

The Secret to Teshuva

One whose limbs and organs are totally devoted to Hashem immediately reacts to sanctify Hashem's Name when the opportunity arises. The following story concerning a baal teshuvah, one who returned to observance, demonstrates this idea. An individual was once asked what catalyzed his return. Was it an incident or an individual? At first, he refused to reveal his "secret." After a while, he shared an incredible story with his friends. One morning, as he was driving to work he had the terrible misfortune of seeing a young, observant Jewish child run in front of his car. It was a serious accident, and the child sustained a grave injury. He was not held responsible for the accident since he had been traveling at the appropriate speed. The child, unfortunately, ran out in front of his car. Yet, the verdict of innocence did not remove the crushing feeling of guilt that continued to haunt him.

The depression that resulted from his part in the accident was overwhelming. He could not eat or sleep. He walked around in total despair. One day, he conjured up the courage to go to the hospital and visit the child and his family. Perhaps, this would serve as some form of penance to give him some peace of mind. He went to the hospital, knocked on the door of the boy's room, and was greeted by the little boy's mother. After exchanging the usual pleasantries, he blurted out to the mother, "what can I do to atone for my sin?" The mother looked at him. Without skipping a beat, she said, "Accept upon yourself to become a shomer Shabbos!" He was shocked. Here, he thought that the mother would give him a bill for the medical expenses and cost of aftercare. No, she was concerned with one thing: his Shabbos observance. She cared only that another Jew was not yet observant. It was as if she was "programmed" that she should seize any opportunity to bring a Jew closer to observance.

This woman exemplifies the concept of "v'simloch aleihem meheirah", "that You may reign over them soon." She accepted every chance to sanctify Hashem's Name. There is a postscript to the story. The driver became observant and married a young woman from an observant home. The guests of honor at the wedding were the young boy, who had recuperated from his injuries, and his parents, who had succeeded in changing the life of a Yiddishe neshamah.

He said, If you will listen diligently to the voice of Hashem, your G-d, and you will do what is just in His eyes, and you will give ear to His commandments and observe all His statutes, then any of the diseases that I have placed upon Egypt, I will not place upon you. (15:27)