

## Mishlei 08-01

# The Call of Wisdom

[Pesukim 8:1 thru 8:36]

### Key Concepts

Mishlei now returns to the idealized metaphor of Wisdom that was introduced in the first chapter (Segment 01-20). Wisdom is represented as an angelic spirit that expresses Hashem's desires to every person, admonishing him to respect wisdom, acquire it, and act on it. Wisdom is essential to human existence and the voice of Wisdom is calling out to each and everyone of us, no matter where we are located.

### Exploring Mishlei

The detailed concepts of wisdom in this chapter are presented in 36 pesukim, arranged in seven parts, as outlined here. For more insight into the pesukim that make up the chapter, refer to the Learning Mishlei section below.

**Part 1. Introduction.** As in Segment 01-20, the student of Mishlei is again advised to pay attention to the spirit of Wisdom that is calling him. That spirit seems everywhere, but in truth, it is calling from within his own heart. Depending on the context, Wisdom and Torah may be considered synonymous terms.

**Part 2. The Truth of Wisdom.** The voice of Wisdom emphasizes that its words are directly relevant to the listener. We now hear that voice emphasizing the truth and authenticity of the Torah wisdom that has come down to us. We are taught that although we will be asked to exert ourselves to acquire wisdom, that effort will be very worthwhile and necessary.

**Part 3. The Value of Wisdom.** First of all, we need to realize wisdom's value as being far superior to any commodity we hunger after. The value of wisdom surpasses the most precious metals for it helps us evade the trap of the yetzer hara (evil inclination) and make the right choices in life.

**Part 4. The Motivation for Wisdom.** The primary motivation for putting in the effort to acquire wisdom is the fear of Hashem. Hashem has determined wisdom as the measure of what pleases Him. He has chosen wisdom as His way of expressing the choice we need to make between good and evil. Thus, to avoid antagonizing our

Creator, we must be guided by wisdom. Accordingly, He will help those who seek wisdom to acquire it.

**Part 5. The Rewards of Wisdom.** The system of rewarding mankind for making the right choices in life is directly related to the wisdom that we need to guide those choices. Accordingly, we are called upon to dedicate our energies to learning Torah.

**Part 6. The Origin of Wisdom.** Wisdom is more ancient than the world. It is the very purpose and design of Creation. (See Mishlei Segment 03-19.) Even before mankind was created, wisdom was a source of joy to Hashem. He then passed on His precious gift to mankind.

Without a pre-existing wisdom, the world would not have been created and we would not exist. After Hashem created wisdom, He treasured it as a parent treasures an infant child. In His goodness, Hashem then gave that treasure to mankind. It was His hope that mankind would appreciate this gift in the form of the Torah, and recreate the same kind of loving relationship with it.

**Part 7. Heeding Wisdom.** The voice of Wisdom concludes by admonishing its audience to heed the lessons of wisdom, because in wisdom there is life and whoever rejects wisdom is allying himself with death. We are asked to apply moral discipline (*mussar*) to overcome the challenges inherent in acquiring wisdom and responding to its requirements.

## Learning Mishlei

### Part 1. Introduction.

**(א) הֲלֹא חִכְמָה תִּקְרָא  
וּתְבוּנָה תִּתֵּן קוֹלָהּ :**

My son, think about what I have been saying about the call of wisdom (Segment 01-20). Surely you must hear it.

**Is not wisdom calling you — הֲלֹא חִכְמָה תִּקְרָא?**

**And is not the spirit of understanding raising its voice — וּתְבוּנָה תִּתֵּן קוֹלָהּ**

asking for you to pay attention? Wisdom appears to you openly in the light of day. It is not like the “strange woman”, the voice of temptation that approaches you at dusk (Mishlei 07-02), when your vision is clouded.

**(ב) בְּרֹאשׁ מְרוֹמִים עָלֵי דָרֶךְ  
בֵּית נְתִיבוֹת נִצְבָּה:**

You can't evade the call of wisdom, for wisdom is part of you, implanted by your Creator. Wisdom comes to you from the sublime heights of Creation and so you can see it calling from

**atop the heights along the way — בְּרֹאשׁ מְרוֹמִים עָלֵי דָרֶךְ,**  
where you surely must see it.

Each day when you have a choice to make, there at **the place where the pathways diverge — בֵּית נְתִיבוֹת,** that's where **it is standing — בֵּית נְתִיבוֹת נִצְבָּה** to advise you on the right choice.

