

Elul WhatsApp / Telegram Messages

18th Elul – 18th September

How do I make that first step towards reconnecting myself to Judaism or my faith or my God? How do I take that one step that will help me get ready for Elul and the Holy Days to come? If you want to change one thing, what do you do? Where do you start?

Well, I think the answer to that question depends on what you personally find most emotionally powerful. Let me tell you what I find, that for me the most powerful religious experience comes from music. I've often said that words are the language of the mind, but music is the language of the soul. And for me, music opens me up as nothing else can, and that's whether it's the music of *Kol Nidre*, or the *Kaddish* of the *Yamim Noraim*, or if you know a particular moving tune for *Avinu Malkeinu*, any of the real Jewish sounds that resonate with you.

In 1968, I spent Rosh Hashanah as a young sophomore student in 770 Eastern Parkway, where I heard the Lubavitch Rebbe blow shofar. After that, we went back to a neighbour, a Chabad *chassid* who lived nearby for lunch and there was another guest, and as we were waiting for our host to finish his *davening* he told me his story. He had been very far from Judaism. He was a composer of pop music. I had heard some of his compositions because there had been big hits, but he'd given up Judaism for many years. And one day he was driving in the Midwest in America, and suddenly the thought occurred to him that it must be coming close to Rosh Hashanah, which he hadn't observed for several years. And at that moment he said, they came into my mind a song that I learned at *cheder* when I was five or six years old. And as that song came into his mind, he stopped the car, he turned it around and headed straight to New York, straight to Brooklyn, straight to the home of Chabad. And that he said is why I'm here. That was his *teshuva*. That was his coming home.

Now what was it that turned it around for him? Was it the music? Was it memories of childhood? Was it the realisation of how far he had drifted and how lost he was? It was probably all three, but that is the power of music to open our soul to the light and the love of God.