

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 man 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 יִכְפֹּר עֵוֹן וּבִירְאָת ה' סוּר מִרָע:

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

(ו) בְּחֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת יִכַּפֵּר עֹן
וּבִירְאַת ה' סוּר מִרָע:

Sin will be forgiven through acts of selfless **kindness and** through meditating upon the **truth** — **בְּחֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת יִכַּפֵּר עֹן** of what has happened and what one should do in the future, **but fear of Hashem** enables **turning from evil.**— **וּבִירְאַת ה' סוּר מִרָע**.

Additional Insights

A series of insights illuminating this proverb are presented below. The numbers identifying the insights refer to the listing of sources at the end of the segment. Among the additional sources used in developing this segment are Rashi, Metzudos, Hagra.

(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.

(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 (mental discipline). In this process, he should prepare himself to be able to resist the very sin that he succumbed to in the past, even if the circumstances happen to be repeated.

(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.

Sources

The primary sources used for the additional insights illuminating this segment are listed below.

(3) - המאירי

(1) - מלבים

(2) - רבינו יונה