**(ג) לֵיָד שְׁעָרִים לְפִי קָרָת מִבּוֹא פְתָחִים תִּרְנָה:**

As you gain in knowledge and understanding, you will find that wisdom follows a progression from broad concepts that are understood by all to ever more refined details and insights. This progression is symbolized by a natural movement of Wisdom's call from the outer roadways to the area

**near the gateways of the city — לֵיָד שְׁעָרִים לְפִי קָרָת,**  
where the courts are in session. And then finally **at the doorways — מִבּוֹא פְתָחִים** into the inner chambers of specialized knowledge, wisdom **cries out — תִּרְנָה:**

**(ד) אֶלֵיכֶם אִישִׁים אֶקְרָא וְקוֹלִי אֶל בְּנֵי אָדָם:**

I address myself especially **to you, O men — אֶלֵיכֶם אִישִׁים** of character and education, who have prepared yourself and focused your mind on what I have to say.

Thus, it is specifically to you that **I call — אֶקְרָא,** for I know that you will be more receptive to my message and you will persuade others to follow you.

**But my voice** also goes out **to all of mankind — וְקוֹלִי אֶל בְּנֵי אָדָם,** for each person should be prepared to absorb what I have to say to the best of his ability.

**(ה) הִבִּינוּ פְתָאִים עֲרֻמָּה וְכִסְיִלִּים הִבִּינוּ לֵב:**

You men of character and education, think you are already wise and have nothing to learn, recognize that there are matters in which you are naive, and that if you continue to pursue wisdom you will find more meaning and

truth. So let the **naive understand cleverness** — **הַבִּינוּ פְּתָאִים עֲרָמָה**  
and see through the intellectual enticements of the *yetzer hara*.

**And you knowledge-hating fools** — **וּכְסִילִים**  
learn to **understand** knowledge in **your heart** — **הַבִּינוּ לֵב**  
so that you can use it to control your passions.

### Part 2. The Truth of Wisdom.

(ו) **שְׁמְעוּ כִּי נִגִּידִים אֲדַבֵּר וּמִפֶּתַח שִׁפְתַי מִיִּשְׂרָיִם:**

**Listen,** — **שְׁמְעוּ**

**for I will speak words of great significance** — **כִּי נִגִּידִים אֲדַבֵּר,**

that you will use to determine the direction of your life;

they are not just entertaining analogies.

**And the opening of my lips** — **וּמִפֶּתַח שִׁפְתַי**

will reveal **valid concepts** — **מִיִּשְׂרָיִם,**

not merely poetic allusions and figures of speech.

(ז) **כִּי אֶמֶת יִהְיֶה חֶכְמִי וְתוֹעֵבַת שִׁפְתַי רָשָׁע:**

**For my palate will utter the truth** — **כִּי אֶמֶת יִהְיֶה חֶכְמִי**

of Hashem's Torah that you can rely on to guide you in life.

**Evil is an abomination to my lips** — **וְתוֹעֵבַת שִׁפְתַי רָשָׁע**

and so you can be sure that I will not mislead you in false directions.

(ח) **בְּצִדָק כָּל אִמְרֵי כִּי אֵין בָּהֶם נִפְתָּל וְעִקָּשׁ:**

**A righteous approach** — **בְּצִדָק**

is followed in **all the teachings of my mouth** — **כָּל אִמְרֵי כִּי**

so that topics are arranged in a logical, consistent sequence.

**There is no twisting or distortion in them** — **אֵין בָּהֶם נִפְתָּל וְעִקָּשׁ.**

You will not be misled by poor organization of the material or inconsistencies.

