

## Mishlei 19-03

### Blame

#### Key Concepts

Because we live in a physical world, each of us is constrained by the environment in which we happen to live, including the family and culture into which we were born. We do not get to choose the circumstances of our gift of life. But we do get to choose what we do within our own personal frame of reference, which is like a tiny universe of our own.

Hashem has given us this amazing gift and it comes with its unique set of challenges that represent our mission in life. As a person grows up, he is constantly looking around him and thinking about what he should be doing with himself. For each person, the source of control is within his own mind which has the power to evaluate and reflect upon the choices facing him. Hashem has implanted a sense of right and wrong within each of us, as well as the voice of temptation calling us to make a selfish and unwise choice.

But what happens, if I listen to the voice of temptation and fail in my responsibility to do the right thing? It would be tempting to blame my failure on the circumstances of my life:

If only my parents and teachers had done a better job! If only my friends didn't exert a bad influence on me! If only Hashem had made me a man of means! It would be nice to say that under different conditions I would have been a better person, but Mishlei tells us that is a big mistake.

#### Exploring Mishlei

(ג) אִוְלַת אָדָם תְּסַלֵּף דְרָכּוֹ וְעַל ה' יִזְעַף לְבוֹ

(3) *A man's own foolishness corrupts his way,  
yet his heart rages against Hashem.*

As we have seen, Mishlei repeatedly emphasizes the importance of actively using our minds and doing whatever is right within the framework of the options that

are available to us. Here Mishlei refers to the failure of intelligently using one's mind as foolishness. Such foolishness is disastrous to a person because it can have the effect of corrupting his way through life. He will be inclined to resent what has happened to his life and he may want to blame Hashem for not making it easier for him. But it does a man no good to rage against Hashem, for the foolish person has been given the gift of life and he has a mission to make the best of what Hashem has given him. If he does not do that, he has only himself to blame.

## Learning Mishlei

(3) A man's own foolishness — **אִלְתָּא אָדָם**  
**corrupts his way** through life — **תִּסְלֵף דְרָכּוֹ**.  
**But it is against Hashem** — **וְעַל ה'**  
**that his heart rages** — **יִזְעַף לְבָבוֹ**

Every life is a test. When a person has been given a test by Hashem, it is foolish to be angry with the One who has given it to him.

## Additional Insights

[1] The fallacy of blaming Hashem for the consequences of one's own foolishness is vividly described in the Torah (*Bereishis* 42:28). When Yosef's brothers discovered that their money had been returned to them, they were afraid they would be suspected of having stolen it. So, they said, **מָה זֹאת עָשָׂה אֱלֹקִים לָנוּ** - *What has Hashem done to us?* At that point they did not see this as a consequence of their own foolishness in selling Yosef as a slave. (רש"י)

[2] When things go wrong a foolish person is always looking for someone else to blame. But for a person to believe in Hashem means that he believes Hashem treats him fairly. This faith is called *emunah*. A person with *emunah* firmly believes that Hashem gave each individual the ability to meet the particular challenges that he is faced with. (מלבי"ם)

[3] If a person fails to admit his misfortune is caused by his own sin, that in itself is a sin. It is the sin of lack of *emunah*. (רבינו יונה)

[4] A person who has started to do a major *mitzvah*, such as learning Torah, may be counting on Hashem's help. But if he unwisely takes on a commitment for

which he is unprepared, he will inevitably fail. He should not blame Hashem for not coming to his assistance. He should blame himself for his conceited attempt to appear more learned than he is. (הגר"א)