Mishlei 01-01

Introduction (1:1-6)

Key Concepts

In this first segment of Mishlei, Shlomo Hamelech (King Solomon) introduces himself as the author. He explains what it is meant to accomplish and what techniques he will use. The basic building block is the allegory (mashal), which is used to present a principle of moral and spiritual guidance so that the book may be thought of as a series of allegories (Mishlei).

However, as used here the term "mashal" is not limited to a narrative allegory, such as a parable. It also includes the use of metaphors and images to make abstract concepts come alive. In many cases, the principles of righteous moral behavior are stated bluntly without the embellishment of allegory and for this reason, the more inclusive term "Proverbs" is sometimes used in referring to this book.

Exploring Mishlei

PART 1. AUTHORSHIP AND THEME OF THE BOOK. Shlomo Hamelech identifies himself as the author of the book and introduces the subject matter. He then describes its purpose which is to teach a person how to make good choices in life. This requires knowledge and the enlightened moral discipline necessary to apply that knowledge. The book also instructs the student in how to acquire an insight into three essential uses of personal judgment in social relationships: righteousness (*tzedek*), justice (*mishpat*), and fairness (*meisharim*).

(א) מִשְׁלֵי שְׁלֹמֹה בֶן דָּוִד מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל: (ב) לָדַעַת חָכְמָה וּמוּסָר לְהָבִין אִמְרֵי בִינָה:
(ג) לָקַחַת מוּסַר הַשְׂכֵּל צֶדֶק וּמִשְׁפָּט וּמֵישָׁרִים:

(1) The allegories of Shlomo son of David, King of Yisrael. (2) To know wisdom and mussar (moral discipline), to comprehend abstract ideas. (3) To acquire enlightened mussar, righteousness, justice, and fairness.

PART 2. AUDIENCE. The author completes the introduction by describing for whom the book was intended. Included are naive people and young people who have not had the benefit of learning from experience, as well as learned people who want to

acquire analytical tools to add to their store of learning.

(ד) לָתֵת לִפְתָאיִם עָרְמָה לְנַעַר דַּעַת וּמְזִמָּה׃ (ה) יִשְׁמַע חָכָם וְיוֹסֶף לֶקַח וְנָבוֹן תַּחְבֻּלוֹת יִקְנֶה׃ (ו) לְהָבִין מָשָׁל וּמְלִיצָה דִּבְרֵי חֲכָמִים וְחִידֹתָם׃

(4) To provide cleverness to naive people; knowledge and thoughtfulness to the young. (5) Let the learned man listen and add to his store of learning; and let the deep thinker acquire analytical tools. (6) To understand allegory and interpretation, teachings of the wise and their enigmas.

Additional Thoughts

As explained by Rav Shamshon Rafael Hirsch, the underlying root of the word "*mashal*" is the same as that of "ruler" (*moshel*). It is something that determines the role or function of other entities. The "*mashal*" points to the underlying message (*nimshel*) just as the "*moshel*" points to the group of people over which he rules.

The book relies heavily upon narrative allegories and metaphors. These are essential tools to support a person's grasp of intellectual concepts by relating them to the instinctive knowledge that he has gained through experience.Thus, the intellect can acquire an understanding of the unknown by clothing it in images of the known.

Note to the Reader

In contrast to Tehillim, where each *mizmor* (*perek*) has a unique theme, many of which are connected, Mishlei is organized as a series of relatively independent messages or "*meshalim*." Therefore this elucidation of Mishlei is presented here as a series of independent segments, each reflecting a specific theme or moral lesson. Each segment will be numbered by the perek in which it appears and its location within the *perek*.

Learning Mishlei

PART 1. AUTHORSHIP AND PURPOSE OF THE BOOK.

(א) מִשְׁלֵי שְׁלֹמֹה בֶן דָּוִד מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל׃

This book contains the instructive **allegories** — מִשְׁלֵי and other wise teachings **of Shlomo** — שְׁלֹמֹה, who was granted profound wisdom by Hashem. Shlomo was **the**

son of King David — בֶּן דָּוִד, who taught him the wisdom he had learned in a life of many challenges. Like his father, Shlomo was **King of Yisrael** — מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל and acquired additional wisdom through interaction with his people.

(ב) לָדַעַת חָכְמָה

The purpose of this book is for the student who studies it **to** clearly **know** — לָדַעַת the principles of **wisdom** (*chochmah*) — חָכְמָה. Wisdom is the knowledge that guides a person in making good choices in life. Because such wisdom often runs counter to the person's instinctive nature, it cannot be derived from human experience but must be acquired through Divinely inspired teachings.

