

Mishlei 13-04

Idleness and Frustration

Key Concepts

Mishlei teaches that to achieve any objective in life, whether physical or spiritual, a person must be prepared to expend a degree of effort. This becomes a challenge for any individual who is inclined to be lazy and enjoys being idle. He will find himself frustrated by his unfulfilled desires. If he really wants to satisfy his yearnings he must learn to overcome his preference for idleness.

Exploring Mishlei

(ד) מִתְאַוֶּה וְאֵין נִפְשׁוֹ עֲצֵל וְנִפְשׁ חֲרָצִים תִּדְשֹׁן:

(4) He yearns [for something] but finds nothing; [it is because] his true desire is idleness. But the soul of the energetic doer will be gratified.

This proverb contrasts the frustration of unfulfilled desires and failed projects with the feeling of gratification that comes from objectives being satisfied. The key to these opposing situations lies in the nature of the individual. Does he prefer idleness more than the reward of fulfilled desires or is he sufficiently motivated to work for his objective.

Learning Mishlei

(ד) מִתְאַוֶּה וְאֵין נִפְשׁוֹ עֲצֵל

וְנִפְשׁ חֲרָצִים תִּדְשֹׁן:

If a person **yearns** for something **but finds nothing**; it is because **his true desire is idleness** — מִתְאַוֶּה וְאֵין נִפְשׁוֹ עֲצֵל. **But the soul of the energetic doer will be gratified** — וְנִפְשׁ חֲרָצִים תִּדְשֹׁן because he will put in the effort that brings about effective results.

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.

Wisdom in Words

- (1) The word **מתאווה** (yearns) indicates intensely wanting or desiring some outcome either physical, intellectual or spiritual. Whatever a person may desire, he will be frustrated if he is not prepared to work for it.
- (2). In this context the word **נפש** (soul) refers to the deep inner desires and yearnings of a person. The intensity of those desires relative to what he needs to do to satisfy them will determine if he is successful. We also find this usage in *Tehillim* 27:12: **אל תתנני בנפש צרי**, *Don't give me over to the desires of my tormentors*. However, the word **ונפש** in the second part of the verse refers to the actual person or individual whose desires are satisfied.
- (3) The word **הרצים** (energetic doers) refers to the personality type of an individual who energetically applies himself to an objective. An example would be an upright person who earns his livelihood through honest effort. It could also refer to a *talmid chacham* who studies the Torah diligently and energetically.
- (4) The word **תדשן** (gratified) can refer to the satisfaction a person has from consuming a full measure of food. It can also refer to emotional and spiritual gratification.

Other Insights

- (5) A person who seeks a goal in life but finds that he is unsuccessful should ask himself whether he is putting in enough effort.
- (6) A person may yearn for spiritual growth but still accomplishes nothing. He should avoid blaming Hashem or some external factor. He needs to recognize that it is his lazy attitude that is preventing him from fulfilling the desires of his soul.
- (7) A person who work hard for a living will find that his physical desires and appetites are fully satisfied, whereas a person who resists hard work will find that his appetites become more and more difficult to satisfy.
- (8) Sometimes a person may have ambitious goals, but once he realizes how much comfort he will have to sacrifice and how many short-term pleasures he will have to give up, he changes his mind. Such a person should rethink his aspirations and think about whether his goals are really worthwhile. If they are, he should focus on the value of what he wants to

achieve so that he will be ready to make the necessary sacrifices.

Sources

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

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| (5) - רבינו יונה | (1) - רש"י, |
| (6) - אלשיך | (2) - חנוך לנער |
| (7) - מלבי"ם | (3) - רש"י |
| (8) - המאירי | (4) - אבן עזרא |

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