

Mishlei 02-03**The Gift of Wisdom (2:7 – 2:22)****Key Concepts**

The Torah is Hashem's gift of wisdom to the Jewish people, but it is a conditional gift. The condition is that those who have received the gift commit themselves to studying it and acting in accordance with its directives. In this segment Mishlei speaks of the great benefits which the study of wisdom brings.

Exploring Mishlei

PART 1. THE PROMISE OF WISDOM. Hashem promises the recipients of His gift that the Torah will remain eternal. Their efforts will not be wasted and the Torah will be there for them in the World to Come. He will also repay their devotion to the Torah by shielding them from errors of interpretation and from inadvertent failure to perform the *mitzvos* correctly.

(ז) יִצְפֹּן לַיֹּשְׁרִים תּוֹשֵׁיָהּ מִגֶּן לְהִלְכֵי תֵם: (ח) לְנֹצֵר אֶרְחוֹת מִשְׁפָּט וְדָרֶךְ חֲסִידָיו
יִשְׁמֹר:

(1) Hashem stores away the eternal Torah for the upright. He is a shield to those who walk in moral purity. (8) [He acts] to safeguard the paths of justice and He protects the way of His devout ones.

PART 2. THE SWEETNESS OF WISDOM. The Torah offers man a resource of great sweetness. If he makes the effort to gain its wisdom, he will be able to understand how he should relate to other human beings, balancing their concerns and interests against his own.

Once he has internalized this knowledge, it will give him great satisfaction. He will find that the knowledge of Torah is satisfying in itself. He will also find that it enables him to use his own intelligence to choose the proper course of action in every situation. (Of course, if he is not yet at the level where he can make this judgment on his own, he should turn for guidance to one who has acquired this wisdom.)

(ט) אִז תִּבִּין צְדָק וּמִשְׁפָּט וּמִיִּשְׁרִים כָּל מַעֲגַל טוֹב: (י) כִּי תִבּוֹא חֲכָמָה בְּלִבְךָ וְיָדַעַת לִנְפִשְׁךָ יִנְעָם:

(9) *[If you acquire wisdom] then you will understand, righteousness, justice and fairness. You [will know] every good course. (11) When wisdom enters your heart, [you will find that] wisdom becomes sweet to your soul*

PART 3. THE POWER OF WISDOM. The wisdom of the Torah offers the individual a powerful tool, which is essential in his travel through life. That tool is the ability to evaluate alternative courses of action and make the right moral choice in each situation that he encounters. In every step of his way he will find that he needs to reject bad choices that may be put into his path by his instinctive wants and desires. Such choices may also originate from the bad influences of individuals and societies around him.

(יא) מְזִמָּה תִּשְׁמֹר עָלֶיךָ תִּבּוֹנָה תִּנְצְרֶכָה: (יב) לְהַצִּילְךָ מִדָּרֶךְ רָע מֵאִישׁ מִדָּבָר תִּהְפְּכֹת: (יג) הַעֲזִיבִים אַרְחוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל לְלֶכֶת בְּדַרְכֵי חַשָּׁד: (יד) הַשְּׂמַחִים לַעֲשׂוֹת רָע יִגִּילוּ בְּתִהְפְּכֹת רָע: (טו) אֲשֶׁר אַרְחֲתִיהֶם עֲקָשִׁים וְנִלְוִים בְּמַעֲגָלוֹתָם:

(11) *The discretion [that you acquire through the wisdom of the Torah] will protect you. Conceptual understanding will safeguard you. (12) [Wisdom will serve] to rescue you from the way of evil, from the man who speaks perversions. (13) [To save you from those] who forsake the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness, (14) [from those] who are glad to practice evil. They rejoice in reversals [into] evil. (15) [They are men] whose paths are perverted [and lead you] astray along their courses.*

Navigating Mishlei. Earlier in Segment 01-01 (Introduction), Mishlei spoke of the importance of discretion (*mezimah*) in helping the inexperienced youth deal with the temptations that exist in the world (1:4). In segment 02-02 (The Structure of Wisdom), Mishlei describes the value of conceptual understanding (*tevunah*) as a tool for the use and teaching of knowledge. It enables you to internalize what you have heard by reviewing it and thinking it through. This results in new wisdom and understanding.