(ט) **כֹּלֵם נִכְחִים לְמַבִּין וַיִּשְׂרָיִם לְמַצְאֵי דַעַת:**

The fool who has not prepared himself to understand the teachings of the Torah

may misinterpret them, but **they are all correct** — **כֹּלֵם נִכְחִים**

to be relied upon **by the one who understands** — **לְמַבִּין**

the subject matter. **And they are straightforward** — **וַיִּשְׂרָיִם**

**to those who strive for knowledge** — **לְמַצְאֵי דַעַת**

as long as they make a sincere effort to understand.

Part 3. The Value of Wisdom.

**(י) קחו מוסרי ואל כסף ודעת מחרוץ נבחר :**

When you have a choice, put your efforts and your energy into acquiring my teachings rather than worldly goods or currency.

**Take my *mussar* (lessons of moral discipline) — קחו מוסרי rather than silver — ואל כסף.**

When you use silver to acquire goods you are likely to expose yourself to harm and aggravation. But *mussar* will bring you benefits in this world and the next.

Silver is only a currency, but gold is valuable for its own sake. But even gold pales in comparison to knowledge.

**Take knowledge rather than choice gold — ודעת מחרוץ נבחר —**

Gold gives pleasure only to the eyes, whereas knowledge of Hashem can pervade your entire being with spiritual joy.

**(יא) פי טובה חכמה מפנינים וכל חפצים לא ישוו בה :**

Wisdom surpasses anything you can buy for silver, even pearls.

**For wisdom is better than pearls — פי טובה חכמה מפנינים ,**

with which you might try to gain favor in the eyes of men because of their attractive glow. In contrast, wisdom earns you favor in the eyes of both men and G-d.

And even if silver can buy you physical pleasure, the value of

**all physical desires cannot compare to wisdom — וכל חפצים לא ישוו בה —**

for how can you compare something transitory with something eternal.

(See *Mishlei* 3:15, Segment 03-13.)

**(יב) אני חכמה שכנתי ערמה ודעת מזמות אמצא :**

Listen to me for **I am wisdom — אני חכמה ;**

where **I dwell** there is **cleverness — שכנתי ערמה ,**

to enable you to weigh the consequences of any

contemplated action and help you unravel the

designs of the *yetzer hara* (evil inclination) that lead you to sin.

**I enable you to find the knowledge for analysis of schemes — ודעת מזמות אמצא —**

that are designed to trap you.

Part 4. The Motivation for Wisdom.**(יג) יִרְאַת ה' שְׁנֵאת רָע**

The primary motivation that will bring you to wisdom is the **fear of Hashem** — יִרְאַת ה', which will attune you to His will, so that you can grasp the authority of His Torah and make the emotional commitment to study it.

(See *Mishlei* 1:7, Segment 01-07)

And what is the fear of Hashem in practice?

It is **the hatred of evil** — שְׁנֵאת רָע, that is, the hatred of what Hashem hates.

**גָּאָה וְגָאוֹן וְדָרְךְ רָע וּפִי תְהַפְכוֹת שְׁנֵאתִי :**

[*Wisdom declares:*] I hate **pride and haughtiness** — גָּאָה וְגָאוֹן [שְׁנֵאתִי].

Such an attitude is a direct challenge to Hashem.

(See *Mishlei* 6:17, Segment 06-16).

**I hate the way of evil** (bad *middos*) — וְדָרְךְ רָע

**and a mouth that speaks with duplicity**, provoking strife — וּפִי תְהַפְכוֹת שְׁנֵאתִי.

(See also 6:19, *ibid.*)

**(יד) לִי עֵצָה וְתוֹשֵׁיָה אֲנִי בִינָה לִי גְבוּרָה :**

Without the wisdom of the Torah you will not be able to give effective counsel to yourself or to others. [*Thus, Wisdom declares:*]

**Counsel is mine** — לִי עֵצָה

and mine is **the eternal truth of the Torah** — וְתוֹשֵׁיָה.

and **I am understanding** — אֲנִי בִינָה,

for without a solid grounding in Torah wisdom, you will not be able to develop meaning insights.

Ultimately, wisdom will help you build the strength of character to resist the *yetzer hara*. [*Thus, Wisdom declares:*]

**Strength of character is mine** — לִי גְבוּרָה.

**(טו) בִּי מְלָכִים יִמְלְכוּ וְרוֹזְנִים יַחְקְקוּ צְדָק :**

It is only **through me** that **kings will reign** properly — בִּי מְלָכִים יִמְלְכוּ

and exert political power in a way that benefits their people.

