

## Mishlei 17-09

### Forbearance – Love

#### Key Concepts

What is love? Unfortunately, despite the wide variations in what people actually mean when they use the word, they continue to rely on it as a generic label for a complex and changing set of emotions. And so, it is worthwhile to think carefully about what the Torah has in mind when it speaks to us of love.

To understand an abstract concept such as love we need to look at the specific patterns of behavior that it implies. Some behaviors are consistent with a feeling of love while others demonstrate the absence of love. Using a distinctive choice of words and phrases, Mishlei has presented us with a means to examine our own lives and relationships with regard to some aspects of what we should think of as love.

#### Exploring Mishlei

**(ט) מְכַסֶּה פְּשַׁע מְבַקֵּשׁ אֶהְבָּה וְשֹׂנֵה בְדָבָר מִפְּרִיד אֱלוֹף:**

***(9) He who disregards an offense is a seeker of love;  
but he who dwells on the matter alienates a friend.***

This proverb speaks of love as a factor in how people react to each other when they say or do things that cause offense, either intended or unintended.

It begins by declaring as a sign of love the disregarding or overlooking of an offense by the loved person. Mishlei describes this reaction as being **מְכַסֶּה פְּשַׁע**, "covering the sin" so that it is no longer seen. The offense has not been removed but the offended person is motivated by love not to let it intrude upon his thoughts. Instead, he dwells on the positive qualities and deeds of the loved one.

If the offended person succeeds in suppressing thoughts of the offense he is described as a **מְבַקֵּשׁ אֶהְבָּה**, a seeker of love. This description tells us a lot about our attitude to love. It is not something that "happens" to us. We don't wait to "fall in love." We seek opportunities to experience love for each person with whom we have a relationship. A measure of our success in this quest is our ability to avoid harboring resentment for perceived offenses.

The failure of love is described by Mishlei as being **שְׁנָה בְדָבָר**, repeating or harping on an offense. The person can't get it out of his mind. He disregards the good qualities of the other person because his thoughts are taken up by how he has been hurt by the offense. The subject of the offense is referred to as **דָּבָר** to emphasize that an unwise or thoughtless word can cause as much hurt as any physical offense. Nevertheless, the one who seeks love has learned not to dwell on it.

Mishlei describes the effect of a failure of love as being **מִפְרִיד אֱלוֹף**, alienating a friend. By using the word **מִפְרִיד**, "to cause a separation", Mishlei is teaching us that the proper goal of love should be to achieve closeness between people. Closeness implies having insight into the needs and concerns of the other person, and then reacting to that insight in a meaningful and constructive way. To the extent that love has failed, the individuals disregard each other instead of disregarding their offenses.

Mishlei refers to the loved one using the interesting word **אֱלוֹף**, which means an individual who is "unique" and "special" (like the first letter of the aleph-beis.). To love another person is to hold him in high regard, thinking of all the special qualities that make him unique, while suppressing thoughts of his negative qualities.

The Torah commands us to love each other and to love Hashem. In practice this means to constantly and gratefully think of each other's good qualities and kindnesses. And it means suppressing thoughts of any questions and doubts that might interfere with the purity of our regard for the one being loved. All of this requires constant thought and active attention. That is why it is a *mitzvah*. Every *mitzvah* is challenging in its own way.

## Learning Mishlei

(9) He who disregards an offense — **מְכַסֵּה פְשָׁע**  
is a seeker of love — **מְבַקֵּשׁ אֲהָבָה**  
but he who dwells on the matter — **שֹׁנֵה בְדָבָר**  
alienates a friend — **מִפְרִיד אֱלוֹף**

## Additional Insights

[1] If someone disregards an offense, he has identified himself as a seeker of love (**מְכַסֵּה פְשָׁע מְבַקֵּשׁ אֲהָבָה**). These words are reversed in Segment 10-12 to convey a similar message (**וְעַל כָּל פְּשָׁעִים תְּכַסֶּה אֲהָבָה**), "love covers all offenses."

This means that if a person loves another, he will be inclined to forgive every kind of offense. (מלבי"ם)

[2] A person who suffered an offense and keeps harping on it alienates not only the offender (אֵלוֹף) but the Creator who is the אֵלֹהִים of the entire world. By focusing upon his own resentment rather than seeking peace he is acting in a self-centered way and is creating a separation between himself and Hashem. (רש"י)

[3] If a person reproaches a friend repeatedly (שָׁנָה בְּדָבָר) he will have the opposite of the desired effect and will turn the friend into an enemy. (מלבי"ם)