

Behaalotcha – Shabbat 06 June 2015

The Torah speaks to me.

By these words I mean to say that Hashem is speaking to me through the prism of the Torah. As Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the Alter Rebbe of Chabad used to say that a Jew has to live with the times. It means that the words of the Torah apply to me living in 21st Century Kenton.

This week we read in the Torah how the Israelites in the desert brought the Pesach sacrifice on 14th Nissan.

A delegation of people come to Moshe and Aharon because they were in a state of impurity and unable to bring the sacrifice at the right time. So they say to Moshe: “Why should we be left out and disallowed from bringing the Pesach sacrifice at the appointed time?”

Moshe takes their words very seriously. He instructs them to wait and see what Hashem would tell them to do.

He comes back with the following instructions: that if a person was in a state of was in a state of impurity or lived a distance away from the tabernacle at the time of Pesach, then he/she had a second opportunity to bring the Pesach sacrifice on the Pesach Sheini which would take place a month later on 14th Iyar.

If you look very carefully in the Torah you will see that the words: “Bederech rechokah” a distance away are written with extra dots on top of the words. This symbolises that perhaps bederech rechokah is not to be taken too literally.

In the Talmud in Pesachim there is a discussion as to what is meant by bederech rechokah. How far do you have to be away from the Temple to be called a distance away?

Rabbi Akiva maintains that he who is outside Modiim; a suburb of Jerusalem, 15 kilometres from the centre is called bederech rechokah and would be permitted to bring the Pesach sacrifice on 14th Iyar.

Rabbi Elazar contends that even if the individual is just beyond the threshold of the Temple is considered as being too far to bring the korban Pesach the first time around.

So we can understand Rabbi Akiva’s viewpoint that a distance away is 15 kilometres outside Jerusalem, but the view of Rabbi Elazar, that you are just past the threshold of the Temple precincts, How can that be called a distance away?

I think there is a profound message here. Our Sages are not measuring distance from temple in geographic physical language but in spiritual terms.

Two people may be sitting next to each other in Shul, in physical language they are both close to the Holy Ark in the Synagogue. Yet they may be worlds apart in their attitudes.

One of them is davening with great concentration and has his /her mind tuned in to yiddishkeit and knows that when you come to shul there are the words on the top of the Aron that read: Know before whom you are standing.

And he knows that when you come into the Shul we are in the presence of Hashem. That person is geographically close and spiritually aware and tuned in.

The person next to him might be thinking about the forthcoming football match or the front page of this weeks JC. So even though he /she might be geographically very close indeed, which is a good thing that they come to shul in the first instance, I'm not knocking that.

Nevertheless, that person has a long way to travel on their spiritual ladder.

I remember when I was rabbi in Staines there was a man who lived in Egham, who lived four miles from the shul and rain or shine he walked to shul on Friday evening and then again on Shabbos morning- there and back.

Geographically he may have lived a distance from shul, but spiritually his heart was very close indeed and permeated with a love of Yidsdishkeit.

When the Late Lubavitcher Rebbe Z'L in the late fifties and early sixties began to send out his emissaries to far flung corners of the globe, to bring Judaism to even the furthest reaches, he was ridiculed by his detractors who said that he would never succeed.

The Rebbe told his Chassidim that through the fact that they reach out to the far reaches of the world they can get even closer to Hashem by so doing. In other words; it doesn't matter where you live; it's where you are in your heart that really matters. Hashem is everywhere and we just need to tune in to the right frequency to connect up with Him.

And this is the message that Moshe conveys to the B'nei Yisrael, wherever you are you can always establish a connection with G-d.

Shabbat Shalom