

The Way Home

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Zablon Simintov is the last Jew in Afghanistan. He is also an example of so many of our brethren scattered throughout the diaspora. From Argentina to Alaska, from Sydney to Siberia, there is hardly a country devoid of a Jewish presence. Yet living at the ends of the earth is a far cry from living in the Holy Land. What is the purpose of exile? Surely God sees that it is so much more difficult for us to return to Him when we are so distant from our homeland, the place of our spiritual vitality.

Our great Rabbis reveal the answer to this mystery: “The Jews were exiled among the idol-worshippers only in order to collect the converts from among them” (Pesachim 87b). Besides actual converts, our Sages are hinting to the concept of fallen sparks of holiness. The Arizal teaches that throughout the world, many sparks of holiness have been hidden (the greater the spark, the harder it is to find). Through collecting these sparks, the Jewish people will be redeemed (Pri Etz Chaim, Sha’ar Kriat Shema 3). All this is part of God’s master plan.

When we lived as a nation in the Holy Land, we enjoyed an especially close and loving relationship with God. Our relationship was so special that we began to lose our appreciation for it, and slowly but surely drifted away from doing our part. God, in His lovingkindness, saw this problem and used it to our advantage. He sent us off to faraway places, lands devoid of the spiritual nature of the Land of Israel, locales filled with vile temptations. And precisely in those places is our simple loyalty and mitzvah performance so valuable to God. Precisely in those dirty "hiding spots" are we able to find the fallen sparks of holiness and return them as a special gift to our loving Father in Heaven. This is not only true for the Jewish people, but for each and every one of us as well.

If, while we were on a spiritual high, we succumbed to our base temptations, God forbid, how can we now possibly repent if we feel so low and distant from God? We must remember that God's entire purpose is only to draw us close to Him. The *raison d'être* of Creation was for us to receive our *tikkun* (spiritual fix) so we can enjoy a true relationship with our Creator. God will stop at nothing until this is achieved.

If we stumble to a very low place, we will be sent hints and opportunities from that place itself to return to God. Not only that, but by doing small and seemingly easy mitzvot in that place, we can give an even greater amount of pleasure to God than when we were on the higher level. Why? Because only when we get ourselves dirty are we able to find and reveal those precious hidden sparks. Even the great *tzaddikim* on their lofty level do not merit to accomplish this incredible task.

While recounting the desert journey of the Jews en route to the Land of Israel, the Torah states, "God led them in a roundabout way" (Exodus 13:18). This is our journey as well. We each want to leave our "spiritual desert" and arrive in the Promised Land, but sometimes (or oftentimes) God leads us in a

roundabout way. However, we shouldn't feel at all lost, for God possesses the most technologically advanced GPS and knows precisely where to take a pit stop. In actuality, this is our greatest challenge in these last generations. We have almost arrived and need only pick up a few last "items" along the way. We are almost home!

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Birkhot Hoda'ah 4:45