

But the sons of Korach did not die. (26:11)

It is not as if Korach had protected his sons by excluding them from his ill-fated debacle. *Rashi* comments that they had been involved from the very beginning. At the time of the dispute, however, they were *meharher bi'teshuvah*, had thoughts of repentance in their hearts. Therefore, a place was fortified for them in *Gehinnom*, Purgatory, and they resided there. This means that the earth beneath them hardened above the spot designated for them in *Gehinnom*. Thus, they were spared due to the *teshuvah* thoughts they harbored. This is a powerful and inspiring lesson. *Teshuvah saves.*

When the *Ponovezher Rav, zl*, was about to travel on a fundraising trip, he visited his revered *Rebbe*, the *Chafetz Chaim, zl*, to receive his blessing. "Does the *Rebbe* have a message for the people in Europe?" he asked. "Tell them that it is quite simple to do *teshuvah*, repent. All one has to do is regret and express remorse over his deviation from Hashem's Torah. He then accepts upon himself to continue upon the prescribed path. The *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, would like us to think that *teshuvah* is a difficult undertaking which usually concludes in failure. This is one of the wiles of the *yetzer hora*. *Teshuvah* is not difficult."

The Bnei Brak security guard who worked the protective unit that safeguarded Ponovezh *Yeshivah* was himself not observant. Thus, it came as a total surprise, when one day he appeared at his post sporting a *yarmulke* and wearing *tzitzis*. One of the *rabbanim* who met him asked, "My friend, what prompted you to wear *bigdei malchus*, royal garb?" The man replied, "It was the *shiur*, lecture, delivered by *Maran Horav Shach* (the *Rosh Yeshivah*)." The *Rav* countered, "What did you understand from the *shiur* that inspired you?"

"I did not understand a single word," the guard replied. "When the car transporting the *Rosh Yeshivah* to the *yeshivah* pulled up, however, I saw how the students reverently lifted the aged *Rosh Yeshivah* from the car, and how they supported every step that he slowly took until he ascended to the lectern. When I saw this, I thought to myself, 'The *bais hamedrash* is filled to capacity, standing room only. What can this elderly *Rosh Yeshivah* say that is so special?' I decided to stand by the door of the room and listen. As soon as the *Rosh Yeshivah* began the *shiur*, a complete transformation occurred. The *Rosh Yeshivah*, who was weak and unable to walk, delivered a lecture like a young, spirited eighteen-year-old. His passion and spirited delivery blew my mind! Where did he suddenly garner the strength to be so young and exuberant? I figured that it must come from the Torah. I decided then and there that, if Torah can create such a metamorphosis in a person, I was going to change my way of life and become observant."

We have no shortage of *teshuvah* stories, because many people find their way back, often (like the *Bnei Korach*) through the vehicle of a *hirhur*, thought. (I looked up 'thought' in the thesaurus and arrived at a better word: consideration.) Many of us have fleeting thoughts, but never stop long enough to consider their import and impact. "Consider" the following story, which I just read in Rabbi Yechiel Spero's, "One Small Spark."

Many *yeshivos* in *Eretz Yisrael* cater to the needs – both physical and spiritual – of men who are returning to Jewish observance. One such *yeshiva*, under the leadership of *Horav Eliyahu Feivelson*, focuses primarily on the younger generation, men who seek to concretize their religious beliefs and their knowledge of Torah before going on to build a family. Thus, *Rav Feivelson* was surprised one day when a gentleman, regal in dress and demeanor, visited him with an unusual request: “I am a professor at the university and recently became a *baal teshuvah*. I am well on the road to becoming a fully observant member of *Am Yisrael*. My issue is with my wife. She is not yet there. In fact, she neither has interest in becoming *frum*, observant, nor in my carrying out my choice. She would much rather that I return to the ‘normal’ way of life that we enjoyed before I became *frum*. I came here to ask the Rabbi to please speak with my wife and attempt to convince her to accompany me on this journey.”

Rav Feivelson was impressed with this man’s request. It was not every day that an accomplished senior citizen showed up at his door to make such a request. “What motivated your return to Torah Judaism?” he asked the professor. This is his moving story.

“I was nine years old when my parents emigrated to *Eretz Yisrael*, following World War II. They were survivors who had lost everything in the Holocaust. Family, money, religion – all lost. They sought a better future for their *ben yachid*, only child. We arrived in a growing city that did not yet have the type of school that my mother wanted for me. Not knowing much about schools, she contacted her brother for advice. He suggested *Batei Avos*, which was a fine school, part of a religious orphanage located in Bnei Brak. The school had been established by the *Ponovezher Rav*, as part of his legacy to rebuild the Torah that was decimated in Europe. My mother trusted her brother. She had no reason to ask whether the school was religious. If she had known that it was, I would not have attended. Her child would not fall prey to the ‘mistake’ that had cost them everything. (Sadly, whenever something goes wrong, it is always G-d’s fault. We cannot judge. What the survivors experienced is beyond anything that we can describe or understand.)

Ashdod to Bnei Brak was not a commonly traveled route. When my mother sent me off, we knew that it would be some time before we would see one another. I would have a room and three solid meals a day, so why should she worry? One day, when my mother had to be in Bnei Brak for another reason, she decided to visit me in the school. How shocked and dismayed she was to discover that her precious child was attending a *frum* school. She was adamant: ‘Pack your bags; we are leaving this place. My child will not attend a religious school!’

“Three days later, an elderly man wearing a long black frock, sporting a white beard, appeared at our door. He introduced himself as *Rav Kahaneman*, the *Ponovezher Rav*. Apparently, he had been traveling outside the country on one of his fundraising trips and was dismayed to discover upon his return that one of his students had opted to leave. ‘What can I do,’ he asked, “to resolve the situation? Why did you take him home? Did we do something wrong? Was it the food, or his bed? What can we do to rectify this, so that he can return forthwith?’

“Nothing! Absolutely nothing! After what my husband and I experienced, we want nothing to do with religion. I was unaware that your school was religious. Otherwise, he would never have stepped foot in your building.’

“The *Rosh Yeshivah* begged. He pleaded. He promised the world. My mother, however, was adamant. There was no way I was returning to *Batei Avos*. Suddenly, the *Rav*’s knees began to shake, and he asked for a chair. He sat down by the table and began to cry uncontrollably. He uttered not a word; he just cried and cried. Ten minutes elapsed. He stopped, wiped his tears, rose from the chair and left our home.

“Indeed, my mother saw to it that her precious child would not grow up religious. I, however, never forgot that image before my eyes. The sight of an elderly *Rosh Yeshivah* weeping copiously over the loss of one young child to Judaism was forever etched in my psyche. His tears were so genuine, because his love of Torah and every Jewish *neshamah* was heartfelt and authentic. Many decades passed since that day, but I have finally returned. Now, I want my wife to join me, so that we can live out our twilight years as fully-observant Jews.”

Rav Feivelson agreed to help. After such a story, who could demur such a request? The *Rosh Yeshivah*’s cries never ceased. They pierced the heart of a young boy and remained with him throughout his life, until they finally had the desired effect.