

Mishlei 12-28

Life

Key Concepts

One of the essential characteristics of life is the need for continuous growth and change. When a person becomes stagnant in his personal development, he is closer to death. The process of change may be compared to travelling on a road because a road always leads somewhere. So all of us are on a road; the question is where is our road leading?

Mishlei reminds us that we were created for a purpose and that purpose is to live a life of goodness and righteousness. If we do that, then our life has meaning, and our Creator will reward us with more life. Furthermore, we can anticipate that it will be a life that fulfills the inherent need of any living being, that is, to survive. By staying on the road of righteousness we are promised the opportunity to live a life that is not followed by death.

Exploring Mishlei

(כח) בְּאַרְח־צְדָקָה חַיִּים וְדֶרֶךְ נְתִיבָה אֱלִימוֹת:

**(28) *On the road of righteousness, you will find life.
Its path is directed towards immortality.***

This proverb identifies life as a treasure to be found on the road of righteousness, where righteousness means doing what our Creator wants us to do. The road of righteousness is a broad highway with many paths. Each person has a unique path tailored to his personal mission and destiny in life, but all paths are directed along the same road, which is in the direction of righteousness (*tzedakah*). That direction leads us beyond the life we are now living in this world to the life of immortality in the next world.

The term *tzedakah* also refers to the specific concept of giving charity. We have seen a discussion of the relationship between charity and life in Segment 11-18 (Charity and Life).

Learning Mishlei

(28) On the road of righteousness — בארְחֵי צְדָקָה

you will find life — חַיִּים .

It is a life that is directed towards immortality because

on the way of each path through life — וְדֶרֶךְ נְתִיבָהּ

there is no death — אֵלֵּימוֹת .

Additional Insights

(1) If the life force which has been granted to each of us is directed to the opposite of what Hashem wants, then all the positive potential within us remains dead; we pursue aims and create things whose non-existence God desires. Our life then spells death to goodness, and so leads us to death. (רשר"ה)

(2) None of the paths that run in the direction of righteousness leads to death. These are the paths of *middos* (good character) and knowledge. (רלבי"ג)

(3) Righteousness leads to life. And life leads to righteousness because as long as a person is alive, he has the opportunity to do acts of righteousness, which will enable him to perfect his soul. (חנוד לנער)

(4) The life that one acquires through righteousness is a life that is not followed by death. (חנוד לנער)

(5) Days of life may be added to a person's life span in reward for the act of charity. Furthermore, a person who donates regularly to charity will be protected from death. (רבינו יונה)