

"THE SECRETS OF CHANGE"

by Jon Erlbaum

(Insights for the 10 Days of Teshuva)

*Hi All - when I once spoke about the following ideas at our Minyan down the Shore, my brilliant Brothers spontaneously chimed in with poignant puns. I am introducing those puns directly below in incomplete form. Why, you might ask! Because a) the puns really only make sense after reading through the initial paragraphs, and b) to whet your appetites! We're talkin' **HUGE incentive** to read this one from beginning to end... A Good Sweet Year to you all! Love, Jon & The Chevra*

- This Week's **BR1** (Brother Reference #1): **"Don't bite off more than you can _____" - Marc Erlbaum, Summer 2005**
- This Week's **BR2** (Brother Reference #2): **"Don't go too _____" - Daniel Erlbaum, Summer 2005**

RETURN TO WHERE YOU'VE NEVER BEEN?

As long as we're playing word games, let's have a quick round of "Wheel of Fortune", shall we? Clue: something that human beings are born with. "ORIGI_AL _ _ _". You'd like to solve the puzzle? Oh, I'm sorry - the answer is **NOT** "ORIGINAL SIN". Not in the JEWISH Wheel of Fortune! The answer is actually **"ORIGINAL PURITY"** (ok, so I intentionally tried to throw you off by leaving only 3 letter spaces!)

In case you missed it, this is fantastic news! You see, during this time of year, between Rosh Hashana & Yom Kippur, there is an especially strong emphasis on the Mitzvah of **TESHUVAH** - loosely translated as "repentance", but **tightly translated as "RETURN"**. How does the tighter translation of "RETURN" help us to breathe easier through the challenging Teshuva process? By reassuring us of an awesomely comforting reality: that all we need to do in order to accomplish "Teshuva" is to "RETURN" to who we already truly are! To strip away the schmutz that masquerades as being fundamental to our identities, and to come back to our pure, essential selves! To know definitively that we were NOT born with the stain of original sin! True, the moment we left the womb, we were endowed with the challenge of "original self-centeredness". Nonetheless, we can rest assured that we were created as pure and holy

beings - in the "Image" of our Creator.

GET BACK TO THE GARDEN

So now we know what we're called upon to do during these days of awe: in the words of Joni Mitchell's "Woodstock" (later echoed harmoniously by *Crosby, Stills, and Nash*), *"we've got to get ourselves - back to the gar-ar-ar-ar-den"*). Which garden? The Garden of Eden, no doubt! We've got to get back to our natural, fresh, pristine states of being. But how do we fight through the layers of schmutz? The following inquiry provides us with some valuable insights:

GROWTH OBSTACLES: SURROUNDED BY SCHMUTZ

In our Evening prayers, we ask G-d to remove our growth obstacles "from **in front of us** and from **behind us**". Questions:

1) In what way do growth obstacles stand "**IN FRONT OF us**"? One way is by putting up the paralyzing roadblock known as "**ALL-OR-NOTHING THINKING**". We somehow convince ourselves that change is meaningless unless we go all the way with it! This growth-stunting fallacy, also known as the "HYPOCRISY TRAP", tells us: "Don't bother doing a partial Mitzvah - don't bother keeping a little more Kosher or a little more of Shabbat - such a selective Judaism' would only make you a hypocrite!" This type of self-defeating attitude stands "in front of us", as it blocks the forward motion of our Mitzvah & character improvements! But we can jump over these roadblocks by reminding ourselves that a true hypocrite is someone who *professes a belief* and then *does not make an honest effort* to live up to it in practice. The mere fact that someone professes a belief and then fails to fully live up to it in practice does not make that person a "hypocrite" - it makes that person a "human"! We all fall short of our ideals to some degree, simply because we're not perfect - and fortunately, we are neither required nor expected to be! [1]

2) In what way do growth obstacles stand "**BEHIND us**"? By **PUSHING us to grow too fast!** By **SHOVING us** in the direction of forward change at an unnatural, unhealthy pace! Sure, we might achieve forward strides in this manner - but at the high cost of burn-out and resentment! And when we fall, who knows how long it will take us to get up again?

TWO POIGNANTLY "PUNNY" BROTHERS

So now we arrive at the profound but simple secret of our sages (spiced up by the spontaneous spin of my Brothers). How do we create lasting change? Little by little! And as I was saying these ideas to a group of people that included my Brothers, near the end of my remarks I mentioned that it's crucial to not bite off more than you can chew, after which my **Brother Marc** quickly quipped...

- **BR1** (Brother Reference #1): "Don't bite off more than you can **TESHUVAH**" (Poignant Pun #1).

Similarly, the sages warn us, "**TAFASTA Merubah Lo Tafasta**": "***If you've grabbed at too much, you haven't grabbed anything***" (***keep your eye on that word "TAFASTA"***). We know this in everyday life: if we try to pick up that extra bag of groceries (e.g. to avoid another trip from the trunk to the kitchen), we may drop all the bags we could have otherwise carried successfully. So too, in areas of personal growth, **less is often more!** Therefore, as we approach our Teshuvah this year - as we look to return to our holy essence - may we create lasting change by remembering...

- **BR2** (Brother Reference #2): "**...not to go TOO FASTA**" (climactic & Poignant Pun #2, courtesy of my **Brother Daniel**)

May we all have meaningful days of Teshuvah! Love, Jon & The Chevra

1. Adapted from *The Informed Soul*, by Rabbi Dovid Gottlieb - pp.184-5

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