

A HOLY MOTIVE

by Rabbi Label Lam

There are three and possibly four basic ingredient in Teshuvah. 1) Feeling regret (**past**) 2) Vidui- Admitting to HASHEM (**present**) 3) Accepting not to do it again in the **future**. 4) If the sin was between man and man then returning or repairing what stolen and/or broken along with asking for forgiveness is also required. (**present**).

Accepting not to do something again in the future is a scary proposition. When Adam sinned and HASHEM asked him, "Where are you?" Adam answered, "...I was afraid because I was naked." The Midrash detects that Adam is employing the word "I" - ANOCHI in referring to himself. He feels himself removed and independent from HASHEM, and they explain he is saying, "I did it and I will do it again!" This sounds awfully brazen. I saw an explanation recently that what Adam meant was, "I am afraid that I can't help myself anymore and therefore I will do it again." It's hard for any of us to say we will never do it again. Change is hard!

Maybe Erev Yom Kippur is the wrong time to be telling jokes but there is a deep truth embedded here. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing. A young fellow learned in the Talmud that if a man marries a wicked woman he will not have to go to Gehinom because he experienced here in this life already. So he went the local matchmaker and asked for the worst of the worst shidduchim. The Shadchan was terribly reluctant to offer such a punishing bride but the fellow insisted and offered a large sum of money. A date was set with a fire breathing, swearing, cigar smoking, and abusive brute of woman. On the date she was far worse than his expectation. Her language and conduct was foul and beyond offensive. So he proposed marriage. She accepted. Under the Chupah he stood with trepidation as he braced himself for a life of beatings and verbal abuse.

However, much to his great surprise she was just the opposite. Nothing could get her even slightly angry. He tried leaving his socks on the floor and insulting her but she, in response was only gracious and kind. After a year he was frustrated to the limit so he went back to the matchmaker and cried foul. "This is not what I bargained for! This is a false sale! I asked for a wicked woman and here I have an Eishes Chayal!"

The Shadchan listened in disbelief. "I have to see this myself! I need to meet with her!" The husband left and his bride entered. The Shadchan asked, "Is it true? Can it be!? Your husband claims you are a true Tzadekes!" Just then she put her big boots on the desk, pulled out a cigar, struck a match, lit up and blew out a couple of smoke rings. She turned to the Shadchan and said, "If that bum thinks I'm going to save him from Gehinom then he's got another thing coming!"

The story is attributed to Reb Levi Yitzchak 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 that 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 Yitzchak 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.

It's possible for any person to change anything. We just need a strong enough incentive. Sometimes it can be for revenge and sometimes it can be for profit, but how much more so can we succeed with **a holy motive**.