PART 4. THE STRANGE WOMAN. Mishlei emphasizes the great power of Torah wisdom in enabling a person to overcome the negative influences of false ideologies and corrupting cultures. He illustrates the insidious attraction of such influences by comparing them to the seductive power of an immoral woman who has betrayed her husband and now seeks to entrap others into the perverted lifestyle into which

she has fallen.

Mishlei describes this seductress as being strange and alien because people are attracted by experiences that are unfamiliar. When something is unknown it seems to offer unlimited possibilities and becomes easy prey to the imagination.

The unknown seems exciting and therefore preferable to familiar experiences. Furthermore, the intense, but momentary pleasures of immorality become addictive. Once the victim has tasted the forbidden fruit he is strongly driven to repeat the experience, even after he comes to realize how destructive it is. But then it is too late.

(טז) לְהַצִּילֶךָ מֵאִשָּׁה זָרָה מִנְכַרְיָה אֲמַרְיָה הַחֲלִיקָה: (יז) הֶעֱזֹבַת אֶלּוֹף נְעוּרֶיהָ וְאֵת בְּרִית אֱלֹקֶיהָ שָׁכַחָה: (יח) כִּי שָׁחָה אֶל מְוֹת בֵּיתָהּ וְאֶל רְפָאִים מֵעִגְלֹתֶיהָ: (יט) כָּל בְּאִיָּה לֹא יִשׁוּבוּן וְלֹא יִשְׁיִגּוּ אַרְחוֹת חַיִּים:

(16) [Wisdom will serve] to save you from a strange woman, from a smooth-talking alien woman, (17) who abandons the husband of her youth, and she forgets the covenant with her G-d. (18) For her house slopes down toward death. Her ways are toward the lifeless. (19) All who go to her house do not return. They never achieve the ways of life.

Navigating Mishlei. In subsequent segments of Mishlei we will again encounter the powerful metaphor of the strange woman as a symbol for temptation. For example, see segment 05-04 (Curiosity).

PART 5. THE WAY OF THE GOOD. Mishlei takes great pains to emphasize the importance of wisdom. Wisdom can guide a person in finding the right way through life. It can give a person the insight he needs to anticipate the tragic end that bad choices can lead to. If that powerful opportunity is neglected, disaster will be likely to ensue.

(כ) לְמַעַן תֵּלֵךְ בְּדַרְךְ טוֹבִים וְאַרְחוֹת צְדִיקִים תִּשְׁמֹר: (כא) כִּי יִשְׁרִים יִשְׁכְּנוּ אַרְץ וְיִתְמִימִים יִוָּתְרוּ בָּהּ: (כב) וְרָשָׁעִים מֵאַרְץ יִכְרְתוּ וּבֹגְדִים יִסָּחוּ מִמֶּנָּה:

(20) [Acquire wisdom] so that you may walk in the way of the good and keep to the paths of the righteous. (21) For the upright will dwell securely in the land and those who are perfected will remain in it. (22) But the evildoers will be severed from the land and the betrayers will be uprooted from it.

Learning Mishlei

PART 1. THE GIFT OF WISDOM.

(ז) יִצְפֹּן לַיֹּשְׁרִים תּוֹשֵׁיָהּ

Those who conscientiously devote themselves to learning Torah can be assured that their efforts will not be wasted. The Torah is eternal and their portion in it is assured by Hashem in the World to Come. **He stores away** — יִצְפֹּן and preserves **the eternal Torah** — תּוֹשֵׁיָהּ **for the upright** — לַיֹּשְׁרִים who study it.

מִגֵּן לְהִלְכֵי תָם:

And in This World, He is **a shield** — מִגֵּן **to** protect from inadvertent sin **those who** are committed to the *mitzvos* of the Torah and **walk in moral purity** — לְהִלְכֵי תָם.

