

AUTOMATIC

by Rabbi Label Lam

A New Year is about to begin. We would all like to improve, yet change is hard! How can we get ourselves to budge in a new direction? How do we get started and how do we get stopping?

The story is attributed to Reb Levi Yitzchok from Berditchov tzl. He had been working on himself in a private setting trying to overcome some issue on whatever high level he was struggling when he resigned to accept that it was not possible to change. Immediately afterward he stepped out into the street where he witnessed an argument between a wagon driver and a store owner. The store owner wanted the wagon driver to unload the goods into his store. The driver insisted, "I can't!" The store owner barked back. "It's not that you can't! It's that you don't want to!" The fight went on just like but with ever increasing intensity and volume. "I can't!" "It's not that you can't! It's that you don't want to!" Then something happened.

The store owner quietly reached into his pocket and waved a few bills and said, "What if I offered you 50 zlotas? Would you be able to?" The wagon driver answered soberly, "I'll give it try." Reb Levi Yitzchok marveled that the wagon driver was indeed then quite capable of doing the job. It was not that he was not able it really was because he did not really want to. He also understood that that incident played out before his eyes, was to instruct him about his own circumstance. If he could only meditate on and deeply realize the true value of the accomplishment at hand then he could gain enough power leverage himself to do the impossible.

A story is told about a little shepherd boy who planted himself casually on the king's highway. Along came the king himself one day in his quadruple stretch limo and with the rest of his entourage. They came to a screeching halt in front of the shepherd who was absorbed in playing his flute. The attendees honked the royal horns gently and then more and more furiously. beeeeeeeeeeeep- beep- beep- beep- bpbpbpbpbpbpbpb- beeeeeeeeeeeep (Sounds familiar?) but he turned a deaf ear.

The servants were angered at his arrogance as the boy waved his hand uncaringly in their direction. They wished to flatten him at first but the king himself advised otherwise. He told them to open the car door and invite him in. The boy now gladly took the offer to go for a cruise in such a fine vehicle. Unaware he was seated right next to the king he persisted in his insolent ways. He used inappropriate language and gestures. He pulled on the king's beard and toyed with his crown. The king silently tolerated the insulting behavior.

When they came to a little hamlet there were signs welcoming the king and a small number of fans

shouting with glee, "The King!" The car slowed down and they waved in acknowledgment. The shepherd boy asked them to wait for a few moments so he could see the king everyone was clamoring for. The same scene repeated itself on a bigger scale as they made their way through a larger city. When they arrived at the "big city" there were millions of people screaming excitedly, "The King!"

The shepherd boy became curious as to why they had confronted so many celebrations in one day and why there had been no other cars in each of the parades. It suddenly dawned upon him the frightening fact that he had been sitting next to the king himself the whole time. He immediately fell with trembling to the feet of the king and begged for his life and for forgiveness. The king accepted his petitioning and pardoned him. So too on Rosh HaShana, to the extent an awareness of "The King" is awakened in our minds to that degree we will have gained a light with which to view our lives. In this way the process of "Teshuva" is first made meaningful. Obviously, we cannot express proper remorse until it becomes abundantly clear to us than before in front of Whom we stand. The Chovos Levavos writes, "Don't look at the size of the sin but rather the greatness of the One in front of Whom the sin was committed."

To the extent that we can realize this awesome notion, Teshuva is possible and change is **automatic**.