

# CLOSE ENOUGH?

by Rabbi Label Lam

*And you shall not defile the land where you reside, in which I dwell, for I am HASHEM Who dwells among the Children of Israel. (Bamidbar 26:34)*

**...in which I dwell:** You should not cause Me to dwell amidst its uncleanness. (Rashi)

**...for I am HASHEM Who dwells among the Children of Israel:** Even when they are unclean, the Divine Presence resides with them. (Rashi)

We are treated here to "good news" and "bad news". The "good news" as spelled out in the verse is that HASHEM dwells in the in our land, in the Land of Israel. Furthermore, we find out that HASHEM dwells in the midst of the Children of Israel "even when they are unclean" as Rashi spells out. Not only is that "good news" but it is "great news"! There is no way to rid ourselves of the Divine Presence. Hope beats eternal! Now we can march forth with nothing but confidence and good cheer.

After all, King David had said, "As for me, being close to G-d is my good..." (Tehillim 73:28) Therefore we are already living in a state of success in proximity to Divinity. Just as in real estate the three most important ingredients that factor into the value of a property are "location, location, location", so too it is in spiritual terms. What raises a person's esteem and true value in this world and the next is "closeness to HASHEM".

I know a person who rented a summer apartment with a window looking directly out onto the plaza of the Kossel. The view was stunning beyond words. It is impossible to imagine the value of that piece of property, on so many levels. Why then does King David say that that's what's good for him, his being close to HASHEM? Is it not also what's good for everyone else also?

Why is "my good" my being close to HASHEM? And what's the "bad news" associated with knowing that HASHEM is amongst his people even when they are unworthy?

There's a Mishne in Pirke Avos that says, "Let your house be a meeting place for sages..." (Avos 1:4) Rabeinu Yona confirms the notion that one's home should be a place where the wise congregate. However, we confront a practical difficulty when trying to implement the overt meaning of the Mishne. There will always be more homes than sages to fill them up. Can each and every home be expected to host the Torah Shiur or the parlor meeting? How can everyone share a mandate that their house should be a meeting place for sages? How are all of us to fulfill this universal maxim?

When we look carefully at the words of the Mishne the answer appears. It states, "Yehi Beis'cha...Let your house be..." Your home should be the type of environment that the sages would feel as comfortable entering as you would be hosting them. Imagine that the Chofetz Chaim or the Steipler is coming over, not to visit for a day or a week but to move in. How much of an adjustment would that be? What would we have to hide or hinder to host comfortably? How ashamed would we be to wildly misbehave in their presence?! The pursuit of that standard may be the source of the common practice amongst Jews world-wide to hang pictures of Gedolim on the walls, if only to remind us of the company we keep.

Therefore the "good news" is that HASHEM is in our midst and the "bad news" that HASHEM is in our midst. We can forget about HASHEM but we are reminded that HASHEM never forgets about us. HASHEM can be so close to me, but am I to HASHEM **close enough**? DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).