(ח) לִנְצֹר אַרְחוֹת מְשֻׁפֵּט

Since Hashem preserves the Torah for the upright, they are assured of being able **to safeguard** even the most detailed of **the paths of justice** — לִנְצֹר אַרְחוֹת **מְשֻׁפֵּט** and not to fall prey to erroneous interpretations.

וְדַרְךְ חֲסִידָיו יִשְׁמֹר:

And since He acts as their shield, **He protects the** entire **way** of life **of His devout ones** — וְדַרְךְ חֲסִידָיו יִשְׁמֹר so that they do not become diverted into mistaken patterns of behavior.

PART 2. THE SWEETNESS OF WISDOM.

(ט) אִז תִּבִּין צְדָק וּמִשְׁפָּט וּמִיִּשְׁרָיִם

If you succeed in acquiring wisdom (segment 02-01), **then you will understand** — אִז תִּבִּין the three essential uses of personal judgment in social relationships (segment 01-01) and you will know when to apply each one, depending on the circumstance:

- (1) **righteousness** — צְדָק, going beyond the letter of the law.
- (2) **justice** — וּמִשְׁפָּט, adhering to the exact requirement of the law.
- (3) **fairness** — וּמִיִּשְׁרָיִם, acting in an equitable and balanced manner even when the law is not specific. Such behavior generally calls for finding the right balance

between generosity and stinginess. Stinginess is not a good trait but generosity can also be harmful if carried to an extreme.

כָּל מַעְגַּל טוֹב:

You will even get to know **every good course** — כָּל מַעְגַּל טוֹב, when fairness requires you to behave in a manner that veers from the emphasis on the “good” trait. Cruelty and pride are negative qualities in themselves; but are occasionally necessary, for instance, in dealing with wicked people.

(י) כִּי תָבוֹא חָכְמָה בְּלִבְךָ

You will achieve all this **when wisdom enters your heart** — כִּי תָבוֹא חָכְמָה בְּלִבְךָ. That will happen when you can use your intellect to gain understanding and derive Torah truths from one another.

וְדַעַת לִנְפְשְׁךָ יִנְעַם:

Then, because of the pleasure you will have from the Torah knowledge that you have absorbed and the insights you have gained, you will find that **wisdom becomes sweet to your soul** — וְדַעַת לִנְפְשְׁךָ יִנְעַם.

PART 3. THE POWER OF WISDOM.

(יא) מְזִמָּה תִשְׁמֹר עֲלֶיךָ

Those who acquire the wisdom of the Torah are granted a special benefit, which is the power of **discretion** — מְזִמָּה, which is the ability to evaluate the available courses of action and anticipate outcomes. Whenever you are faced with a decision, this power **will protect you** — תִשְׁמֹר עֲלֶיךָ from foolish behavior by helping you analyze your motivations.

תְּבוּנָה תִנְצְרֶכָה:

When you are faced with the challenge of distinguishing truth from falsehood, the power of **conceptual understanding** — תְּבוּנָה that comes with the wisdom of the Torah **will safeguard you** — תִנְצְרֶכָה by enabling you to recognize false ideologies and the misleading talk of the wicked.

(יב) לְהַצִּילְךָ מִדֶּרֶךְ רָע

מֵאִישׁ מְדַבֵּר תְּהַפְכֹת:

If you occupy your time acquiring wisdom, you will diminish the effect of any potential bad influence. The wisdom that you gain will serve **to rescue you from**

the way of evil tendencies — **לְהַצִּילְךָ מִדֶּרֶךְ רָע** that are within you. It will also save you **from the man who speaks perversions** — **מֵאִישׁ מְדַבֵּר תְּהַפְכוֹת**, distorting the truth of the Torah to draw you away from your *emunah*.