If a king does not observe the laws of the Torah, his reign will not endure. Similarly, it is only through me that

**political rulers will decree true justice** — וְרוֹזְנִים יַחְקְקוּ צְדָק.

**(טז) בִּי שָׁרִים יִשְׂרוּ וּנְדִיבִים כָּל שֹׁפְטֵי צֶדֶק:**

It is only **through me** that **officials will administer** effectively — **בִּי שָׁרִים יִשְׂרוּ**. The same for **court officers and righteous judges** — **וּנְדִיבִים כָּל שֹׁפְטֵי צֶדֶק**.

**(יז) אֲנִי אֶהְבֵּי אֶהָב וּמִשְׁחָרֵי יִמְצְאֵנִי:**

Don't be discouraged if you find learning difficult.

**I love those who love me — אֲנִי אֶהְבֵּי אֶהָב.**

People who love each other think alike and share secrets with each other.

If you have a positive attitude and you really care for me, I will be closer to you and reveal my secrets at the same time that you are closer to me.

**Those who seek me will find me — וּמִשְׁחָרֵי יִמְצְאֵנִי**

because Hashem will help them.

### Part 5. The Rewards of Wisdom.

**(יח) עֲשֹׂר וְכָבוֹד אֶתִּי הוּן עֵתֶק וְצִדְקָה:**

Don't think that if you dedicate your energies to learning Torah, you will be at a disadvantage. On the contrary, if you learn sincerely, you will find that

**wealth and honor are preserved with me — עֲשֹׂר וְכָבוֹד אֶתִּי,**

if not in this World, then set aside for you in

the World to Come. One way or the other,

your wisdom will ultimately bring you

**great fortune and the good name of righteousness — הוּן עֵתֶק וְצִדְקָה.**

**(יט) טוֹב פְּרִי מִחֶרוֹץ וּמִפָּז וּתְבוּאַתִּי מִכֶּסֶף נְבָחָר:**

The fruit of the wisdom that I have to offer is the basic knowledge which you acquire.

**My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold — טוֹב פְּרִי מִחֶרוֹץ וּמִפָּז.**

Precious metals can be stored and admired for as long as you live in this world, but the knowledge that you gain through wisdom is available to you in the World to Come, as well.

And when my wisdom is matured through review and reflection, it becomes like agricultural produce that has value in the marketplace. You will then find it comparable to choice silver which has value as a tool for conducting business.

But **my produce is even better than choice silver — וּתְבוּאַתִּי מִכֶּסֶף נְבָחָר**

because you can use matured wisdom to create new insights through logical deduction and analysis. These are worth far more than the things you can buy with silver.

**(כ) בָּאֵרַח צְדָקָה אֶהְלֵךְ בְּתוֹךְ נְתִיבוֹת מְשֻׁפָּט :**

To acquire wisdom you must practice generous righteousness with all people.  
At the same time you must practice strict justice with yourself, placing the highest demands on your own behavior.

**For I walk on the public road of righteousness — בָּאֵרַח צְדָקָה אֶהְלֵךְ.**

And I stay **within the narrow pathways of justice — בְּתוֹךְ נְתִיבוֹת מְשֻׁפָּט**,  
where the individual veers neither to the right or left.

**(כא) לְהִנְחִיל אֶהְבֵּי יֵשׁ וְאַצְרִיתֵיהֶם אֲמַלֵּא :**

You will find that the rewards of achieving wisdom follow the same principles as the requirements for achieving it. If you practice strict justice with yourself, then in the World to Come you will be granted what you have rightfully earned by your behavior. [Wisdom declares:]

My policy is **to grant permanently to those who love me — לְהִנְחִיל אֶהְבֵּי**,  
**the existing** fruit of their own virtue — **יֵשׁ**.

**And I will fill their storehouses — וְאַצְרִיתֵיהֶם אֲמַלֵּא**  
with generous bounty, far beyond what they have earned.

