

There were men who had been contaminated by a human corpse and could not make the Pesach-offering... they said, “We are contaminated... why should we be diminished by not offering Hashem's offering in its appointed time?” (9:6,7)

A debate in the *Talmud* (*Succah* 25a) concerns the identity of the men who were contaminated. Rabbi Yosi HaGlili says that they were the pallbearers of Yosef's coffin. Rabbi Akiva says they were Mishael and Elitzafan, who were occupied with the corpses of Nadav and Avihu. In any event, these were not ordinary Jews who wanted to display their religious commitment. These were men who were sincerely concerned about being left out as the nation celebrated the offering of the *Korban Pesach*. We wonder what these men were thinking. They were fully aware of their situation: they were *tamei* – end of story. One who is *tamei* may not offer the *Korban Pesach*. Did they expect Moshe *Rabbeinu* to revise the Torah? Furthermore, is there really a controversy (other than historical) as to who were these men – to the point that Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Yosi HaGlili debate their identity?

Horav Shmuel Aharon Yudelevitz, zl (Meil Shmuel) explains that even *Chazal* wondered why they were making this request. Certainly, they did not expect Moshe to bring down another Torah from Heaven. These men, however, felt that it was inconceivable (to them) that Hashem would prevent them from offering the *Korban Pesach*. They understood that the way things stood, there was no logical way for them to offer the *Korban Pesach*. Nonetheless, they were certain that Hashem would somehow provide a suitable option. Thus, they presented their request to Moshe.

When Moshe saw and understood the sincerity that motivated their request, he did not ignore them, for, he too, felt that, if there is a will – there is a way – and they had an extremely strong will. Moshe turned to Hashem to rule on this issue. The answer came back in the form of *Pesach Sheni*, a second chance to observe the offering of the *Korban Pesach*. It was unheard of, but this is the power of *ratzon*, strong will.

As a result of this thought, *Rav Shmuel Aharon* explains the debate between Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Yosi HaGlili. *Chazal* sought to trace the roots of these men who, despite being *tamei*, demanded a venue to offer the *Korban Pesach*. Rabbi Yosi HaGlili felt that, by carrying Yosef *HaTzaddik's* coffin, they had become inspired to reach higher, to seek the highest levels of sanctified living. They derived from Yosef that *lo b'moso yikach ha'kol*, one takes nothing (from this world) with him when he dies. Yosef had enormous wealth and unprecedented power, but, at the end, when his tenure in this world came to its conclusion, he lay in a coffin like everyone else. (As the old *Yiddish* saying goes, “There are no *keshenes*, pockets, in the *tachrichim*, shrouds.) We take nothing material on our journey to the World of Truth.

Furthermore, Yosef never bore a grudge against his brothers for the misery they caused him. He

understood that this was Hashem's decree. Last, they saw the great merit that Yosef had because he had run away from Potifar's wife. The Red Sea split when his coffin came toward it. *Ya'nus mipnei ba'nas*; "Run from before the one who ran (away from Potifar's wife)." When they realized the immense distinction of whose body they carried, they decided that they too wanted to make use of every opportunity for spiritual growth.

Rabbi Akiva feels that Mishael and Elitzafan, who involved themselves in caring for the bodies of Nadav and Avihu, were privy to an even greater spiritual lesson. Nadav and Avihu died during their attempt to fulfill Hashem's command on the highest level. The mere fact that Moshe *Rabbeinu* chose these two to take care of the bodies indicates that they were close with the deceased. Thus, Rabbi Akiva feels that the men who were impure were two individuals who had learned the importance of going to the extreme to fulfill a *mitzvah*. They could not live with themselves if they were to be deprived of the *mitzvah* of *Korban Pesach*.

One thing is for certain: Whether it was Yosef's pallbearers or it was Mishael and Elitzafan – they both strove for perfection in *avodas Hashem*. They did not settle. They wanted more; they wanted it all! As a result, *Chazal* established *Pesach Sheini*.