

Mishlei 01-20**Wisdom is Calling**

[Pesukim 1:20 thru 1:33]

Key Concepts

Don't say that the wisdom of the Torah is too difficult for you or is not available to you in your situation in life. Don't say that such wisdom is suitable only for theoretical discussions in the *Bais Hamedrash* but is not practical for the real world in which you must function every day.

The message of Wisdom is very serious and is critical to your life. Don't neglect it and don't try to evade it. You should visualize Wisdom as a dynamic spirit which is desperately eager to share and adapt its message to everyone in every situation, no matter how much they have studied in the past and no matter what other activity is occupying their attention.

Exploring Mishlei

INTRODUCTION. Wisdom is calling out to everyone and is proclaiming its accessibility in every human habitation.

(כ) חִכְמוֹת בַּחוּץ תִּרְנֶה בְּרַחֲבוֹת תֵּתֵן קוֹלָהּ :
(כא) בְּרֹאשׁ הַמַּיִוֹת תִּקְרָא בְּפִתְחֵי שְׁעָרִים בְּעִיר אֲמַרְיָהּ תֹאמֶר :

(20) Wisdom proclaims its message in the street. It raises its voice in the squares. (21) At the head of the noisy markets, at the entrances to the city gates, and everywhere in the city, Wisdom speaks its words.

IGNORANCE. Every baby starts out in life in a state of complete ignorance. Gradually over the years he acquires the knowledge and wisdom to succeed at some level. Under normal conditions, nobody remains an imbecile. However, many Jews fail to achieve the minimal level they will need to serve Hashem properly and experience spiritual growth. What prevents believing Jews from breaking out of their state of ignorance? Unfortunately, many find it very difficult to make the sacrifices that are needed to acquire the wisdom of the Torah. Three major considerations have been identified.

(1) Despite the best of intentions, some lack the strength of character to avoid being influenced by the distractions that abound in our society. And so they waste their time in idle amusement. (2) They may also be affected by the culture of disrespect and levity which pervades many social circles. Because of their lack of seriousness they cannot commit their minds to thoughtful study over any length of time. (3) Some may have become discouraged by the challenges of the learning process itself. Instead of the sweetness of learning all they see is hard work and so they have given up.

All of these factors are dealt with by the spirit of Wisdom here in Mishlei. In effect, Wisdom advises each person to examine himself and understand what is holding him back from rising further out of the swamp of ignorance. Once a person understands what behavior patterns he has fallen victim to, he needs to work on himself to break those patterns. Here, Wisdom assures him that he will not be alone. If he makes an effort, he will have the benefit of Divine help.

(כב) עַד מָתַי פְּתִים תֵּאָהָבוּ פְתִי וְלִצִּים לְצוֹן חֲמָדוֹ לָהֶם וּכְסִילִים יִשְׁנָאוּ
דַּעַת:

(כג) תְּשׁוּבוּ לְתוֹכַחְתִּי הִנֵּה אֲבִיעָה לָכֶם רוּחִי אֹדִיעָה דְבָרֵי אֶתְכֶם:

(22) Wisdom says: “You simple-minded people, how long will you be devoted to distractions? How long will self-styled comedians delight in teasing each other? How long will fools hate knowledge?”

(23) How long before you turn back at my rebuke. Listen here! I will impart my spirit to you. I will make my words known to you.”

REJECTION. The natural state of a human being is to be a receptacle for the wisdom of the Torah and to live a life that is governed by that wisdom. When a person rejects the opportunity to acquire wisdom, it is a sign that he has been influenced by character weaknesses such as laziness or the attraction of immoral life styles.

In effect there is a voice of Wisdom within each person’s soul calling upon him to overcome his human weaknesses and adopt the purpose for which he was created. When the individual consciously ignores that voice, he is held accountable.

The voice of Wisdom notifies him that he must be ready to face the consequences of his rejection, as described in subsequent parts of this segment.

(כד) יַעַן קָרָאתִי וְתַמְאֵנוּ נְטִיתִי יָדֵי וְאִין מִקְשִׁיב:
(כה) וְתִפְרְעוּ כָּל עֲצָתִי וְתוֹכַחְתִּי לֹא אֲבִיתֶם:

(24) Wisdom continues: *“Because I called you, but you refused, because I motioned with my hand and no one paid attention. (25) Because you rejected my advice and you did not want my rebuke, you will need to accept the consequences.”*

RUDE AWAKENING. People like to believe that they are right, especially when times are good. Even when things go wrong they naturally assume it is just bad luck or someone else’s fault. However, if a person always believes he is doing the right thing he will never change and he will never grow.

