

“And you will return unto Hashem, your G-d, and listen to His voice.” (30:2)

There is a remarkable contrast between two types of people: one defies rebuke, laughing it off with disdain and derision; and the *baal teshuvah*, penitent, who hears Hashem’s call, responds to His voice and returns wholeheartedly. Two people – or could it be one person, one individual in different stages of his spiritual development? Is it possible for the hard-core sinner, the individual who mocks Hashem and His followers bitterly, to return and be accepted? It is certainly possible for him to be accepted: Hashem is a loving Father Who waits patiently for His errant child. How does one whose attitude is likened to a bitter root, however, change from one extreme to another? We do not always know what turns someone on, because we are not always aware of what has turned them off. If we fail to properly diagnose the illness, we will have a difficult time discerning a cure.

Rabbi Paysach Krohn tells a story about the *Klausenberger Rebbe, z.l.*, which demonstrates this idea. The *Rebbe* was a unique individual. His love for all Jews was legendary. He had an especially keen interest in children. Immediately following World War II and its accompanying atrocities against the Jewish People, the *Rebbe* opened a *yeshivah* and a *Bais Yaakov* school in a Displaced Persons camp. The conditions were dismal and lamentable, but *Torah* study, the lifeblood of our People, has to continue. One day, the *Rebbe* was told about Meshullam, a young man who had succumbed to the heresy that followed Hitler’s holocaust of our People. Until the age of sixteen, Meshullam had exhibited signs of becoming an incredible *talmid chacham*, *Torah* scholar. He was exceptionally diligent in his *Torah* study and meticulous in his *mitzvah* observance. Then came the Holocaust. Having lost most of his family and observed the tragedy that befell so many others, he rejected his Judaism, undermining any attempt to bring him back to observance.

The *Rebbe* was not a person to take no for an answer, especially when a *Yiddisheh neshamah*, Jewish soul, hung in the balance. He asked that the *bachur*, young man, be brought to him. When Meshullam entered the *Rebbe*’s room, the *Rebbe* motioned for him to sit down next to him. “I am told that you are the son of *Reb* Laibish, whom I knew very well,” the *Rebbe* said. “Yes,” Meshullam responded, glibly. He was not going to be lulled into any conversation about Judaism and faith in G-d. He knew it all, and he had rejected it after Auschwitz. For him, the world of religion was something of the past.

“They tell me you were once a great *masmid*, diligent in your studies, back home. Is this true?” the *Rebbe* asked in a non- confrontational tone. Knowing fully well, the significance of *Torah* study to the *Rebbe*, he decided not to give the *Rebbe* the pleasure of telling him that at one time he had conformed to the demands of religion and loved *Torah* study. He simply nodded to the *Rebbe*’s question.

“But, now you are angry,” the *Rebbe* said in a soft soothing tone. “Of course, I am angry,” he blurted out. “How could I tolerate the heinous, brutal destruction of so many people? The best were taken from us, the finest are lost forever, and you expect me not to be angry!”

The *Rebbe* lovingly extended his hand and touched Meshullam’s face, telling him, “You are so right. I also suffered heavy losses. They took my beloved wife and eleven children and murdered them. I was left alone with nothing. You are right. The best were taken from us and look at what is left.” With these words the *Rebbe* suddenly burst out in tears and began to sob. As the pent up emotion poured from him, Meshullam also began to cry. Together, the *Rebbe* and Meshullam mourned their losses on each other’s shoulders.

It was no longer necessary for the *Rebbe* to say anything. Rebuke was not and had never been a factor. There was so much bitterness bottled up in Meshullam that only needed a release. The *Rebbe* was that catalyst. Words were not necessary. Tears, streams of tears, an outpouring of emotion is what Meshullam needed. The *Rebbe* understood this – while others, regrettably, did not. Meshullam returned, because the Klausenberger *Rebbe* understood his need. It is unfortunate that more people like Meshullam did not connect with someone of the caliber of the Klausenberger *Rebbe*.