וּמוּסָר

The teachings of this book **also** guide the student in the **moral discipline** (*mussar*) — וּמוּסָר   to apply the wisdom he has learned. He needs this discipline to overcome the inclination to make unwise choices in life. At its root the basis of moral discipline is the fear of Hashem.

לְהָבִין אִמְרֵי בִינָה:

To facilitate these objectives, the teachings of this book instruct the student in how **to** analyze and **comprehend** — לְהָבִין   **abstract ideas** — אִמְרֵי בִינָה. The tool for achieving this understanding is the human intellect, which has the capacity to absorb received truths and gain new insight into them by derivings truths from one another.

(ג) לָקַחַת מוּסַר הַשְׂכֵּל

This book also instructs the student in how **to acquire** — לָקַחַת   a higher form of **moral discipline** — מוּסַר   that is **enlightened** — הַשְׂכֵּל   by reverence for the greatness of Hashem, as opposed to the fear of punishment.

צֶדֶק וּמִשְׁפָּט וּמֵישָׁרִים:

This book also instructs the student in how to acquire an insight into three essential uses of personal judgment in social relationships and to know when to apply each one, depending on the circumstance:

(1) **righteousness** — צֶדֶק, going beyond the letter of the law.

(2) **justice** — וּמִשְׁפָּט, adhering to the exact requirement of the law.

(3) **fairness** — וּמֵישָׁרִים, acting in an equitable and balanced manner even when

the law is not specific.

PART 2. AUDIENCE.

<div align="center">

(ד) לָתֵת לִפְתָאיִם עָרְמָה
</div>

This book can serve **to provide naive people** — **לָתֵת לִפְתָאיִם** with cleverness — **עָרְמָה**. People who have not worked on developing their moral strength may easily swayed by the *yetzer hara* (evil inclination). This book will teach them what to look for and how to resist it.

<div align="center">

לְנַעַר דַּעַת וּמְזִמָּה׃
</div>

Furthermore, this book can provide the inexperienced **youth** — **לְנַעַר** with **knowledge** — **דַּעַת** of the temptations that exist in the world **and the discretion** — **וּמְזִמָּה** to guard against them.

<div align="center">

(ה) יִשְׁמַע חָכָם
וְיוֹסֶף לֶקַח
</div>

The **learned man will** also be able **listen to** — **יִשְׁמַע חָכָם** the teachings of this book **and add** to his store of **learning** — **וְיוֹסֶף לֶקַח** by exploring and interpreting the ideas presented here.

<div align="center">

וְנָבוֹן תַּחְבֻּלוֹת יִקְנֶה׃
</div>

And the deep thinker will acquire analytical tools — **וְנָבוֹן תַּחְבֻּלוֹת יִקְנֶה** by which he can discover insights that would otherwise have escaped him.

<div align="center">

(ו) לְהָבִין מָשָׁל וּמְלִיצָה
דִּבְרֵי חֲכָמִים וְחִידֹתָם׃
</div>

Working with this book the student will learn to understand — **לְהָבִין** four basic forms in which the subject matter of *chochmah* and *mussar* are presented, in this book and elsewhere:

(1) **allegory** — **מָשָׁל**, parables, images, and metaphors as used throughout the *Tanach* (Scriptures), but especially in this book

(2) **interpretation** — **וּמְלִיצָה**, of the allegory. The interpretion may be clearly implied by the context, by tradition, or through inspired analysis by Torah scholars. An allegory may have multiple levels of interpretation, each of which is valid.

(3) **teachings of the wise** — **דִּבְרֵי חֲכָמִים**, *chochmah* and *mussar* presented in

the Oral Torah — תּוֹרָה שֶׁבְּעַל פֶּה , as an extension and enhancement of the Written Torah — תּוֹרָה שֶׁבִּכְתַב .

(4) **and their enigmas** — וְחִידֹתָם, additional teachings of the wise that are stated in enigmatic form, but which can be elucidated through the allegories like those in this book.

Sources

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

ד – רש״י, מצודות, מלבי״ם	א – רש״י, אבן עזרא, רבינו יונה, רבינו בחיי,
ה – מצודות, המאירי	מצודות, מלבי״ם
ו – אבן עזרא, הגר״א, מלבי״ם, רשר״ה	ב – רש״י, מצודות, מלבי״ם
	ג – אבן עזרא, רבינו יונה, מלבי״ם,