(יג) הַעֲזֹבִים אֲרָחוֹת יֵשֶׁר
לְלַכֵּת בְּדַרְכֵי חֲשָׁד:

You will then be saved from the influence of those men **who forsake the** narrow, demanding **paths of uprightness** — **הַעֲזֹבִים אֲרָחוֹת יֵשֶׁר** **to walk in the** relaxed, easy-going **ways of moral darkness** — **לְלַכֵּת בְּדַרְכֵי חֲשָׁד**. Their main concern is to enjoy themselves and so they choose a way of life that gives them the freedom to do as they please, but they fail to appreciate that there is no light of wisdom on that dark road. The pleasures that seemed at first to offer glitz and sparkle are an illusion, and they end up in darkness.

(יד) הַשְּׂמֵחִים לַעֲשׂוֹת רָע

Don't be fooled by their apparent sincerity and persuasiveness. These are men **who are glad to practice evil** — **הַשְּׂמֵחִים לַעֲשׂוֹת רָע** and they are happy to get others to join them. They readily follow their animal instincts without any anxiety about the punishment that is in store for them.

יִגִּילוּ בְּתַהֲפֻכוֹת רָע:

Such men get pleasure by destroying what others have built. **They** especially **rejoice** — **יִגִּילוּ** **in** promoting spiritual **reversals** — **בְּתַהֲפֻכוֹת**, steering good people into **evil** paths — **רָע**.

(טו) אֲשֶׁר אֲרָחוֹתֵיהֶם עֶקְשִׁים
וְנִלְוִזִים בְּמַעְגְלוֹתָם:

Don't be misled by men **whose paths** — **אֲשֶׁר אֲרָחוֹתֵיהֶם** appear straight but lead to **perverted** — **עֶקְשִׁים** destinations. **And** stay away from those **who will** lead you completely **astray along their devious courses** — **וְנִלְוִזִים בְּמַעְגְלוֹתָם**, which appear at first to be only minor detours.

PART 4. THE STRANGE WOMAN.

(טז) לְהִצִּילְךָ מֵאִשָּׁה זָרָה

The wisdom that you gain will also serve **to save you** — **לְהִצִּילְךָ from** being attracted by false ideologies and corrupt cultures, which are like **a strange woman** — **מֵאִשָּׁה זָרָה** who has become estranged from her husband. She has suppressed her own conscience and now gets gratification by drawing you to the sin of adultery.

מִנְכַרְיָה אֲמַרְיָה הַחֲלִיקָה:

Being saved from such ideologies and cultures is like being saved **from a smooth-talking alien woman** — **מִנְכַרְיָה אֲמַרְיָה הַחֲלִיקָה** who has become alienated from her duties. She traps you into sin with false endearments and misleading promises.

(יז) הֶעֱזַבְתְּ אֱלוֹף נְעוּרֶיךָ

וְאֶת בְּרִית אֱלֹקֶיךָ שָׁכַחָה:

Avoid that woman **who abandons the husband of her youth** — **הֶעֱזַבְתְּ אֱלוֹף נְעוּרֶיךָ**. She has betrayed his trust and his love for her. **And she** consciously **forgets the covenant** she has made **with her G-d** — **וְאֶת בְּרִית אֱלֹקֶיךָ שָׁכַחָה**. She readily violates His commandment against adultery.

(יח) כִּי שָׁחָה אֶל מוֹת בֵּיתָהּ

Such a woman will bring you nothing but grief, **for** — **כִּי** anyone that enters **her house** — **בֵּיתָהּ** will find that it is not the solid place it appears to be. It **slopes** — **שָׁחָה** imperceptibly down **toward death** — **אֶל מוֹת**.

וְאֶל רַפָּאִים מֵעִגְלֹתֶיהָ:

The murderous passions which she arouses through her betrayals can lead to terrible violence. Thus, **her ways** — **מֵעִגְלֹתֶיהָ** which seem at first to be oriented to pleasure, **are** actually directed **towards the** place of the **lifeless** — **וְאֶל רַפָּאִים** —

Gehinnom.

(יט) כָּל בְּאֵיהָ לֹא יִשׁוּבוּן

All who go to her house — כָּל בְּאֵיהָ are so affected by their corrupting experience that they **do not return** — לֹא יִשׁוּבוּן unscathed, even when they make a serious attempt to restart their lives.

