

Distance Is An Illusion

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“The essence of God’s greatness is that the very person who is most distant from Him can and should serve Him... There is a common misconception among young people that this principle does not apply to them, for a person may think he has too deeply tainted himself and has done too much wrong. But the truth is just the opposite – this principle applies especially to him! A person’s main test in life, and the essence of the refining process he must undergo, is that through all the declines and falls and through all that he experiences, he should not allow himself to become distanced from God, from Torah or from prayer” (*Healing Leaves*, p. 65).

I know it’s not Sukkot season, but I have a related thought. You see, being handy is not one of my strong points, and while I know others who appreciate the handyman qualities that building a sukkah tends to bring out, I personally get

stressed by the experience. A few years ago, I invested in an expensive type of sukkah that was guaranteed to just “snap together,” no tools necessary! Well, all I can say is that I had a difficult time figuring out exactly where the tall and heavy boards were supposed to “snap together.”

Now consider how awkward it was for the Jews journeying for so many years in the desert, lugging with them all the components of the Tabernacle, assembling and disassembling this structure at every stop. Surely it would have been easier to set up a permanent structure. What was the purpose of all the schlepping?

Additionally, when the Tabernacle was set up, there were very strict rules based on its sanctity regarding who could go where. Someone who violated these rules was liable for the death penalty. Yet after the Tabernacle was disassembled and moved, its previous resting place retained zero sanctity. If we compare the Tabernacle with its permanent replacement, the Holy Temple, the difference is striking. Even today, the Temple Mount retains a level of sanctity that restricts Jews from entering its precincts. Why was the Tabernacle different?

By building the Golden Calf, the Jews stumbled in the cardinal sin of idol worship. God’s awesome revealed glory that they had just experienced at Mount Sinai during the Giving of the Torah became hidden from them. Because of this, the Land of Israel, the place where Godliness is openly revealed, was also inaccessible to them. Therefore, they were forced to journey from place to place in a barren desert, so far removed from the Promised Land that lay just ahead.

But even in moments like these, God does not forsake us. Inasmuch as every place is filled with God’s glory, God chooses to reveal Himself openly only in places of sanctity. Yet even when we are so distant, if we choose to search for Him and call out to Him, there is a place above time and space where we can access the most awesome levels of Godliness, a

place of no boundary.

Therefore, God commanded us to take gold, silver, and copper – the very same materials that were used to construct an idol – and build for Him a temporary home, the Tabernacle. The same materials that brought about so much evil now brought redemption. Despite their having been used for unholy purposes, and in general being materials used for mundane work and trade, God revealed to us that even they could become a transformative instrument. Precisely because the holiness revealed at the places where the Tabernacle stood was so great, this holiness could have no permanent setting.

God's greatness is unfathomable. Let us always search for it.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Geviyat Chom MeYesomim 3