

Mishlei 04-20**Staying On Course**

[Pesukim 4:20 thru 4:27]

Key Concepts

Continuing his discussion of choosing our road through life, Mishlei now teaches us that having chosen the right road we must be continually alert to make sure we are not getting side-tracked.

This watchful vigilance is also referred to as “*zehirus*.” It involves conscientious attention at all times to what we are doing and why we are doing it. Mishlei speaks in terms of four primary organs with which we encounter the world: the heart, the mouth, the eyes, and the feet.

Exploring Mishlei

ATTENTIVENESS TO THE TORAH. Mishlei begins this segment by admonishing us to be attentive to the teachings of the Torah not only for their own sake but as they are reflected in everything we are doing throughout the day. The Torah cannot be relegated to an abstract study for it is the very source of our life and our existence.

(כ) בְּנֵי לְדַבְרֵי הַקְּשִׁיבָה לְאִמְרֵי הַט אֲזַנְךָ:

(כא) אֵל יִלְיֹזוּ מְעִינֶיךָ שְׁמַרְם בְּתוֹךְ לִבְבְּךָ:

(כב) כִּי חַיִּים הֵם לְמַצְאֵיהֶם וְלִכְל בְּשָׂרוֹ מְרַפָּא:

(20) My son, be attentive to my words. Incline your ear to my teachings.

(21) Don't let them be diverted from your eyes. Guard them within your heart.

(22) For they are life to one who finds them and they are a healing for all his flesh.

ATTENTIVENESS TO THE HEART. The heart is the seat of our thoughts and our emotions. For all practical purposes it is the same as the mind. Since our heart is always active, we must be continuously on guard to ensure that it is not contaminated by sinful thoughts.

(כג) מִכָּל מִשְׁמֶר נֹצֵר לִבְךָ כִּי מִמֶּנּוּ תוֹצְאוֹת חַיִּים:

**(23) Guard your heart more than all protected valuables,
for the sources of life flow from it.**

ATTENTIVENESS TO THE MOUTH. The mouth expresses the thoughts that are in our heart. When false thoughts are allowed to form in the heart, they take shape in the mouth and cause harm to other people, as well as to ourselves. Thus, the temptation to speak destructive thoughts must be continuously monitored and restrained.

(כד) הִסֵּר מִמֶּךָ עֲקָשׁוֹת פֶּה וּלְזוֹת שְׁפָתַיִם הֲרַחֵק מִמֶּךָ:

**(24) Remove from yourself the distortions of truth that may emanate
from the mouth.**

Let the falseness of the lips be far removed from yourself.

ATTENTIVENESS TO THE EYES. The eyes are not just the physical organs of sight but the eyes of the mind which look ahead to determine our next course of action throughout the day. These eyes should be carefully focused to make sure our plans and intentions are worthwhile. At the same time, our eyes must be closed to options and images that can mislead us.

(כה) עֵינֶיךָ לִנְכַח יְבִיטוּ וְעַפְעָפִיךָ יִישְׂרוּ נִגְדָּךְ:

**(25) Let your eyes look ahead
so that your eyelids will direct your vision.**

ATTENTIVENESS TO THE FEET. The feet are our means of moving forward and thus they represent the translation of thought into action. We must be careful at all times not to rush into action, but to carefully weigh the potential impact of anything we have a mind to do.

(כו) פִּלַּס מֵעַגַל רַגְלֶךָ וְכָל דְרָכֶיךָ יִכְנוּ:

**(26) Measure the course your feet are following,
then all your ways will be firmly set.**

(כז) אַל תֵּט יָמִין וּשְׂמֹאל הִסֵּר רַגְלֶךָ מִרָע:

(27) Don't deviate right or left. Remove your feet from evil.

Mishlei concludes by comparing our course in life to a straight road, representing the truth. Through constant vigilance we should rigorously adhere to our chosen path, avoiding the slightest deviation. And whenever the false path of evil presents itself, we should quickly reject it and completely remove our feet from it.

Learning Mishlei

ATTENTIVENESS TO THE TORAH.

(כ) בְּנֵי לְדַבְרֵי הַקְּשִׁיבָה לְאִמְרֵי הַטָּ אֲזַנְדָּ:

My son — בְּנֵי,

be attentive to my words — לְדַבְרֵי הַקְּשִׁיבָה,

for they are the teachings of the Torah. That means you must work to free your attention from other concerns.

Incline your ear and listen to all that I say — לְאִמְרֵי הַטָּ אֲזַנְדָּ,

for I am giving you the essential insights and concepts of the Torah.

