



May 14, 2014/14 Iyar 5774



A Constitutional Congregation

What does the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania have to do with the oldest synagogue in that state?

Congregation Mikveh Israel (Originally Kaal Kadosh Mickve Israel) was founded in the 1740s by the community of Sephardi Jews then living in Philadelphia. It became an official chartered organization in 1773.

While the Jewish population of Philadelphia was, itself, not particularly large at the outbreak of the War of Independence, the city became a haven for Jews fleeing New York, Richmond, Charleston and Savannah, as well as the Pennsylvanian cities of Easton and Lancaster. Among its membership there was tremendous support for the revolution. (In fact, it was to Philadelphia's Mikveh Israel community that Revolutionary financier Haym Salomon fled when he escaped British imprisonment in New York.) Aside from its official name, the congregation is also referred to as "The Synagogue of the Revolution."

By the time the Revolution was over in 1783, the congregation was in the midst of its first building campaign. As people began to return to their home cities (although many remained in Philadelphia), the members found themselves in need of funds to complete the building. It is telling that many prominent Philadelphians enlisted in the cause (including Benjamin Franklin).

As the population settled and then slowly began to



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Which American synagogue was approved by a President?

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absorb newer immigrants, other Jewish organizations began to form. Rodeph Shalom, founded in 1795, catered to the Ashkenazi community.

In the 19th century, even as many local Jewish communities were just beginning to appear, others were already shifting their identities. Wishing to secure its identity, Mikveh Israel created a congregational constitution that not only established the basic membership regulations, but also decreed that the services would always be conducted according to the custom of the Portuguese Jews. The constitution was presented to the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania and was approved on May 14, 1824. The court noted that the synagogue constitution was an example of the new order of the times.

Written in honor of Jewish American Heritage Month.

Today's Tip: Matzah Again

In honor of *Pesach Shaynee* (the Second Passover), enjoy a piece of matzah today.

EXTRA: TODAY IS The Second Passover



On the first anniversary of the Exodus from Egypt, the Children of Israel prepared to celebrate their first Passover as free people. God decreed that they should eat matzah and *maror* (bitter herbs) in commemoration of the great event, and, most importantly, that the Israelites should all partake of the Passover sacrifice (lamb).

On the eve of the second Passover, Moses was approached by a group of distraught men. "We are unclean because of the dead body of a man; why are we being held back so that we cannot bring the offering to God in its appointed time among the children of Israel" (Numbers 9:7)?

Contact with the dead rendered a person *tamei*, spiritually impure, and any person who was *tamei* was forbidden to partake of the Paschal lamb.

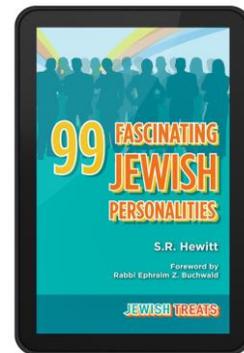
In response to their plea, Moses sought instruction from God. God responded that anyone who was *tamei* due to contact with death or who was on a far-

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away journey at the time of the Passover offering (14th of Nisan), would then offer the Pascal lamb one month later, on the 14th of Iyar. Those celebrating "*Pesach Shaynee*" (Second Passover) had to eat the meat of the sacrifice together with matzah and *maror*, exactly as on a regular Passover.

Today, without a Temple, no one is able to bring a Passover sacrifice. Thus the laws of *Pesach Shaynee* have little practical effect in day to day Jewish life. However, there is a custom to eat some matzah on the 14th of Iyar to mark the date of *Pesach Shaynee* for ourselves and for future generations.

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About NJOP - NJOP is a non-denominational organization designed to provide positive, joyous Jewish experiences to every Jew.

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