

Mishlei 04-05**Staying on Course
(4:20 - 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 practice of 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

PART 1. 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 לְאָמְרֵי הַט אֲזַנְךָ: (כא) אֵל יִלְיוּ מְעִינֶיךָ שְׁמֶרְם בְּתוֹךְ לִבְבְּךָ: (כב) כִּי חַיִּים הֵם לְמוֹצְאֵיהֶם וְלִכְל בְּשָׂרוֹ מִרְפָּא:

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

PART 2. ATTENTIVENESS TO THE HEART. The heart is the seat of our thoughts. 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.

PART 3. 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) הִסַר מִמֶּךָ עֲקָשׁוֹת פֶּה וּלְזוֹת שְׁפָתַיִם הִרְחַק 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.

PART 4. 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 לִנְחֹכַח יְבִיטוּ וְעַפְעָפִיךָ יִישְׂרוּ נִגְדָּדֶךָ:

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

PART 5. 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) פִּלְס מֵעַגְל רֵגְלֶךָ וְכָל דְרָכֶיךָ יִכְנוּ: (כז) אֶל תֵּט יָמִין וּשְׂמֹאלוֹל הִסַר רֵגְלֶךָ מִרָע:

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

PART 1. ATTENTIVENESS TO THE TORAH.

(כ) בְּנֵי לְדַבְרֵי הַקְּשִׁיבָה
לְאִמְרֵי הַט אֲזַנְךָ:

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 carefully **to all that I say** — לְאִמְרֵי הַט אֲזַנְךָ, for I am giving you the essential insights and concepts of the Torah. Be careful not to miss anything.

(כא) אַל יִלְיוּ מֵעֵינֶיךָ
שְׁמִרַם בְּתוֹךְ לִבְּךָ:

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** — שְׁמִרַם בְּתוֹךְ לִבְּךָ 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
וּלְכֹל בְּשָׂרוֹ מְרַפָּא:

For they are the secret of eternal **life** — כִּי חַיִּים הֵם to the soul of the person who continues to search until he **finds them** — לְמַצְאֵיהֶם. And even in this world they are a **healing for all his flesh** — וּלְכֹל בְּשָׂרוֹ 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) מִכֹּל מְשֻׁמָּר נֹצֵר לִבְּךָ

More **than all** your **protected** valuables — מִכֹּל מְשֻׁמָּר that you guard against external threats, **guard your heart** — נֹצֵר לִבְּךָ from internal threats — 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.

כִּי מִמֶּנּוּ תּוֹצְאוֹת חַיִּים:

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?

PART 3. ATTENTIVENESS TO THE MOUTH.

(כד) הִסֵּר מִמֶּךָ עֲקָשׁוֹת פֶּה

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 distortions** of the truth that may emanate **from the mouth** — הִסֵּר מִמֶּךָ עֲקָשׁוֹת פֶּה.

וּלְזוֹת שְׁפָתַיִם הֲרַחֵק מִמֶּךָ:

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 be far removed from yourself** — וּלְזוֹת שְׁפָתַיִם הֲרַחֵק מִמֶּךָ.

PART 4. ATTENTIVENESS TO THE EYES.

(כה) עֵינֶיךָ לִנְכַח יִבִּיטוּ

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 eyes to be diverted by the temptations that appear before them.

וְעַפְעָפִיךָ יִישְׂרוּ נִגְדֶּךָ:

Your eyes will be closed to what you shouldn't see so that **your closed eyelids will direct your vision** — וְעַפְעָפִיךָ יִישְׂרוּ נִגְדֶּךָ straight ahead to what you should see.

PART 5. ATTENTIVENESS TO THE FEET.

(כו) פִּלַּס מַעְגַּל רַגְלֶךָ

Don't rush into any action without thinking of its impact and meaning. Use your mind to **measure** — פִּלַּס and evaluate **the course** which **your feet** — מַעְגַּל רַגְלֶךָ are following as you move into an action.

וְכָל דְרָכֶיךָ יִכְנוּ:

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. If you do, then **all your ways will be set firm** — **וְכָל דְרָכֶיךָ יִפְּנוּ**.

(כז) אֶל תֵּט יָמִין וּשְׂמֹאל

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** — **אֶל תֵּט** from the truth even slightly, either to the **right** or to the **left** — **יָמִין וּשְׂמֹאל**.

הִסֵּר רַגְלְךָ מִרָע:

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

Sources

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

כד - רבינו יונה, חנוך לנער, מלבי"ם
 כה - המאירי, מצודות, מלבי"ם
 כו - רש"י, אבן עזרא
 כז - רבינו בחיי, רלב"ג, מצודות

כ - רבינו בחיי, חנוך לנער, הגר"א
 כא - רבינו יונה, רבינו בחיי, חנוך לנער,
 שבט מיהודה
 כב - רבינו יונה, רבינו בחיי, אבן יחייא, מלבי"ם
 כג - מצודות, הגר"א, שבט מיהודה

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