What does it take to puncture a person’s balloon of self-deception? Even a gradual worsening of his situation may not do it. He will continue to come up with rationalizations, desperately hanging on to his illusions because he does not want to change.

If Hashem sends him a sudden misfortune, that may shake him up. But even then, he will not be eager to consider the implications.

Mishlei advises him to look into his heart and open himself up to the voice of Wisdom that exists within each person’s soul.

If he does so, he will realize that Wisdom is showing him how ridiculous he has become because of his refusal to face the truth. He will see that Wisdom is laughing at him and is mocking him. Perhaps the shock of being an object of humor will break through his veneer of complacency!

(כו) גַם אֲנִי בְּאִיִּדְכֶם אֶשְׂחֶק אֶלְעֵג בְּנֶאֱפִיִּדְכֶם :

(26) Wisdom continues: *“I, too. When your misfortune strikes, I will laugh at you.”*

CONSEQUENCES. People who make bad choices in life often do so because they fail to think through the consequences of their actions. They react to their current feelings and influences but don’t consider that things will not always be the same. Even when they know they are not doing what they should be doing they persuade themselves that the situation is not urgent, and they will have opportunities to adjust their behavior later.

In these last *pesukim* of Chapter 1, Mishlei warns the reader that time is running out. Acquiring the wisdom of the Torah is a process that takes time and cannot be done at the last minute. A person who has neglected wisdom will one day be forced to face the consequences. Instead of the happiness that he hoped to achieve with

his current life choices he will realize that a life without the guidance of wisdom is doomed to tragedy.

This message is conveyed by the voice of Wisdom within his own soul, which tells him that without Torah he will be at a loss when the inevitable dark day of tragedy arrives. He has made his choice and will have to face consequences.

But even at this late date Mishlei adds a postscript, reminding the reader that he has an opportunity to listen to the voice of Wisdom and change his life. Then instead of a tragic consequence he will be blessed with happiness in this world and the next.

(כז) בָּבֵא כְּשֹׂאוֹה כְּשׁוֹאָה פְּחָדְכֶם וְאִידְכֶם כְּסוּפָה יִאָּתֶה בָּבֵא עֲלֵיכֶם צָרָה וְצוּקָה :

(כח) אִזּוּ יִקְרְאוּנִי וְלֹא אֶעֱנֶה יִשְׁחַרְנֵנִי וְלֹא יִמְצְאוּנִי :

(כט) תַּחַת כִּי שָׁנְאוּ דַעַת וַיִּרְאֵת ה' לֹא בָּחְרוּ :

(ל) לֹא אָבוּ לַעֲצָתִי נִאֲצוּ כָּל תּוֹכַחְתִּי :

(לא) וַיֹּאכְלוּ מִפְּרֵי דֶרֶכָם וּמִמַּעֲצוֹתֵיהֶם יִשְׂבְּעוּ :

(לב) כִּי מְשׁוּבֹת פְּתִים תִּהְרָגִם וְשָׁלוֹת כְּסִילִים תִּאֲבֹדִם :

(לג) וְשָׁמַעַ לִי יִשְׁכֵּן בְּטַח וְשָׁאֲנֹן מִפַּחַד רָעָה : פ

(27) Wisdom continues: "When your fear arrives like a sudden darkness and tragedy strikes like a tornado, when trouble and torment come upon you, (28) then they will call me, but I will not answer. They will search for me, but they will not find me, (29) because they hated moral knowledge and they failed to choose the fear of Hashem. (30) They did not want my advice; they spurned all my admonitions. (31) They will eat of the fruit of their path. And they will have their fill of their own counsels. (32) For the unrestrained life of the simple-minded will do them in and the self-satisfaction of fools will destroy them. (33) But whoever listens to me will live in confident serenity, undisturbed by the fear of tragedy."

Learning Mishlei

INTRODUCTION.

(כ) חֲכָמוֹת בַּחוּץ תִּרְנָה
בְּרַחְבוֹת תִּתֵּן קוֹלָהּ :

The Torah's **Wisdom** — חֲכָמוֹת
proclaims its message **in the street** — בַּחוּץ תִּרְנָה
so that everyone can hear.
In the town squares — בְּרַחְבוֹת
where people gather to conduct business
it raises its voice — תִּתֵּן קוֹלָהּ.

