

Mishlei 06-06**Focused Thinking**

[Pesukim 6:6 thru 6:11]

Key Concepts

The chapter began with an example of wishful thinking. Wishful thinking is what happens when a person is too lazy to expend the energy necessary to do what needs to be done. Instead, he lets matters take their course while hoping for the best.

The lazy attitude displayed in wishful thinking is a serious problem in *avodas Hashem* because the lazy person neglects the duty of working to develop himself in Torah and *mitzvos*. He may also neglect the duty of earning a living and providing for his family.

Now in the second segment of the perek, Mishlei teaches us about focused thinking. This is the essential character trait that enables a person to overcome both mental and physical laziness. A person who practices focused thinking identifies the goals that are important to him. He then focuses his energies on achieving them.

Exploring Mishlei

THE ANT. In the first half of the segment Mishlei refers us to the lowly ant, a creature that is totally focused on its mission, which is to store food for the winter. To achieve its goal, the ant gathers grain during the spring and then dries it out during the hot summer months. The ant varies its routine as necessary depending on the prevailing conditions, with the paramount consideration being a store of grain that is large enough and dry enough to last through the fall and winter. Thus, the ant is demonstrating a focused thinking process that has been wondrously programmed into it by its Creator.

(ו) לֵךְ אֶל נִמְלָה עֹצֵל רְאֵה דְרָכֶיהָ וְחִכָּם :

(ז) אֲשֶׁר אֵין לָהּ קִצִּין שֹׁטֵר וּמִשָּׁל :

(ח) תִּכְוֶן בְּקִיץ לַחֲמָה אֲגָרָה בְּקִצִּיר מֵאֲכָלָהּ :

(6) Go to the ant, you lazy fellow. Observe its ways and you will become wise.

(7) Even though it has no overseer, enforcer, or ruler,

(8) it prepares its food in the summer. During the harvest it gathers its food.

THE SLEEPYHEAD. In the second half of the segment Mishlei turns to another metaphor, a visibly lazy fellow who is taking a siesta and doesn't want to get up even though he has finished sleeping. He pleads for a little more time in bed before getting back to work, and even if it is too late for deep sleep, he hopes to be allowed to snooze a bit, or at least to shut his eyes as he rests his head on his folded hands. Mishlei acts as a stern father, warning this fellow that idleness will lead to poverty.

So the immediate goal is to avoid poverty and that should be enough to shake up the sleepyhead. But this metaphor serves to remind the reader of Mishlei that he will fail in his mission of life if he does not carefully define his objectives and work hard to achieve them.

(ט) עַד מְתֵי עֵצֶל תִּשְׁכַּב מְתֵי תְקוּם מִשְׁנַתֶּךָ:

(י) מְעַט שְׁנוֹת מְעַט תְּנוּמוֹת מְעַט חֲבֵק יָדַיִם לְשֹׁכֵב:

(יא) וּבֹא כְמֹהֵלֶךְ רֹאשֶׁךָ וּמַחְסֵרְךָ כְּאִישׁ מִגֵּן:

(9) “How long will you lay in bed, you loafer. When will you get up from your sleep.”

(10) “I hear you say, ‘A little more sleep, a little more dozing, a little more folding of the hands to rest.’”

(11) “But your poverty will come upon you like a highwayman, and your destitution like an armed bandit.”

Learning Mishlei

THE ANT.

(ו) לֵךְ אֶל נְמֹלָה עֵצֶל רְאֵה דְרָכֶיהָ וְחִכָּם:

Go to the industrious ant — לֵךְ אֶל נְמֹלָה —
and learn from it, you lazy fellow — עֵצֶל.

Although the ant is a tiny creature,
Hashem has put much wisdom into it
to serve as a model of determination and perseverance.

The ant's behavior shows awareness of the future. It gathers grain when it is available in the fields and puts it away to have provisions at a later time, when it will be needed. This is in contrast to the idler, who consumes what he has and doesn't pay attention to the future. Not only does the ant work hard to prepare for the future, it does so with great energy and initiative. It does not let temporary difficulties prevent it from persevering to its objective.

Observe its ways and you will become wise — רְאֵה דְרָכֶיהָ וְחָכָם. You will learn focused thinking. The ant is continually focused on its goal and adjusts its actions, as necessary. For example, if the kernel of grain that it wants to move is too heavy to push, the ant does not get discouraged. Instead, it turns itself around and tries pulling the grain. It does whatever is needed to get the job done.

(ז) אֲשֶׁר אֵין לָהּ קָצִין שֹׁטֵר וּמַשְׁל:

The ant is self-motivated and adheres to complex rules of social behavior so that conflict will not hinder its work. It refrains from taking a particle of grain that belongs to another. It is able to do this by recognizing the distinct smell with which its fellow has marked the kernel that belongs to it. The ant is self-disciplined, and faithfully obeys these rules,

even though it has is no overseer — אֲשֶׁר אֵין לָהּ קָצִין,
nor is there an enforcer — שֹׁטֵר,
or ruler — וּמַשְׁל

to compel its behavior.

(ח) תִּכְנֶן בִּקְיָץ לְחֶמֶה אֲגָרָה בִּקְצִיר מֵאֲכָלָהּ :

The ant **prepares its food in the hot summer months — תִּכְנֶן בִּקְיָץ לְחֶמֶה** by drying it out so that it will last through the winter. It continues to gather food during this time even though the grain had first become available

during the spring harvest when it first gathers its food — אֲגָרָה בִּקְצִיר מֵאֲכָלָהּ.

It continues to gather more than it needs because it cannot be sure how much will survive through the coming fall and winter.

THE SLEEPYHEAD.

(ט) עַד מְתִי עָצַל תִּשְׁכַּב מְתִי תִקּוּם מִשְׁנֵתְךָ:

My son, you are like a person who has just woken up, but is too lazy to get out of bed. So I say to you,

“How long will you lay in bed, you loafer — עַד מְתִי עָצַל תִּשְׁכַּב?

You woke up some time ago. You just haven't gotten up yet

and are pretending to be asleep.

When will you get up from your sleep — מַתִּי תְקוּם מִשְׁנָתְךָ —

(י) מְעַט שְׁנוֹת מְעַט תְּנוּמוֹת מְעַט חֲבֵק יָדַיִם לְשֹׁכֵב:

“I hear you say, ‘Just let me have a **little** more sleep — מְעַט שְׁנוֹת,
and if not a full sleep let me have a **little** more **dozing** — מְעַט תְּנוּמוֹת,
and if not that, a **little folding of the hands to rest** — מְעַט חֲבֵק יָדַיִם לְשֹׁכֵב
on them as I close my eyes.”

(יא) וּבֹא כְמֹהֶלֶךְ רֹאשֶׁךָ וּמְחַסְרֶךָ כְּאִישׁ מְגִן:

“But your idleness will add up and suddenly

your poverty will come upon you like a highwayman — וּבֹא כְמֹהֶלֶךְ רֹאשֶׁךָ

and you will be defenseless for you have made no preparation.

And your destitution will be like an armed bandit — מְחַסְרֶךָ כְּאִישׁ מְגִן

against whom you have no protection.”