Be careful not to miss anything.

(כא) אַל יִלְיוּ מֵעֵינֶיךָ שְׁמַרְם בְּתוֹךְ לְבָבְךָ:

Don't let my teachings be diverted — אַל יִלְיוּ

from the attention of your mind's eyes — מֵעֵינֶיךָ

because if you are not alert to the *mitzvos*, you may easily err.

Guard my teachings within your heart — שְׁמַרְם בְּתוֹךְ לְבָבְךָ

by means of regular review, so that you can draw upon them

at all times as you go about your day-to-day affairs.

(כב) כִּי חַיִּים הֵם לְמַצְאֵיהֶם וְלִכְל בְּשָׂרוֹ מְרַפָּא:

For they are the secret of eternal life — כִּי חַיִּים הֵם

to the soul who searches until he finds them — לְמַצְאֵיהֶם.

And even in this world for all his flesh — וְלִכְל בְּשָׂרוֹ

they are a healing — מְרַפָּא.

They assure a general well-being of the entire person, not like the limited healing of physical medications, which focus on individual parts of the body.

PART 2. ATTENTIVENESS TO THE HEART.

(כג) מִכָּל מִשְׁמֶר נֹצֵר לְבָדָּ כִּי מִמֶּנּוּ תּוֹצְאוֹת חַיִּים:

More than all your protected valuables — מִכָּל מִשְׁמֶר

guard the hidden valuables of your heart — נֹצֵר לְבָדָּ

from being contaminated by sinful thoughts. Your heart is the key organ of your entire being and you should make every effort to keep it pure.

For flowing from it — כִּי מִמֶּנּוּ
are the very sources of your life — תּוֹצְאוֹת חַיִּים.

How can you utilize that noble instrument for something which destroys life?

ATTENTIVENESS TO THE MOUTH.

(כד) הָיָר מִמֶּךָ עֲקָשׁוֹת פֶּה וּלְזוֹת שְׁפָתַיִם הֲרַחֵק מִמֶּךָ:

If your heart is contaminated by sinful thoughts, they will not only affect your actions, there is a danger that twisted words will come from your mouth and harm others. So control your thoughts to **remove from yourself — הָיָר מִמֶּךָ**
distortions of the truth that may emanate from the mouth — עֲקָשׁוֹת פֶּה

And even if you form false words inside your mouth, stop them from passing through your lips so that others can hear them.

Let the falseness of the lips — וּלְזוֹת שְׁפָתַיִם
be far removed from yourself — הֲרַחֵק מִמֶּךָ.

ATTENTIVENESS TO THE EYES.

(כה) עֵינֶיךָ לִנְכַח יִבִּיטוּ וְעַפְעָפִיךָ יִישְׂרוּ נִגְדָּךָ:

Let your mind's eyes look ahead — עֵינֶיךָ לִנְכַח יִבִּיטוּ
 and focus on Your purpose in life.

If you do this, you will not allow your physical eyes to be diverted by the temptations that appear before them. Thus, your eyes will be closed to what you shouldn't see and **your eyelids will direct your vision — וְעַפְעָפִיךָ יִישְׂרוּ נִגְדָּךָ**
 straight ahead to what you should see.

ATTENTIVENESS TO THE FEET.

(כו) פֶּלֶס מֵעַגְל רַגְלֶךָ וְכָל דְרָכֶיךָ יִבְנוּ:

Don't rush into any action without thinking of its impact and meaning.

Let your mind **determine — פֶּלֶס**
the course which your feet — מֵעַגְל רַגְלֶךָ
 are following as you move into an action.

Then **all your ways will be set firm — וְכָל דְרָכֶיךָ יִבְנוּ.**

Consider carefully the benefit of every deed versus its cost — consider the fleeting pleasure that you may get from committing a sin versus its eternal cost; consider the temporary inconvenience that you may encounter when doing a *mitzvah* versus the eternal reward that it brings.

(כז) אַל תֵּט יָמִין וּשְׂמֹאל הָסֵר רַגְלְךָ מִרָע:

As you follow your course in life you will be tempted by what you see along the way. But hold to your principles and **don't deviate** from the truth — **אַל תֵּט** to the **right** or to the **left** — **יָמִין וּשְׂמֹאל**.

And when you come across something you know to be clearly wrong, **remove your feet from** that **evil** — **הָסֵר רַגְלְךָ מִרָע** so that it can no longer tempt you.