

Spotlight on...Pesach Sheini

Background:

In Chapter 9 of Parashat Behaalotcha, Hashem commands Moshe to remind the Israelites about the obligation to offer the Pesach sacrifice on the 14th of Nissan. However, as verse 6 tells us, there were some people who were impure that day because they had come into contact with a dead body and were therefore unable to offer the sacrifice. They come to Moshe and ask him why they should be losing out on the mitzvah because they are unclean - after all, it's not their fault or in their control!

Hashem responds to Moshe by teaching the laws of Pesach Sheini. People who were unable to do the korban on the 14th of Nissan will not have another chance to do it on the 14th of Iyar. Interestingly, Hashem applies this to two categories of people: the first is those who have come in contact with a dead body, as we would expect. The second is people who were "b'derech rechoka," or far away. There is no further definition of what is meant by this vague term.

The mishna on Pesachim 93b asks what "derech rechoka" means. Rabbi Akiva says that it is the equivalent of the distance from Jerusalem to Modiim, which would take about half a day to walk. Rabbi Eliezer says that it refers to any distance beyond the entrance to the courtyard of the Beit HaMikdash, where the korban was offered.

Questions:

1. Without knowing the rabbinic explanations, how would you define "derech rechoka"?
2. Why do you think Rabbi Akiva defines it as half a day's walk? Does that sound like a reasonable definition to you?
3. Why do you think Rabbi Eliezer defines it as anywhere beyond the entrance to the Beit Hamikdash? How does this change our understanding of the purpose of Pesach sheini?