(כא) בְּרֹאשׁ הַמַּיּוֹת תִּקְרָא
בְּפִתְחֵי שְׁעָרִים
בְּעִיר אֲמַרְיָהּ תֹאמֶר :

And **at the head of the noisy markets** — בְּרֹאשׁ הַמַּיּוֹת,
that is where Wisdom **calls out** its teachings — תִּקְרָא.
Also, **at the entrances to the city gates** — בְּפִתְחֵי שְׁעָרִים,
where the elders sit to settle disputes,
and everywhere else in the city — בְּעִיר,
Wisdom **speaks its words** — אֲמַרְיָהּ תֹאמֶר
to all who will listen.

IGNORANCE.

(כב) עַד מָתַי פְּתִים תִּיאָהֱבוּ פְתִי

Wisdom is speaking: You **simple-minded** people — פְּתִים
who are vulnerable to the attractions of “modern” culture,
how long — עַד מָתַי
will you be devoted to mindless **distractions** — תִּיאָהֱבוּ פְתִי ?

וְלִצְיִים לְצוֹן חֲמָדוֹ לָהֶם

How long will self-styled **comedians** — וְלִצְיִים
delight in teasing each other — לְצוֹן חֲמָדוֹ לָהֶם
and finding something to laugh about in every serious situation?

וּכְסִילִים יִשְׁנָאוּ דַעַת :

How long, will fools — **וְכַסִּילִים**
hate knowledge — יִשְׁנְאוּ דַעַת

because learning Torah doesn't give them the pleasure that others find in it ?

(כג) תְּשׁוּבוּ לְתוֹכְחָתִי

To each of you I say: How long will it be before you
turn back — תְּשׁוּבוּ

from your foolish attitude and pay serious attention
to my rebuke — לְתוֹכְחָתִי ?

הִנֵּה אֲבִיעָה לָכֶם רוּחִי
 אֹדִיעָה דְבָרִי אֲתֹכֶם :

Listen **here — הִנֵּה!**

If you will open your mind, **I will impart my spirit to you — אֲבִיעָה לָכֶם רוּחִי .**

You will then be able to focus your mind on acquiring knowledge. If you do this,

I will make my words known to you — אֹדִיעָה דְבָרִי אֲתֹכֶם

so that you will be able to remember what you have learned. Once you have gained some knowledge, you can build on that and you will see the sweetness in how it all fits together.

PART 3. REJECTION.

(כד) יַעַן קָרָאתִי וַתִּמְאַנּוּ

The time has come to remind that you that **because — יַעַן**

you rejected me you will have to suffer the cost of your ignorance.

Remember that **I called you — קָרָאתִי**

to listen to my guidance when I was close to you, **but you refused — וַתִּמְאַנּוּ .**

Instead, you distanced yourself from me so that you could no longer hear my voice.

נָטִיתִי יָדִי וַאֲיִן מִקְשִׁיב :

Even so you could still see me from the distance and so

I motioned to you with my hand — נָטִיתִי יָדִי .

But tragically, you pretended not to see me

and so there was no one to pay attention — וַאֲיִן מִקְשִׁיב .

(כה) וַתִּפְרְעוּ כָּל עֲצָתִי
 וַתוֹכְחָתִי לֹא אֲבִיתֶם :

You rejected all my helpful advice — ותפָּרְעוּ כָּל עֲצָתִי
and you did not want to listen to my rebuke — וְתוֹכַחְתִּי לֹא אָבִיתֶם.
 You treated me like a troublesome stranger interfering with your life.

RUDE AWAKENING

(כו) גַּם אֲנִי בְּאִידְכֶם אֲשַׁחֵק

You treated me badly and rejected my heartfelt advice because you preferred your illusions. **I, too — גַּם אֲנִי,** will act sharply in the hope that you will come to your senses.

When your misfortune strikes — בְּאִידְכֶם ,
I will laugh at you — אֲשַׁחֵק
 so that you realize how foolish you are.

CONSEQUENCES.

(כז) בָּבֵא כְּשׂוֹאָה פְּחָדְכֶם
 וְאִידְכֶם כְּסוּפָה יֶאֱתֶה
 בָּבֵא עֲלֵיכֶם צָרָה וְצוּקָה :

As long as things continue to go well for you, you enjoy your pleasures and disregard the need for the wisdom of Torah in your life. But you must know that there will come a time when things go wrong.

