

## Mishlei 16-06

# Teshuvah

### Key Concepts

There are times when a person is overcome by a mood of selfishness or ego that causes him to violate his inner conscience and act to please himself. Such violation is called sin and is the greatest challenge that a person must face.

Although man is vulnerable to sin, the Creator provided him with a means to recover from the consequences of sinful behavior. Essentially this process of *teshuvah* (returning) involves sincere regret for the sins of the past and earnest resolve to avoid sinful behavior in the future. *Teshuvah* is a demanding process, but Hashem has promised that it will be rewarded by forgiveness and a clean slate so that man can continue with his life.

Regret for the past is essentially an appeal to be forgiven for past sins. A person needs to find ways of demonstrating the sincerity of his appeal by performing acts of devotion to regain Hashem's favor. Since all sin is characterized by selfishness the person should actively demonstrate his regret by performing acts of kindness to others and by reflecting upon the seriousness of his past behavior — kindness and truth (*chesed* and *emes*).

The commitment to truth also requires an understanding of the Torah's laws of proper moral and ethical behavior that define Hashem's expectations of the human beings He created. Thus, Torah affects the past, but it also affects the future.

Ultimately, the process of regret for past sins is confirmed by resolving to avoid sin in the future. The earnestness of such a resolution depends upon a person's commitment to the fear of Hashem. It is not enough to fear being seen by other people. One must internalize an awareness of Hashem's presence so that a sinning person will be embarrassed to be seen by his Creator.

## Exploring Mishlei

(ו) בְּחֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת יִכָּפֵר עֲוֹן וּבִירְאַת ה' סוּר מִרָע:

(6) *Sin will be forgiven through kindness and truth  
but fear of Hashem enables turning from evil.*

This proverb outlines the steps needed to gain Hashem's forgiveness through the process of *teshuvah*. The first part of the proverb addresses regret for the past and the second part points to the future. Sincerity of the person's regret for sins of the past is demonstrated by his focus on acts of kindness and by facing the truth of what he has done relative to the truth of the Torah. His commitment to selfless behavior in the future is achieved through the fear of Hashem.

## Learning Mishlei

(6) **Through** acts of selfless **kindness** — בְּחֶסֶד;  
**and** by meditating upon the **truth** — וְאֱמֶת  
of what has happened and  
what one should do in the future,  
past **sin will be forgiven** — יִכָּפֵר עֲוֹן.

**But fear of Hashem** — וּבִירְאַת ה'  
enables **turning away from evil** — סוּר מִרָע  
in the future.

## Additional Insights

(1) Despite the wonderful opportunity that a person has been given to wipe out the effects of his sinful past through kindness and truth, he should give priority to avoiding sin in the first place. This means giving priority to *yiras Hashem*. (מלבי"ם)

(2) Even after sin has been forgiven, that does not mean the person's soul has returned to its previous state of wholeness and perfection. That can only be achieved by perfecting his *middos* (character traits) through *mussar* (moral discipline). In this process, he should prepare himself to be able to resist the very sin to which he succumbed in the past, even if the circumstances happen to be repeated. (רבינו יונה)

(3) Besides the fact that each man achieves atonement for his sins through his own acts of *chesed* and *emes*, he also depends upon the *chesed* and *emes* of his Creator. It is the *chesed* of Hashem that makes Him ready to accept a man's appeal for forgiveness and it is His *emes* that assists man in going through the arduous process of *teshuvah*, because a man could not do it alone. (המאירי)