4 million Floridians are being denied the right to vote because of a previous felony conviction.
- The current clemency rules, which Gov. Rick Scott issued in 2011, are the most restrictive in several administrations. By December 2015, nearly five years after taking office, Gov. Scott's administration had restored voting rights to fewer than 2,000 Floridians statewide, while over 20,000 applications remained pending. Meanwhile, in the period between 2010 and 2016, the disenfranchised population Floridians grew by nearly 150,000 to a staggering estimated total of 1,686,000.
- On February 1, 2018 a federal district court judge in Tallahassee ruled that the "unfettered discretion that the [Florida] Clemency Board possesses" violates both the First and Fourteenth Amendments of the U.S. Constitution. The case – Hand v. Scott – is a class action lawsuit filed last March by the Fair Elections Legal Network.

In November 2018 a proposed amendment to the Florida Constitution will appear on the ballot that would restore the vote to most of these 1.4 million people, who have completed their sentences. We will then be able to give a second chance to others in the spirit of Passover Sheni.

VOTE YES #4 SECOND CHANCES

Thank you to Rabbi Rachel Greengrass (NCJW Life Member), Temple Beth Am, for this special Second Chances Passover Reading.

For more information about the Second Chances Campaign,
contact an NCJW Florida Section near you:

The National Council of Jewish Women is a grassroots organization of volunteers and advocates who turn progressive ideals into action. Inspired by Jewish values, NCJW strives for social justice by improving the quality of life for women, children, and families and by safeguarding individual rights and freedoms.

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*The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism pursues social justice
by organizing the North American Reform Jewish community and advocating for its values.*