

# I WAS WRONG

*by Rabbi Label Lam*

With strategies make for yourself war and salvation is in an abundance of council. (Mishlei 14:6)

The Chovos HaLevavos tells about a victorious general returning from war. He was swept up in the parade celebrating his accomplishments and the masses were cheering him wildly. At one point a wise old man made a comment to the general as he passed, "Now that you've finished with the small war, get ready for the big war!" The general stopped and asked the elder, "What big war are you talking about? I've just conquered the known world!" To which the wise man answered, "The battle with your-self!" This war is not an imaginary or metaphorical thing. It is the real and big battle of our lives and for our lives that all of us must fight.

I was once given the assignment of challenging a group of Hebrew Day School students to continue past 8th grade and to consider going to a Yeshiva High School. I told them that I could prove mathematically that there was such a thing as a Yetzer Hara. It piqued their interest but the burden of proof shifted to me. That year I was teaching also on Sundays in a Hebrew School for pre-Bar Mitzvah boys. I told them that predictably so that even the best kid in the class didn't come back the day after his Bar Mitzvah. Why should that be so?

I offered an analogy of shooting warm up baskets on the floor of Madison Square Garden. There you are with the big boys draining three pointers, but the minute the clock starts and the game is on you'd be lucky to hold the ball for a second before it's stolen away. Those guys are playing warm up Judaism but when the game begins at age 13 an iron curtain descends and everyone not serious is immediately shut down.

Here's an important piece of inside information. I'm not usually interested in these number things, but there are enormous practical implications to this brief insight of the Talmud. "The numerical value the name HaSatan (the opposing force) is 364". The message is that this opposing force is active and effective 364 days of the year. Since the solar year is composed of 365 days then there is one day when the Yetzer Hara is asleep and that day is Yom Kippur. How can we maximize strategic use of this information? The Yetzer Hara from the beginning of time has crept into lives subtly at first until he has moved in altogether crushing our innocent selves into a corner. Maybe that's the desperate cry we shout with the Shofar's help on Rosh HaShana to reclaim our purity. The Yetzer Hara sits like a giant gorilla in our living room. For the day he's deep asleep let's plan. We'll back a big truck up and pack his things in organized boxes (ashamnu...bagadnu). We'll quickly load them

and then schlep him onto the truck and drive'm off the edge of a cliff. Then we'll hurry home and lock the door and not allow the same foolishness to enter. Isn't that what happens on Yom Kippur?

I can prove anecdotally that this is true. One of the hardest things for most people to do is to admit that they were wrong. Therefore one Rabbi said the three most important words in marriage are not "I love you" but "I was wrong". How much ego filled effort in this world and how many wars are started because someone just can't get those three words out. It's a terrible Yetzer Hara. Yet on Yom Kippur Synagogues are packed with Jews of all stripes and allegiances. Why on that day? There's no wine and cake to be had. People pay a premium price for seats to stand a day long and say repeatedly, **"I was wrong!"** DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).