

Mishlei 17-13**Ingratitude****Key Concepts**

Hashem created the world as an act of kindness towards its creatures. Man is the most noble of all the created beings, with the ability to appreciate the kindness that has been done to him in giving him life. In return he is expected to do what is right, while rejecting what is evil. To fulfill that purpose man is called upon to emulate his Creator and to act with kindness to his fellows, and with gratitude to the Creator.

Throughout his life a man should be aware of the kindnesses that are being constantly being done to him by Hashem and by other people. His responsibility to act with kindness at every opportunity is, in effect, a repayment of the kindnesses that have been done to him. Through this noble character trait of gratitude man fulfills his purpose in having been created.

What happens if a man fails in his mission of acting towards others with kindness? He is thereby showing ingratitude to the One who created him. For this he deserves to be called to account. But if he now acts badly by harming or hurting other people, he has compounded his sin, especially if the person he is hurting was kind to him. And if he acts disrespectfully to Hashem, desecrating the Name of Hashem, he has committed the ultimate ingratitude.

A person who lives a life of ingratitude is associating himself with evil, both for himself and those he cares about. That association will be permanent if he does not mend his ways, for he has failed to fulfill the purpose for which he was created.

Exploring Mishlei

(יג) מְשִׁיב רָעָה תַּחַת טוֹבָה לֹא תִמוּשׁ רָעָה מִבֵּיתוֹ:

**(13) Whoever returns evil for good,
evil will not depart from his house.**

This proverb brings our attention to the consequences of ingratitude. Ingratitude is a living tragedy which brings about permanent harm, both spiritual and physical, for the one who practices it and for those around him.

Learning Mishlei

(13) Whoever returns evil — **מְשִׁיב רָעָה**
for good — **תַּחַת טוֹבָה**,
hurting the one who has been kind to him,
evil will not depart — **לֹא תִמוּשׁ רָעָה**
from his house — **מִבֵּיתוֹ**.
for he is putting himself in a state that is beyond redemption.

Additional Insights

[1] A person who has acquired wealth through the mercy of Hashem has an obligation to use that wealth in a way that is acceptable to Hashem, such as helping other people. If he fails to do so he is guilty of ingratitude to Hashem, repaying evil for good. (הגר"א)

[2] Inevitably, the consequence of ingratitude is corruption of the person's moral character. This will lead to further sin which will continue indefinitely. The Midrash tells us that Pharaoh failed to show gratitude for the good that Yosef did during the famine in Mitzrayim. This attitude continued to eat away at him until he ended up denying Hashem. (אלשיך)

[3] Inevitably the consequence of ingratitude is an outbreak of contention and strife. Thus, an ungrateful person will find that the evil of quarreling never leaves his house. (אלשיך)

[4] A person who disregards the good that has been done for him, is likely to have developed an excuse that he feels can justify his betrayal. We see this by Pharaoh who enslaved the Jewish people, disregarding all the good that Yosef had done for Mitzrayim during the famine. He justified this action with the pretext of protecting Mitzrayim against the imagined threat posed by the Jews. However, the obligation to show gratitude demands that one set aside one's self-interest. (דעת סופרים)

[5] A person who is guilty of ingratitude will find it difficult to escape a tragic destiny because he will develop a reputation of being an ingrate. As a result, people will be reluctant to help him when he encounters hard times. (רלב"ג)

[6] Another reason that a person who is guilty of ingratitude will find it difficult to escape a tragic destiny is that his ingratitude towards his fellow man will be

reflected in a corresponding ingratitude towards his Creator, thereby invoking Divine retribution. (רלב"ג)

[7] A person who is guilty of ingratitude will find it difficult to do teshuvah and be forgiven because Heavenly justice is based on "*middah k'neged middah*", that is, a punishment to fit the crime. In this case, the crime is paying back harm in return for kindness, so that the appropriate punishment would be to reject an attempt at repentance. Thus, there will be no opportunity for "evil to depart from his house." (מלבי"ם)

[8] A person might excuse himself from being grateful because the person who helped him was guided in that action by Divine Providence. Even if that is true, he is nevertheless obligated to show gratitude to whomever Hashem has chosen to be His agent. (מעם לועז)