

Mishlei 11-26

Role Models and Teachers

Key Concepts

As we have seen in Segment 01-03 a person should be receptive to the positive influences that he encounters in life, beginning with his father and mother. Now Mishlei examines two kinds of influence that correspond to the kinds of people who offer guidance throughout his lifetime. Thus, a person may be positively influenced by *tzadikim* and *chachamim* (righteous men and wise men). In this context the term *tzadik* refers to one who offers guidance indirectly through the example that he sets and the term *chacham* refers to one who offers guidance through the teaching of the wisdom of Torah. In practice we may expect to find both qualities of guidance to varying degrees within the same individual.

Exploring Mishlei

(ל) פְּרִי צַדִּיק עֵץ חַיִּים וְלֶקַח נַפְשׁוֹת חָכָם:

(30) *The fruit of a tzadik is [the fruit of] a tree of life, but a chacham acquires souls [by sharing his wisdom].*

In this proverb Mishlei uses the symbol of the tree of life to represent the *tzadik's* quality of being a source of life to those in his vicinity. Just as the tree produces life-giving fruit so it is that the *tzadik*, through his actions and demeanor, inspire others to be elevated spiritually. His presence in a community also draws Hashem's good will so that everyone benefits from his *zechus* (merit).

In contrast to the relatively passive role of the *tzadik*, the *chacham* takes a direct and active role, teaching the wisdom of the Torah and in calling people's attention to the ways in which they might improve. Of course, as previously noted, the qualities of the *tzadik* and the *chacham* are often found in the same person.

Learning Mishlei

(ל) פְּרִי צַדִּיק עֵץ חַיִּים
וְלֶקַח נַפְשׁוֹת חָכָם:

A *tzadik* is a tree of life for those around him because his example inspires others to do good and thereby gain eternal life. In effect, **the fruit of the *tzadik*** in the form

of good deeds **is** like the fruit of **a tree of life** — פְּרֵי צַדִּיק עֵץ חַיִּים. **But a chacham** through the use of his wisdom **acquires souls** — וְלִקְחָה נַפְשׁוֹת חָכָם for he teaches them how to live a good life.

Additional Insights

A series of insights illuminating this proverb are presented below. The numbers identifying the insights refer to the listing of sources at the end of the segment.

- (1) The fruits of the deeds of the *tzadik* are eternal life.
- (2) The *chacham* is said to "acquire" souls by teaching them and inspiring them. This corresponds to the behavior of Avraham and Sarah, as it says, "and the souls they made (acquired) in Charan" (*Bereishis* 12:5).
- (3) The fruit of the *tzadik* is also a reference to his children, for although his influence is generally indirect, in the case of his own children he actively teaches them and disciplines them because he has access to them at a young age. However, the *chacham* has the special ability to actively persuade and inspire people of any age.
- (4) Furthermore, children are considered the fruit of the tree of life because a person who leaves children after he is gone continues to live through them.
- (5) The *tzadik* himself is a tree of life, "which yields its fruit in due season", as in Mizmor 001 (verse 1:3).
- (6) The *tzadik* is a tree of life because out of his every deed grows something beneficial and life-giving to his surroundings. This is an indirect process, but the *chacham* is a wellspring of life. His words penetrate into the souls of his listeners, gripping them and making them wiser and more noble.

Sources

The primary sources used for the additional insights illuminating this segment are listed below.

(4) - הגר"א

(5) - המאירי

(6) - רשר"ה

(1) - רש"י, מלבי"ם

(2) - רש"י

(3) - רבינו יונה

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