**Part 6. The Origin of Wisdom.****(כב) ה' קִנְנִי רֵאשִׁית דְּרַכּוֹ קִדְּם מִפְּעֻלְיוֹ מֵאָז :**

[Wisdom declares:] I already **belonged to Hashem — ה' קִנְנִי**  
**as the first of His way** of creating the world — **רֵאשִׁית דְּרַכּוֹ**.

In fact I was the essential instrument and purpose of Creation.

I was His plan **before His works of old — קִדְּם מִפְּעֻלְיוֹ מֵאָז**.

**(כג) מֵעוֹלָם נִסְכַּתִּי מֵרֵאשִׁית מִקְדָּמֵי אֶרֶץ :**

I was consecrated from the beginning of eternity — **מֵעוֹלָם נִסְכַּתִּי מֵרֵאשִׁית**.  
I was the first **among the creations that preceded the earth — מִקְדָּמֵי אֶרֶץ**.

**(כד) בָּאֵין תְּהֵמוֹת חוֹלְלָתִי אֵין מַעֲיִנוֹת נִכְבְּדֵי מַיִם :**

I was formed when there were still no watery depths, — **בָּאֵין תְּהֵמוֹת חוֹלְלָתִי**;  
**when there were no pools abounding with water — בָּאֵין מַעֲיִנוֹת נִכְבְּדֵי מַיִם**.

This refers to the first stages of the earth's emergence from formlessness. It was the spirit of Divine wisdom that hovered over the abyss before the separation of the elements of Creation.

**(כה) בְּטָרָם הָרִים הִטְבְּעוּ לִפְנֵי גְבְעוֹת חוֹלְלָתַי :**

I was formed **before the mountains were made firm** — **בְּטָרָם הָרִים הִטְבְּעוּ**  
in the midst of the waters.

**I was formed before the hills** — **לִפְנֵי גְבְעוֹת חוֹלְלָתַי**.

**(כו) עַד לֹא עָשָׂה אָרֶץ וְחוּצוֹת וְרֹאשׁ עֵפְרוֹת תִּבְּל :**

I was formed **when He had not yet made** — **עַד לֹא עָשָׂה**  
**the core regions of the earth or the outlying regions** — **אָרֶץ וְחוּצוֹת**  
**or the first dust of the inhabited world** — **וְרֹאשׁ עֵפְרוֹת תִּבְּל**.

**(כז) בְּהִכִּינוּ שָׁמַיִם שָׁם אָנִי בְּחוּקוֹ חוּג עַל פְּנֵי תְהוֹם :**

When He established the heavens, I was there — **בְּהִכִּינוּ שָׁמַיִם שָׁם אָנִי**.

When He set a spherical shape — **בְּחוּקוֹ חוּג**

**to the face of the deep,** — **עַל פְּנֵי תְהוֹם**

I was there. The world emerged into existence as a result  
of the forms and boundaries established through wisdom.

**(כח) בְּאַמְצוֹ שְׁחָקִים מִמַּעַל בְּעִזּוֹ עֵינֹת תְהוֹם :**

I was there **when He braced** — **בְּאַמְצוֹ**

**the skies above** — **שְׁחָקִים מִמַּעַל**.

I was there **when He reinforced** — **בְּעִזּוֹ**

**the wellsprings of the watery depths** — **עֵינֹת תְהוֹם**.

**(כט) בְּשׁוּמוֹ לַיָּם חֶקֶו**

**וּמַיִם לֹא יַעֲבְרוּ פִּיּו בְּחוּקוֹ מוֹסְדֵי אָרֶץ :**

I was there **when He set a boundary to the sea** — **בְּשׁוּמוֹ לַיָּם חֶקֶו**  
**that the waters would not transgress His word** — **וּמַיִם לֹא יַעֲבְרוּ פִּיּו**.