וְלֹא יִשְׁיִגּוּ אַרְחוֹת חַיִּים:

And after vainly following roads that promise gratification **they** are doomed to **never achieve the ways of** a happy life — וְלֹא יִשְׁיִגּוּ אַרְחוֹת חַיִּים.

PART 5. THE WAY OF THE GOOD.

(כ) לְמַעַן תֵּלֵךְ בְּדַרְךְ טוֹבִים

The wisdom of the Torah will keep you from the way of evil **so that you may walk in the way of the** many **good** people — לְמַעַן תֵּלֵךְ בְּדַרְךְ טוֹבִים, who are kind to others and considerate of them.

וְאַרְחוֹת צְדִיקִים תִּשְׁמֹר:

And by adhering to the Torah, you will merit to **keep to the paths of the righteous** — וְאַרְחוֹת צְדִיקִים תִּשְׁמֹר, who give of their own funds to help others in difficult straits.

(כא) כִּי יִשְׁרִים יִשְׁכְּנוּ אֶרֶץ

It will be a great blessing to you to be counted among the upright, who instinctively follow the way of wisdom. **For the upright will dwell** securely **in the land** — כִּי יִשְׁרִים יִשְׁכְּנוּ אֶרֶץ.

וּתְמִימִים יִנְתְּרוּ בָהּ:

But even greater than than the naturally upright are those who work on themselves to perfect their character and hold to the way of wisdom despite changing circumstances. **And** so, **those who are perfected** — וּתְמִימִים in character, having achieved wisdom through conscious effort and commitment, **will** always **remain in** the land — יִנְתְּרוּ בָהּ, even when others are severed as the result of giving in to unexpected temptation.

(כב) וְרָשָׁעִים מֵאֶרֶץ יִכְרְתוּ
וּבֹגְדִים יִסְחוּ מִמֶּנָּה:

But the evildoers who reject the Torah **will be severed from the land** — וְרָשָׁעִים מֵאֶרֶץ יִכְרְתוּ until they repent, **and the betrayers** who reject the basic values of wisdom that are common to humanity **will be permanently uprooted from it** — וּבֹגְדִים יִסְחוּ מִמֶּנָּה.

Sources

The primary sources used in the interpretation of the verses of this segment are listed below. In this segment we draw on two *meforshim* (commentaries) unique to Mishlei. One is *Chanoch LeNaar*, authored by R' Shmuel Shaul Serero, who lived in Fez, Morocco in the 16th century. The other is *Shevet MeYehudah*, authored by R' Pinchas MiPolotsk, a *talmid* of the Vilna Gaon.

- | | |
|--|---|
| טו - רש"י, המאירי, מצודות, שבט מיהודה, מלבי"ם | ז - המאירי, אבן יחיאל, מצודות, הגר"א |
| טז - רש"י, המאירי, חנוך לנער, מצודות, שבט מיהודה, מלבי"ם | ח - רש"י, המאירי, הגר"א, מלבי"ם |
| יז - אבן עזרא, המאירי, אבן יחיאל, חנוך לנער | ט - רבינו יונה, המאירי, חנוך לנער, מלבי"ם |
| יח - רש"י, המאירי, אבן יחיאל, חנוך לנער, מצודות | י - המאירי, חנוך לנער, הגר"א |
| יט - רש"י, המאירי, חנוך לנער, הגר"א, מלבי"ם | יא - רש"י, אבן עזרא, אבן יחיאל, מלבי"ם |
| כ - רש"י, חנוך לנער, הגר"א, מלבי"ם | יב - רש"י, מלבי"ם |
| כא - המאירי, מצודות, מלבי"ם | יג - המאירי, הגר"א, שבט מיהודה, מלבי"ם |
| כב - המאירי, אבן יחיאל | יד - רלב"ג, חנוך לנער, מצודות, שבט מיהודה, מלבי"ם |

© COPYRIGHT NOTICE

All rights to this document are reserved by the author. For further information contact Isaac Kirzner at isaac@kirzner.com