

# The Way Home

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From Australia to Argentina, from Sweden to South Africa, there's hardly a country devoid of a Jewish presence. Yet living at the ends of the earth is a far cry from living in the Land of Israel. What is the purpose of exile? Surely God sees that it's much more difficult for us to return to Him when we're so distant from our homeland, the place of our spiritual vitality.

Our Sages 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 at the concept of the fallen sparks of holiness. The Arizal teaches that throughout the world, many sparks of holiness have been hidden (like diamonds, the most precious are hidden deep underground). Through collecting these sparks, the Jewish people will be

redeemed (*Pri Etz Chaim, Shaar 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. As often happens, when a relationship is so intimate, it's only too easy for one party to take it for granted. Slowly but surely, we drifted away from doing our part of constantly growing and striving for more. God, in His compassion, 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 murky "hiding spots" are we able to find the fallen sparks of holiness and return them as a precious gift to our loving Father in Heaven. This is true not only for the Jewish people, but for each and every one of us as well.

One may think, "If, while I was on a spiritual high, I succumbed to my base temptations, now that I feel so lowly and distant, how is it even possible for me to return and serve God?"

But we must remember that God's entire purpose is only to draw us close to Him. The *raison d'être* of Creation is for us to receive our *tikkun* and enjoy a true relationship with our Creator. God will stop at nothing until this is achieved.

Therefore, even if we stumble to a very low place, God will send us hints and opportunities radiating from the hidden holiness of that place to return to Him. If, while we were on a great spiritual level, we were expected to do great things, now by doing small and seemingly easy *mitzvot* in that place can we give an even greater amount of pleasure to God. 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

important task. By descending to these lowly places, not feeling pride but still bravely serving God and uplifting the many sparks through our simple deeds, we make up for the lack of passion we had when we felt close to God.

In recounting the desert journey of the Jewish people en route to the Land of Israel, the Torah states, “God led the people 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 God leads us in a roundabout way. Yet we shouldn’t feel at all lost, for God possesses the most technologically advanced GPS and knows precisely where we need to take a pit stop. In these last generations, this is our great final challenge. We have almost arrived and need only pick up a few last valuable “items” along the way. We’re almost home!

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Birkat Hodaah 4:45*