

Mishlei 04-01**Wisdom and Tradition
(4:1- 4)****Key Concepts**

All wisdom originates with the Creator, our universal Father. He gave wisdom as a Divine gift to man and so began the tradition of wisdom being passed down from generation to generation, from father to son and from teacher to *talmid*. In the sefer Mishlei, Shlomo *HaMelech* assumes an active role in this tradition and so he frequently addresses the reader as "my child" or "my son."

Exploring Mishlei

In this segment Mishlei calls upon the next generation of "children" to pay careful attention to his words of wisdom and to appreciate them. He emphasizes that although wisdom comes to each generation as a gift, its precious value should not be underestimated.

Mishlei then reminds his readers that he was also once a child and that he benefited greatly by the wisdom lovingly taught to him in his younger years. Since he was destined to be a king and was the only son of a beloved mother, great care was taken in assuring that the young Shlomo would receive true wisdom and especially the moral discipline (*mussar*) that would qualify him to be an honorable man and wise ruler of the Jewish nation during a time of its greatest glory.

Mishlei assures his readers that he is about to impart to them the same wisdom that was granted to him. He encourages them to abide faithfully to the demands of that wisdom and assures them that they will be rewarded with a meaningful and worthy life.

(א) שְׁמַעוּ בָנִים מוֹסֵר אָבִי וְהִקְשִׁיבוּ לְדַעַת בִּינָה: (ב) כִּי לָקַח טוֹב נָתַתִּי לָכֶם תּוֹרָתִי
אֶל תַּעֲזֹבוּ: (ג) כִּי בֶן הָיִיתִי לְאָבִי רַךְ וְיָחִיד לִפְנֵי אֲמִי: (ד) וַיְרַנֵּי וַיֹּאמֶר לִי יִתְמָךְ
דְּבָרֵי לִבִּי שְׁמֹר מִצְוֹתַי וְחַיֵּה:

(1) Children, listen to the mussar of [Hashem, our] Father. Pay close attention to acquiring understanding [of middos], (2) for I have given to you a good possession. Don't neglect my teaching. (3) For I was a favored son

to my father, a tender [lad, an] only son [to him when he was] in the presence of my mother. (4) He taught me and he said to me, "Let my words brace your heart. Observe my instructions and you will live."

Learning Mishlei

(א) שְׁמָעוּ בָּנִים מוֹסֵר אָב
וְהִקְשִׁיבוּ לְדַעַת בִּינָה:

Children, listen — שְׁמָעוּ בָּנִים to me and take to heart **the mussar of Hashem**, our universal **Father** — מוֹסֵר אָב that I am teaching you. **Pay close attention** — וְהִקְשִׁיבוּ to it because by learning the moral discipline of *mussar* you will **acquire** an in-depth **understanding** — לְדַעַת בִּינָה of *middos*.

(ב) כִּי לֶקַח טוֹב נָתַתִּי לָכֶם
תּוֹרַתִי אֶל תַּעֲזֹבוּ:

For it is a **good** and precious **possession** — כִּי לֶקַח טוֹב, the wisdom that **I have given to you** — נָתַתִּי לָכֶם in this *sefer*. You are receiving it as a gift but you would have had to pay a very high price if you had to purchase it. Therefore, **do not neglect my teaching** — תּוֹרַתִי אֶל תַּעֲזֹבוּ as though it were something cheap.

(ג) כִּי בֶן הָיִיתִי לְאָבִי
רַךְ וַיַּחֲדֵד לִפְנֵי אִמִּי:

And do not reject my *mussar*, thinking that you don't need to be told what to do. Look at my example, **for** — כִּי I was firmly disciplined from my earliest youth even though **I was a favored son to my father** — בֶּן הָיִיתִי לְאָבִי. He expected much from me and demanded it because I was the son — בֶּן destined to be builder — בּוֹנֵה of the Bais HaMikdash. But his discipline was not unkind. I was a **tender** — רַךְ lad **and** he loved my mother deeply. Because I was her one son my father thought of me as if I was his **only son** — וַיַּחֲדֵד when he was **in the presence of my mother** — לִפְנֵי אִמִּי.

(ד) וַיִּרְנֵי וַיֹּאמֶר לִי
יִתְמָךְ דְּבָרִי לְבָדָךְ
שְׁמֹר מִצְוֹתַי וְחַיָּה:

He taught me — וִירַנִי words of great wisdom and, because he loved me, you can be sure that what he taught wisdom was for my benefit. **And** therefore, I confidently pass it on to you: **he said to me** — וַיֹּאמֶר לִי, “**Let my words brace your heart** — יִתְמַדְךָ דְּבַרֵי לִבְךָ to enable you to resist your base instincts. **Observe my instructions** — שְׁמֹר מִצְוֹתַי of proper moral and ethical behavior that I pass on to you **and** you will **live** — וַחַיֶּה a meaningful and rewarding life.”

Sources

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

- א - רש"י, רבינו יונה, המאירי, הגר"א
ב - רבינו יונה, המאירי, רלב"ג, חנוך לנער
ג - המאירי, חנוך לנער, מלבי"ם
ד - רש"י, מצודות, הגר"א, שבט מיהודה, מלבי"ם

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