

Mishlei 19-02

Thought

Key Concepts

During the months of Elul and Tishrei people give a lot of thought to the feelings of guilt arising out of sinful behavior. And so, they pray to Hashem for the opportunity to make a fresh start. They resolve to conscientiously work on themselves to do better in the coming year.

At this point Mishlei steps in and reminds people that they may be in a vicious circle whereby they are the unthinking source of their own spiritual failure. Sinful actions don't happen in a vacuum. There are areas of spiritual neglect that are overlooked throughout the year because people fail to recognize its relevance to the end-of-year guilt.

Two areas are of special concern and are called to our attention in the proverb below. Both are related to the need for more conscious thought about our own situation. (1) Hashem has given each of us a mind that enables us to reflect upon the meaning of our actions. If we use that gift more often throughout the year we will gain greater self-knowledge and greater knowledge of what the Torah expects of us. (2) Furthermore, by consistently slowing down our instinctive impatience to move on the next challenge of life, we will be able to better ensure that what we are doing today is really what we should be doing.

Exploring Mishlei

(ב) גַם בְּלֹא דַעַת נִפְשׁ לֹא טוֹב וְאֵץ בְּרַגְלָיִם חוּטֵא:

*Also, besides the importance of innocence in outright sin, such as touched upon in the previous proverb, **it is not good to be without self-knowledge, and he who speeds up his feet without taking time to think is a sinner.***

This proverb identifies two practices which although not directly sinful in themselves are factors in creating an attitude that leads to sin. The first is failing to take the time and effort to gain self-knowledge (דַעַת) by comparing one's own

behavior with the teachings of the Torah. The second is to rush through life (אָץ בְּרַגְלִים) without fully thinking through the implications of one's actions.

Learning Mishlei

Also, — גַּם

for a person to be **without self-knowledge** — בְּלֹא דַעַת נֶפֶשׁ

is not good — לֹא טוֹב,

and he who speeds up his feet — וְאִץ בְּרַגְלָיו

without taking time to think about what he is doing

is effectively a **sinner** — חוֹטֵא.

Additional Insights

[1] If a person speeds thoughtlessly through life he will be likely to trample sins under his feet because he doesn't take the time to consider their significance.

(רש"י)

[2] There are times when a person sins through neglect rather than wickedness. He is guilty of the failure to apply knowledge (דַעַת) to his actions. If he lets his actions be governed by thoughtless habit he will be like to wander of the path of righteousness. (מלבי"ם)