

Mishlei 13-06

Stability and Mitzvos

Key Concepts

As we have seen in Segment 04-03, Mishlei compares the wisdom of the Torah to a road through life. Our mission is to faithfully stay on that road as we continue our journey of personal development and spiritual fulfillment. Furthermore, as we have seen in Segment 04-10, once we have chosen the right road we must be continually alert to make sure we are not getting side-tracked.

In the current proverb Mishlei teaches the value of doing *mitzvos* (acts of righteousness) as an essential means to help a person stay on the right road. In contrast, a person who commits *aveiros* (sinful acts) will find that they corrupt him and he will be unable to stay on the road that leads to a worthy life.

A person's deeds have a direct effect on his character. By doing good, his character will be elevated, and he will find joy in continuing to do good. A person who commits *aveiros* is his own worst enemy. By committing a sin, he will lose his ability to distinguish between what is right and what is wrong. The result will be a ruined life.

Exploring Mishlei

(ו) צְדָקָה תִּצַּר תְּמִסְדֶּרֶךְ וְרָשָׁעָה תִּסְלֵף חֲטָאתָ:

(6) *An act of righteousness will guard the person
on the path of integrity,
but an act of wickedness will corrupt the sinner.*

This proverb compares a person on the right path with the sinner who has already been diverted to the wrong path. The person who has worked to put himself on the right path will continue to be supported in his efforts by the *mitzvos* that he does. These good deeds have the effect of strengthening his character and thereby helping him resist the forces that might pull him away. The sinner, on the other hand, will find that with each evil act his character is corrupted further, and he becomes more and more committed to his corrupted way of life.

Learning Mishlei

An act of righteousness — צְדָקָה

will guard — תִּצַּר

the person on the path of integrity — תְּמִיּוֹתָיִךְ,

and keep him from straying from that path.

But an act of wickedness — וְרָשָׁעָה

will corrupt the sinner — תִּסְלֵף חַטָּאת

and he will have difficulty getting on the right path again.

Additional Insights

Wisdom in Words

(1) The word צְדָקָה commonly refers to the act of giving charity, which falls within the framework of צְדָקָה, doing the right thing. However, in the present context and elsewhere in Mishlei, צְדָקָה is used to refer to any act of righteousness whereby a person sacrifices his own selfish concerns for the benefit of another, whether it be another person or his Creator. (מלבי"ם, רשר"ה, דעת סופרים)

(2) The expression תְּמִיּוֹתָיִךְ, refers to an individual who is on the right road (דֶּרֶךְ) and who adheres to that road with sincere integrity (תְּמִימוּת). Such a person can be recognized by the sincerity with which he donates to charity, with no consideration of personal benefit or pride. His sincerity is characterized by being complete in his commitment to doing the *mitzvah* in dedication to the will of his Creator. Such commitment is not marred by a personal agenda. (מצודות, מלבי"ם)

(3) The concept of תְּמִימוּת also conveys the idea of a person who obeys the direction of his Master with total devotion, that is, without subjecting it to excessive analysis. Such over-analysis is characteristic of a person who is seeking to find exceptions and loopholes, so that he can change the apparent direction of the *halachah*. (שבט מיהודה)

(4) The word רָשָׁעָה, refers to a wicked act or sin, which has the effect of drawing the sinner into a perverted path where he is subject to further failure of character. (מצודות)

(5) The word תִּסְלֵף refers to the process of being morally corrupted, as we find in Mishlei 19-03, "a man's foolishness corrupts his way" -- אִוֵּל אָדָם תִּסְלֵף דְּרָכּוֹ.

We have also seen a version of this word in Segment 11-03, **וְסָלַף בּוֹגְדִים יִשְׁדֹּם**, “the perversity (corruption) of the ungrateful” will rob them [of their very souls]. (רש"י, מצודות)

(6) The word **חֲטָאת** is generally understood as referring to sin, as in a sacrificial sin offering. However, in the present context it is the sinner himself who is characterized by this term. That is because he is already so deeply attached to the sinful path that he becomes defined by the sins he commits. (רש"י)

(7) Mishlei contrasts the individual who is **תָּם דָּרָךְ**, with the individual who is a **חֲטָאת**, sinner, and contrasts the action of the first (**צְדָקָה**) with that of the second (**רְשָׁעָה**). (מלבי"ם)

Other Insights

(8) This proverb may be understood as a demonstration of the principle that “one *mitzvah* leads to another *mitzvah* and one sin leads to another sin” **מִצְוָה גּוֹרֶרֶת מִצְוָה, וְעִבְרָה גּוֹרֶרֶת עִבְרָה** (*Mishnah Avos 4,2*). (רבינו יונה)

(9) The relationship between integrity and the right way through life is also found in Segment 10-29: “The way of Hashem is a stronghold to persons of integrity” - **מְעוֹז לְתָם דְּרָךְ ה'**. There we see how the way of Hashem and the *mitzvos* that fill that way provide the very stability that will keep a person on the right way. (המאירי)

(10) The *mitzvos* that a person performs serve to protect him from any harm that may inadvertently occur in the course of seeking to follow the right path. (חנוד לנער)