I was there **when He decreed** — **בְּחוּקוֹ**

**the foundations of the earth not to shift** — **מוֹסְדֵי אָרֶץ**.

**(ל) וְאֶהְיָ אֶצְלוֹ אִמּוֹן**

**וְאֶהְיָ שְׁעֲשָׁעִים יוֹם יוֹם מִשְׁחֶקֶת לִפְנֵי בְּכָל יֵת :**

Before the appearance of mankind,

**I was like His infant child** — **וְאֶהְיָ אֶצְלוֹ אִמּוֹן**,

**I was then His delight every day** — **וְאֶהְיָ שְׁעֲשָׁעִים יוֹם יוֹם**,

**frolicking before Him at all times** — **מִשְׁחֶקֶת לִפְנֵי בְּכָל יֵת**.

He enjoyed seeing me develop as a parent takes pleasure

in watching his child discover what it can do. He took pleasure in seeing wisdom implemented in the acts of Creation.

**(לא) מְשַׁחֶקֶת בְּתֵבֵל אֶרְצוֹ וְשַׁעֲשַׁעִי אֶת בְּנֵי אָדָם:**

Later, when man was created,

**I frolicked in the inhabited areas of His earth — מְשַׁחֶקֶת בְּתֵבֵל אֶרְצוֹ  
and became a delight to mankind — וְשַׁעֲשַׁעִי אֶת בְּנֵי אָדָם.**

Wisdom then became an essential component in the life of men and Hashem rejoiced in how mankind took to wisdom, meditated on it and acted on it.

### Part 7. Heeding Wisdom.

**(לב) וְעַתָּה בְּנִים שְׁמָעוּ לִי וְאַשְׁרֵי דְרָכֵי יִשְׁמְרוּ:**

**And now, children — וְעַתָּה בְּנִים,**

**listen to me — שְׁמָעוּ לִי**

now that you have heard about the great value of wisdom, don't be lax about making the effort to acquire wisdom.

**Fortunate are those who keep to my ways — וְאַשְׁרֵי דְרָכֵי יִשְׁמְרוּ,**  
because these are the ways by which you will acquire wisdom.

**(לג) שְׁמָעוּ מוֹסֵר וְחֻכְמוֹ וְאַל תִּפְרָעוּ**

**Listen to and obey the teachings of *mussar* — שְׁמָעוּ מוֹסֵר**

**And then, you will be able to gain wisdom — וְחֻכְמוֹ**

and fully apply it in your life.

**Do not refuse the message of wisdom — וְאַל תִּפְרָעוּ,**  
which is to obey the laws of Creation.

Do not give yourself over to unrestrained behavior.

**(לד) אֲשֶׁרִי אָדָם שָׁמַע לִי**

**לְשִׁקְדַּת עַל דְּלַתֵּי יוֹם יוֹם לְשִׁמּוֹר מְזוּזַת פֶּתַחִי:**

**Fortunate is the person who listens to me — אֲשֶׁרִי אָדָם שָׁמַע לִי,  
coming regularly to my doors every day — לְשִׁקְדַּת עַל דְּלַתֵּי יוֹם יוֹם,**

even when the doors are closed, and the learning is difficult.

But he perseveres and returns again and again

**to watch the doorposts of my entranceways — לְשִׁמּוֹר מְזוּזַת פֶּתַחִי.**

Then, if he persists, and approaches wisdom through its doorways, that is, its basic principles, he will gradually become fully versed in wisdom and will be able to live his life accordingly.

**(לה) כִּי מִצְאֵי מְצָא חַיִּים וַיִּפֶּק רְצוֹן מִה':**

**For he who finds me finds life — כִּי מִצְאֵי מְצָא חַיִּים**

for then he finds Hashem, the Author of life.

Hashem has bound up life with the wisdom He created.

And so that person **obtains the goodwill of Hashem** — **וַיִּפֶּק רְצוֹן מִה'**,

Who grants the individual life and well-being.

When the gates of wisdom open, the vision of wisdom

invigorates him and fills him with new energy in both

body and spirit.

**(לו) וְחֹטְאֵי חַמְס נִפְשׁוּ כָּל מְשִׁנְאֵי אֶהְבוּ מוֹת:**

**But the one who sins against me — וְחֹטְאֵי**

**does violence to his soul — חַמְס נִפְשׁוּ.**

**All who hate me love death — כָּל מְשִׁנְאֵי אֶהְבוּ מוֹת.**

Since life is nourished by wisdom, the enemies of wisdom

are the enemies of life, which means they are the allies of death.