

let us go and worship the gods of (If your brother will entice you secretly... saying “others” ... you shall not accede to him, and not hearken to him, and your eye shall not take pity on him, you shall not compromise nor conceal him. (13:7–9)

The *Torah* singles out the *meisis* – person who entices others to idolatrous worship – for particularly severe treatment, as befits a sin of this egregious nature. Such a person poses a profound threat to the spiritual fabric of *Klal Yisrael*. His actions are much more than a personal transgression, but rather, an unpardonable assault on the collective faith and identity of the Jewish people. The punishment meted out to the *meisis* underscores the importance of maintaining the purity of faith within the Jewish community and how we abhor anyone who would dare undermine the status quo.

The laws that pertain to the *meisis* vis a vis his punishment differ from others who deserve capital punishment. The *meisis* needs no warning before he sins; we may conceal witnesses to observe his treachery. Once he is found guilty, no statement or rationale to ameliorate his action is entered on his behalf. The court does not enter any arguments in his defense. In other words, the same *Torah* whose cardinal rule, *V'ahavta l'reiacha kamocha*, “Love your fellow as yourself,” teaches us that we should exhibit no mercy toward the *meisis*. We listen, convict and punish with prejudice. He has committed a transgression that overrides rationale and compassion. His sin represents the existential threat to our nation's bond, covenant with *Hashem*. When the collective community is in danger of such incursion, the community must take strong, stringent measures to preserve the integrity of its faith.

We have been plagued with *meshichai sheker*, false messiahs, some who succeeded in misleading multitudes, and others who, despite not reaching a large element of Jews, caused irreparable harm. While they did not preach idol worship, but rather, a reformed, secular approach to *mitzvos*-devoid of *Torah*, they succeeded in creating a rift in the fiber of Judaism. Some preached a nationalism that would promote settling the Holy Land, without the necessary commitments to religious observance. Others focused on *mitzvos*, such as *Shabbos*, transforming this into a religion: observe *Shabbos* and ignore the rest.

HoRav Aharon Kotler z”l (quoted by *HoRav Noach Weinberg z”l*), derived from the laws of *meisis* and its punishment a powerful insight concerning the flip-side/contrasting perspective of *kiruv rechokim*, outreach to unaffiliated (and even affiliated) Jews. *Chazal* teach that *Hashem's* desire to bestow reward and favor is five hundred times His desire to punish. Thus, we may extrapolate that, if a *meisis* is considered the lowest of the low, if his transgression is to be treated with extreme prejudice, imagine five hundred times that in the amount of reward received by one who brings Jews back to *Torah*!

People erroneously think that *kiruv* is about multitudes, and success is measured by completely changing a person's life, transforming him/her into a card-carrying member of the *Torah* community. While it is certainly a significant and desired achievement, it does not mean that if A) We reach only one person, or B) he/she is not yet ready to observe every *mitzvah* to the fullest extent of the law - that one has failed. Just taking the initiative to reach out to a fellow Jew is in of itself a "win." *Hashem* deems it to be the greatest good, because it demonstrates our love for Him. The actual impact of our work is subordinate to the initiative.

The *Rosh Yeshiva* cites *Chovos Halevavos* (*Shaar HaBitachon*, *Perek 4*) who makes a powerful, almost frightening, statement; "A person's good deeds alone do not make him worthy of *Olam Habba*. *Hashem* considers him suitable only due to two other factors in addition to his good deeds. The first is that he teaches others about *Hashem* and guides them in doing good. The second is (the result of) G-d's kindness and benevolence.

In short, a person can do everything by the book, can reach an elevated level of spirituality – yet, be sorely short of the goal of worthiness to gain entrance into *Olam Habba*. If he is not involved in teaching/reaching out to others – he is not showing his true love for *Hashem*. One who loves wants to spread the love – no excuses.

One may think that, in order to succeed in *kiruv* he must have an effusive personality, an ability to entertain, captivate and mesmerize. Yet, we find many highly successful outreach professionals who have nothing more to offer than pure, authentic, sincere love for *Hashem* and His children. That is the most important ingredient in successful outreach: Love. When the unaffiliated or turned-off Jew or Jewess senses that the person who is reaching out to them sincerely cares about their spiritual life, they are moved, and they listen. Charisma and eloquence, together with added brilliance, are definitely positive traits that impress a *baal teshuva*, but what impresses and moves them most is not the dazzle, but the authentic love emanating from the heart.

Devarim ha'yotzim min ha'lev nichnasim la'lev: "Words that emanate from the heart enter the heart"- such words can pierce the hardest shell, the most difficult heart to penetrate, because genuineness somehow enters the heart.

Rabbi Dovid Refson, founder of *Neve Yirushalayim*, a seminary for adult women returning to the *Torah* way of life, succeeded as a result of his love for Jews. He and his wife saw many young Jewish women estranged from their heritage, seeking spiritual meaning and purpose, but unsure where to turn. The *Rabbi* and his wife saw "souls" not "projects." They ignored the "baggage" these women carried, and they opened their home/school to them.

One emotionally scarred and skeptical student arrived at *Neve* with a negative attitude. She was not looking for a *Rabbi*, or a class, she was not in search of direction. The truth is, she did not know why she was there. One afternoon sitting alone and overwhelmed, *Rabbi Refson* approached – not to teach, not to preach – just to listen to what she had to say.

That moment was the turning point in her life. She said, “He never attempted to convince me to change. He saw me; believed in me - and, as a result, I believed in myself.” The encounter was the catalyst that transformed her life’s trajectory.

Kiruv is not about changing people. It’s about caring for them and showing them that they matter. Many of the unaffiliated are grappling with self-doubt. When they see someone loves them, respects them for who they are, regardless of the spiritual *nadir* to which they have fallen, then they have hope for true and enduring return.