

Mishlei 09-07

Rejection of Wisdom

[Pesukim 9:7 thru 9: 12]

Key Concepts

In the previous segment Mishlei told us about the earnest invitation that is broadcast far and wide by the “maidens” of Wisdom, that is by the prophets, wise men, and teachers of each generation. Now he prepares these messengers for their holy work by reminding them of the need to be selective. They must realize that there are two categories of people who will reject such an invitation, no matter how attractive it is and how well presented it is. First are the scoffers who pretend to listen to the lessons of Wisdom but look for any opening to undermine the effectiveness of any instruction. Second are the instigators who hate the truth and work openly to defeat it.

Exploring Mishlei

PART 1. WHO IS NOT INVITED?

The “maidens” of Wisdom are advised to restrict their efforts of persuasion to those who can benefit from wisdom. It is useless and counterproductive to teach wisdom to those who scoff at it and to the wicked people who are its enemies. In contrast, someone who has begun the process of acquiring wisdom will be grateful for the opportunity to improve himself further. Mishlei concludes this part by declaring that the key to the beginning of wisdom is the fear of Hashem. Without it, the individual will be attracted to the ranks of the scoffers and the instigators.

(ז) יִסֹר לְךָ לֵךְ לִקְחָהּ לוֹ קִלְוֹן וּמוֹכִיחַ לְרָשָׁע מוֹמוֹ:

(ח) אֵל תּוֹכַח לֵךְ פֶּן יִשְׁנֹאֲךָ הוֹכַח לְחָכָם וַיֶּאֱהָבֶךָ:

(ט) תֵּן לְחָכָם וַיְחַכְּמוּ עוֹד הוֹדַע לְצַדִּיק וַיּוֹסֶף לְקַח:

(י) תַּחֲלֵת חֲכָמָה יִרְאֵת ה' וְדַעַת קְדוֹשִׁים בִּינָה:

(7) There should be no invitation to wisdom for the scoffer because whoever corrects a scoffer brings only humiliation upon himself. Likewise, whoever rebukes the wicked, brings that person's defect upon himself. (8) Don't rebuke a scoffer,

lest he hate you, but rebuke a wise man, and he will love you. (9) Give instruction to a wise man and he will become even wiser. Teach a righteous man and he will increase in learning. (10) The beginning of wisdom is the fear of Hashem and the beginning of holiness is understanding.

PART 2. TO CHOOSE WISDOM.

The spirit of Wisdom now concludes her invitation, encouraging those who can benefit from learning to step forward and make the effort. If they resist the distractions presented by the scoffers and instigators they will be rewarded in this world and the next.

(יא) כִּי בִי יִרְבוּ יָמֶיךָ וַיּוֹסִיפוּ לְךָ שָׁנוֹת חַיִּים:

(יב) אִם חֲכַמְתָּ חֲכַמְתָּ לְךָ וְלִצְתָּ לְבַדְּךָ תִּשָּׂא:

(11) Wisdom says: “For through me the number of your days will be increased and you will be rewarded with added years of life. If you become wise, you become wise for your own good. (12) And if you have scoffed, you alone will bear the consequence.”

Learning Mishlei

PART 1. WHO IS NOT INVITED?

(ז) יִסֵּר לֹץ לִקְחָ לוֹ קִלְוֹן וּמוֹכִיחַ לְרָשָׁע מוֹמוֹ:

(7) The “maidens” of Wisdom will not try to reform a scoffer because

he who corrects a scoffer — יִסֵּר לֹץ,

even by warning him of the punishment

that awaits him, will fail. Instead he

will bring humiliation upon himself — לִקְחָ לוֹ קִלְוֹן

The scoffer appears to be law-abiding

but he uses humor to mock those who

defend moral principles.

The “maidens” of Wisdom will also not try

to reform a wicked instigator because

he who rebukes the wicked — וּמוֹכִיחַ לְרָשָׁע,

even using the most powerful logic will fail.

In fact, he will acquire **his defect — מוֹמוֹ**

for the wicked person is proud of his sins and

turns the tables on his critic, accusing the righteous person of the very same behavior.

(ח) אַל תּוֹכַח לֵץ פֶּן יִשְׁנָאֲךָ הוֹכַח לְחָכָם וַיֵּאָהֲבֶךָ :

(8) Don't rebuke a scoffer — אַל תּוֹכַח לֵץ, lest he hate you — פֶּן יִשְׁנָאֲךָ.

Don't think he will be impressed by rational argument that proves your case. He may pretend to be receptive to logical reasoning, but that is only a cover. He thinks he is smarter than you. Deep down he hates you and will look for the opportunity to diminish you.

But rebuke a wise man, — הוֹכַח לְחָכָם and he will love you — וַיֵּאָהֲבֶךָ

for the wise man is always eager for self-improvement. In contrast to the scoffer, the wise man is humble and is convinced he has much more to learn.

(ט) תֵּן לְחָכָם וַיִּחְכַּם עוֹד הוֹדַע לְצַדִּיק וַיֹּסֶף לָקַח :

(9) Give instruction to a wise man — תֵּן לְחָכָם and he will become even wiser — וַיִּחְכַּם

for the wisdom that you have taught him will lead him to further development of thought.

Teach a righteous man — עוֹד הוֹדַע לְצַדִּיק and he will increase in learning — וַיֹּסֶף לָקַח

for his righteousness motivates him to add to his knowledge of the *halachah*.

(י) תְּחִלַּת חֲכָמָה יְרֵאתָ ה' וְדַעַת קְדוּשִׁים בִּינָה :

(10) The beginning of wisdom is fear of Hashem — תְּחִלַּת חֲכָמָה יְרֵאתָ ה'.

The individual will give respect and obedience to the "maidens" of Wisdom (those who teach the Torah) only if he is filled with the emotions and attitudes of awe before Hashem.

And the beginning of holiness is understanding — וְדַעַת קְדוּשִׁים בִּינָה, which comes through devoting time to study and reflection, so that knowledge of Torah becomes internalized and the individual is transformed.

(יא) כִּי בִי יִרְבוּ יָמֶיךָ וַיִּוָּסֵפוּ לְךָ שָׁנוֹת חַיִּים :

(11) [Wisdom says:]

“For through me the number of your days will be increased — כִּי בִי יִרְבוּ יָמֶיךָ.

In consideration of your efforts to gain wisdom, you will be given the opportunity to learn more. Your greater knowledge will enable you to perform more *mitzvos* and **you will be rewarded with added years of life — וַיִּוָּסֵפוּ לְךָ שָׁנוֹת חַיִּים**, years of prosperity and well-being in this world and years of eternal life in the World to Come.

(יב) אִם חֲכָמָתְךָ חֲכָמָתְךָ לְךָ וְלֹצֵתְךָ לְבַדְּךָ תִּשָּׂא :

(12) **“If you become wise — אִם חֲכָמָתְךָ,**

you become wise for your own good — חֲכָמָתְךָ לְךָ,

because you will be personally rewarded.

And if you have scoffed, — וְלֹצֵתְךָ

you alone will bear the consequence — לְבַדְּךָ תִּשָּׂא.

Your sarcasm will have no effect on the eternal truth of wisdom and it is you who will be punished for your sins, not the righteous people you have shamed.”