When your unseen fear arrives like a sudden darkness — בָּבֵא כְּשׂוֹאָה פְּחָדְכֶם
and tragedy strikes you like a tornado — וְאִידְכֶם כְּסוּפָה יֶאֱתֶה,
when trouble and torment come upon you — בָּבֵא עֲלֵיכֶם צָרָה וְצוּקָה ,
 then you will be forced to pay the consequences of your foolishness.

(כח) אֵיזוּ יִקְרְאוּנִי וְלֹא אֶעֱנֶה
 יִשְׁחַרְנוּנִי וְלֹא יִמְצְאוּנִי :

When that tragic day comes, all those who have neglected wisdom will know that they waited too long. **Then they will call me אֵיזוּ יִקְרְאוּנִי** to help them with advice and sympathy, hoping that I am still nearby and can hear them, **but I will not be able to answer — וְלֹא אֶעֱנֶה** because they have moved too far from me. When they realize I am out of hearing range, **they will start to search for me — יִשְׁחַרְנוּנִי ,** **but they will not find me — וְלֹא יִמְצְאוּנִי .**

(כט) תַּחַת כִּי שָׁנְאוּ דַעַת
 וַיִּרְאוּ ה' לֹא בָּחְרוּ :

Because they hated moral knowledge — תַּחַת כִּי שָׂנְאוּ דַעַת they forfeited my help. **And** even though they had every opportunity, **they failed to choose the fear of Hashem — וַיִּרְאַת ה' לֹא בָחָרוּ**.

(ל) לֹא אָבוּ לְעֵצָתִי
נִאֲצוּ כָּל תּוֹכַחְתִּי :

They did not want my advice — לֹא אָבוּ לְעֵצָתִי about avoiding bad influences; **they spurned all my admonitions — נִאֲצוּ כָּל תּוֹכַחְתִּי** about their failure to acquire wisdom.

(לא) וַיֹּאכְלוּ מִפְּרֵי דֶרֶכָם
וּמִמְעַצְתֵיהֶם יִשְׁבְּעוּ :

They will eat of the bitter fruit of their path in life — **וַיֹּאכְלוּ מִפְּרֵי דֶרֶכָם** , a path which they thought would give them only pleasure. Instead of the sweetness of Torah wisdom they will have the bitterness of fear. And they will have **their fill of the bitter fruit of their own counsels — וּמִמְעַצְתֵיהֶם יִשְׁבְּעוּ** since they refused to listen to my advice. Instead they acted upon their own twisted thinking and this will lead to ultimate tragedy.

(לב) כִּי מְשׁוּבַת פְּתִים תַּהְרִיגֵם
וְשִׁלּוֹת כְּסִילִים תֵּאבְדֵם :

For the unrestrained life of the simple-minded will do them in — כִּי מְשׁוּבַת פְּתִים תַּהְרִיגֵם . Their disregard of consequences will lead them along the path of destructive influences. **And the complacent self-satisfaction of fools**, who are misled by their initial success, **will ultimately destroy them — וְשִׁלּוֹת כְּסִילִים** **וְשִׁלּוֹת כְּסִילִים** because their apparent prosperity will turn to tragedy.

(לג) וְשָׁמַע לִי יִשְׁכֹּן בְּטַח
וְשָׁאֲגוּ מִפֶּחַד רָעָה : פ

But whoever listens to me — וְשָׁמַע לִי to follow the path of the Torah and accept its wisdom **will live in confident serenity — יִשְׁכֹּן בְּטַח** **undisturbed by the paralyzing fear of** impending

tragedy – וְשֹׂאֵן מִפֶּחַד רָעָה , even when he sees disaster striking elsewhere in the world.

Sources

The primary sources used in the interpretation of the verses of this segment are listed below.

- א' כ' – אבן עזרא, רבינו יונה, מצודות, רש"ה
 א' כא – רש"י, המאירי, מצודות, רש"ה, מלבי"ם,
 א' כב – רבינו יונה, רלב"ג, הגר"א, מלבי"ם
 א' כג – אבן עזרא, המאירי, הגר"א
 א' כד – רש"י, מצודות, הגר"א, מלבי"ם
 א' כה – רש"י, אבן יחיאל, הגר"א
 א' כו – מצודות, רש"ה
 א' כז – רש"י, המאירי, מצודות, הגר"א, מלבי"ם
 א' כח – רש"י, אבן יחיאל, מלבי"ם
 א' כט – המאירי, הגר"א, מלבי"ם
 א' ל – המאירי, הגר"א
 א' לא – המאירי, הגר"א
 א' לב – רש"י, רלב"ג, הגר"א
 א' לג – מצודות, הגר"א