G-d desires that human beings seek a close relationship with Him. Paradoxically though, it seems to be so difficult to draw near to G-d. We take a step toward Him, and He seems to distance Himself from us. In the Divine plan, humans must encounter many barriers that make it difficult for them to approach G-d. How are we to understand the wisdom that underlies this dialectical relationship?

The secret lies in the emotion known as חֵשֶׁק (passion or desire). By our very nature, we desire that which is difficult to attain. The higher the mountain, the more we strive to climb to its summit. When the object of one's desire plays 'hard to get,' one's desire intensifies. Hence the obstacles placed before us are meant to increase our longing.

So in light of these Divinely-directed obstacles, how do we strengthen our will to achieve our goal of moving closer to G-d?

Bnei Yisrael entered the Land through יְרִיחוֹ. The name comes from the root רֵיחַ (smell or fragrance). This alludes to the fragrant scent of the trees that grew there (See Rashi, Yechezkel 27:17). In Shir HaShirim (1:3), Shlomo HaMel-ech makes a big deal about the sense of smell. The enjoyment of a fragrant aroma belongs to the soul of man (Berachot 43b). Eretz Yisrael is called Eretz HaMoriya (nor meaning myrrh) due to the aroma of the ketoret (Rashi, Bereishit 22:2).

What does fragrance signify, and how is it intrinsically connected to the Land of Israel?

Like the sense of smell which entices us from afar, a Divine spark beckons us from a distance and inspires us to come closer to Him. This Heavenly glimmer arouses us and intensifies our חֵשֶׁק. As a result, we are empowered to overcome the obstacles that separate us from G-d.

This רֵיחַ of a celestial ‘twinkle’ is distinctive to the atmosphere of the Land of Israel and stimulates our will to reach God. (See Likutei Halachot, Birkat HaRayach). Man’s desire for G-d is a direct result of G-d’s desire for the Land: “You desire, G-d, Your Land” (Tehillim 85:2).

It was the meraglim who denied the power of this will and craving for G-d, claiming the obstacles were insurmountable. Only Yehoshua and Caleb appreciated the power of the Land to induce רָצוֹן and חֵשֶׁק when they declared: “We shall surely ascend and conquer the Land, for we can surely subdue it!” (Bamidbar 13:30, and Rashi).

The will, the push, the drive, and the longing to cling to G-d and fulfill his Will – overcoming all barriers – are intensified by the atmosphere of the only Land saturated with the Will of G-d.

May we dedicate ourselves to appreciate the exquisite fragrance of the Land and be inspired by G-d’s call to overcome all obstacles and come close to Him!