“Ribbit”: The prohibition of lending money with interest (1)

17th of Shebat, 5770
As explained last week, it is forbidden to lend or borrow with interest (= “Ribbit”). What happens when a person who has lent with Ribbit decides to do Teshuva (repent)? – Our sages demanded that if a person who once charged you Ribbit now wants to return that sum of money to you, you do not accept it.

Illustration: Joe lent $10 to Abe last year demanding $1 as Ribbit. This year, just before Yom Kippur, Joe decides to do Teshuva. He goes to Joe and offers to return him the $1 he had charged him. Abe should not accept that money back, and should instead forgive it.
This is in order to encourage people to do Teshuva.

Illustration: Because Joe knows that Abe will probably not accept the money back, he is more likely to do Teshuva. Joe still needs to offer the money back, even if he knows Abe will probably refuse it.
The exception is when the Ribbit was in the form of an object. Then, one may accept the object back.

Illustration: Last year, Joe lent $10 to Abe with the condition that Abe repays him $10, and, additionally, he gives him his blue pen. The blue pen is the Ribbit. This year, Joe is doing Teshuva. Since the pen is an identifiable object, Joe should return it, and Abe could very well accept it. This is to protect Joe’s reputation; otherwise, people who knew the pen belonged to Abe will think Joe never did Teshuva.

Note: *The laws of “Ribbit” are very complex, especially in today’s corporate world of sophisticated financial and legal structures. Ours is a basic overview of the Halakha as found*

in Maimonides's Mishne Tora and in Shulchan 'Arukh. Please consult your rabbi with any practical questions (Halakha leMa'ase).