

OUR TICKET TO THE HALL OF FAME

by Rabbi Label Lam

There's no wise person like someone who's been tested and passed. (Akeida 14)

Reish Lakish said: Repentance (Teshuva) is so great that intentional sins are counted as merits, as it says, "When a wicked man turns back from his wickedness and practices justice and charity, he shall live because of them." (Ezekiel 33:19) ...This is when one repents from love of HASHEM. (Yoma 86B)

How does Teshuva from love of HASHEM convert debits to credits? How does it work? Is this some kind of accounting trick we should know more about or is there another dynamic at play that does not apply to a financial model?

Many years ago I was waiting in a mid-town reception area to learn with a businessman and he was somewhat behind schedule. I made the mistake of peeking out from behind the book I was learning and I espied a Sports Illustrated on the magazine rack. There on the cover was no picture of a robust athlete but rather the shrunken and prune-like countenance of someone I almost recognized. I looked closer and lo and behold it was none other than Mickey Mantle. I wondered what in the world he was doing on the front cover of a current Sports Illustrated. He had not done anything nearly athletic for decades. I became curious to read the article. "The Mick", as he was affectionately known, had been my childhood hero! I was there at the stadium the day he hit his 500th homerun.

My jaw dropped as I read with rapture a story about and by Mickey himself but it had little or nothing to do with baseball. Rather he systematically spelled out in that public format dozens of his personal failings. He spoke about how his drinking had interfered with his playing baseball and how some days he showed up at the park drunk. He spoke openly about how his drinking problem had paved the way for his son's addictive lifestyle which brought him to an early grave from a drug overdose. He listed and vividly portrayed a wide array of ill behaviors and their attending consequences including his own deteriorating liver condition that could be traced to his abuse of alcohol.

I was shocked to see such a public admission. It took a lot of guts to open up like that. He acknowledged that he was doing so to warn others and dissuade them from making the same mistakes he was guilty of. What came next really landed a blow and brought real tears to eyes. He wrote in conclusion that he realized that he had disappointed and hurt his family, his friends, and his fans "and now Mickey Mantle is going to hit more homeruns than ever before!" The gentleman I came to meet and learn with stepped out and I had to explain to him why I was reading Sports Illustrated and weeping.

We can never know what another person's motive is, whether or not it springs from love of The Almighty or fear or whatever. What we can appreciate is that when one recognizes how deep they have sunken and that depth becomes the impetus to go higher than ever then the lowness is then recalibrated as a means to get even higher. If a bow is pulled down so that it goes far from the high place to which it is aimed and then it is suddenly released the tension created by the opposite pull propels the arrow even farther. The same applies if a person digs a deep hole and then they realize that they are going in the wrong direction. That hole can be used as a foundation for a tall building the deeper the pit the higher the building might go. All can yet be turned around.

Taking advantage of the amazing Teshuva opportunity on Yom Kippur day or any time the heart becomes painfully aware may be our ticket to the hall of fame. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).