

The Best Career of All

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One of Rabbi Zvi Aryeh Rosenfeld's Talmud Torah students, whom we'll call "Kohn," lived next-door to the Rosenfeld family. One Friday night, Reb Zvi Aryeh's four-year-old son opened his bedroom window before going to sleep and heard Kohn singing zemirot.

He went to tell his father. Reb Zvi Aryeh came into the room, sat on his son's bed, and listened intently. He bent forward, straining to catch every note. After about half an hour, Kohn finished singing. Reb Zvi Aryeh wished his son a "Gut Shabbos" and left the room.

Reb Zvi Aryeh had been concerned about Kohn's religious observance and was afraid that he might even remove his yarmulke. That evening, when he heard Kohn singing zemirot with such kavanah (devotion), a small hope burgeoned within him that Kohn would be all right. But shortly afterward, Kohn did remove his yarmulke and stopped observing mitzvot.

Reb Zvi Aryeh was terribly hurt when Kohn and another of his promising students stopped keeping mitzvot. He wrote to Rabbi

Avraham Sternhartz in Israel and told him that he was considering leaving the field of kiruv (outreach).

This happened in 1953. When he visited Jerusalem that summer, Reb Zvi Aryeh entered the Breslov synagogue in Katamon after Maariv when the Chassidim were in the midst of their traditional rikud, a short dance after prayers. Rabbi Sternhartz danced past Reb Zvi Aryeh without acknowledging him. Reb Zvi Aryeh thought that Rabbi Sternhartz was angry with him for planning to leave kiruv. The truth was that the Breslov elder had simply failed to notice him.

The second time Rabbi Sternhartz danced past Reb Zvi Aryeh, he noticed him and raised his arms as if to embrace him from afar. Reb Zvi Aryeh cut through the line of men to speak with him directly. "I feel so out of place here," he told him. "I'm clean-shaven, wearing a suit, and living outside the Land of Israel."

Rabbi Sternhartz replied, "Having a beard is great! Wearing Chassidic clothes is great! Living in the Land of Israel is great! But nothing compares to bringing one soul back to Torah!"

Reb Zvi Aryeh had his answer. He remained in the United States, continued working in kiruv, and did not grow a beard. And he never looked back.