

## Mishlei 19-11

# Intelligence

### **Key Concepts**

Basic human intelligence is an essential faculty that Hashem has given to every person. It enables him to evaluate each challenge of life and respond in a way that he believes serves his needs and conscience. Of course, just like all of his other faculties, the quality of inborn intelligence varies from person to person, while being subject to enhancement through training and practice.

Basic intelligence, also called common sense, is a powerful instrument. However, its operation is subject to temporary distortion by even more powerful natural faculties such as the emotion of anger. When a person is offended by an act of insult or disrespect, his momentary anger can totally incapacitate his ability to think clearly.

It is evident that awareness of the state of one's emotions at any time is critical. For example, while under the influence of anger no person can consider himself in command of his intelligence. Effectively, he has temporarily lost his intelligence. The wise individual will recognize this and will delay any attempt to use his intelligence while his anger is still burning.

Once his anger has calmed down a person is able to consider how serious the offense really is, and he can make a considered judgment of the appropriate response, taking into account what the effect is likely to be in terms of the offender's behavior. To conduct such an analysis the person needs unhampered intelligence.

After thinking it through he may decide that the wisest choice is forgiveness, that is, wiping the slate clean and disregarding the fact the offense even occurred. Such

an approach goes beyond what might be expected from basic intelligence. It enters the area of goodness and righteousness. It represents the glorious potential of what a human is capable of.

Of course, this glorious attitude may very well turn out to be the wisest, being the only course that will bring true *menuchas hanefesh* (peace of mind).

## Exploring Mishlei

יא – שְׁכֹל אָדָם הָאָרִיךְ אָפוּ וְתִפְאָרְתּוֹ עֵבֶר עַל פְּשָׁע:

(11) *The intelligence of a person is in slowness to anger but his glory is in forgiving an offense.*

This proverb compares basic intelligence with going beyond intelligence. It all depends on how he reacts when someone commits an offense against him. If he is able to suppress his natural instinct of anger, that is, if he is slow to anger, then he is free to react with intelligence. His emotions won't get in the way of an intelligent response. However, even more glorious than suppressing anger is to forgive the offense entirely. Such a person's thinking becomes free from any emotional baggage because memory of the offense has no effect on him.

## Learning Mishlei

**The intelligence of a person – שְׁכֹל אָדָם**

depends upon **slowness to anger** after an offense – הָאָרִיךְ אָפוּ

**but his ultimate glory – וְתִפְאָרְתּוֹ**

**is in forgiving the offense – עֵבֶר עַל פְּשָׁע.**

## Additional Insights

(1) The inverse of this proverb appears in segment 14:17, *an impatient man acts foolishly* – הגר"א

(2) Anger is difficult to control because it is a deep-seated emotional reaction. When it is let loose, it is like an inundating flood – רשר"ה

(3) Although intelligence cannot defeat anger, it can help suppress the antagonistic reaction induced by anger – מצודות

(4) A person cannot take credit for his intelligence because that is a gift from Hashem. However, the virtue of forgiving an offense is up to the individual — שבט מיהודה

(5) It is glorious to forgive an offense because it promotes love and friendship — רלב"ג, חנוך לנער