

## Mishlei 13-12

# Misery and Heartache

### Key Concepts

Tragically, many people lead lives of misery and heartache. They are not happy with events and circumstances that are important to them. It may be that they are disappointed in the behavior of people close to them or they are disappointed with the circumstances in which they have been placed.

Whether or not they are justified in their expectations that things should be different, they are committed to those expectations and so they are miserable. Mishlei calls attention to this phenomenon because the suffering that these people experience is something happening within their hearts. It is affecting their health and their ability to lead productive lives.

Mishlei sees a cheerful attitude as the most desirable state for a person. He refers to that state as a tree of life and he associates it with having low expectations. If a person receives a gift or favor which he was not expecting, he is invigorated with cheerful gratitude and love for his benefactor.

Having low expectations does not preclude taking whatever steps are available to a person to improve the situation. This is not just permissible but obligatory. However, he should train himself to trust that after all is said and done, his situation has been determined by his Creator as part of a Divine plan. He must believe that Hashem is concerned about him and wants him to cheerfully accept life as he finds it.

### Exploring Mishlei

**(יב) תּוֹחֶלֶת מִמְשָׁכָה מִחֶלֶה לֵב וְעֵץ חַיִּים תֵּאָוֶה בְּאֵה :**

**(12) *A deferred longing is heartache,  
but when a desire is suddenly fulfilled, it is a tree of life .***

This proverb contrasts the misery and heartache of frustrated wishes with the cheerfulness associated with being given good fortune when it is not expected. The

passage of time is a critical factor in this comparison. The longer a person lives with disappointment the more embittered he will be. This will affect his general health and well-being. Every person should watch for and seek to mitigate this condition by working on his own state of mind.

## Learning Mishlei

(12) A longing — תּוֹחֶלֶת  
that is deferred — מְמַשְׁכָּה  
over a period of time  
brings heartache — מַחְלָה לֵב.  
but it is a tree of life — וְעֵץ חַיִּים  
when the desire — תַּאֲוָה  
is fulfilled unexpectedly — בְּאֵה

## Additional Insights

### Wisdom in Words

(1) The word תּוֹחֶלֶת refers to a longing for something that a person feels he has been promised or has a right to expect. The failure of that expectation is especially painful, and contributes to heartache if it continues over an extended period of time. (מלב"ים)

(2) The word תַּאֲוָה refers to a desire or a wish for something which a person would like to have although he has no basis for hoping he would ever obtain it. If he does happen to attain it, he is thrilled and energized. It is a tree of life for him. This word was previously used in Segment 11-23, where it was described as an emotion that motivates a person to engage in behavior which will gratify that emotion. (מלב"ים)

(3) The word תִּקְוָה, hope, does not appear in our proverb, but was previously used in Segment 10-28. It refers to some future event that is earnestly desired, but the likelihood of fulfillment is still uncertain. (מלב"ים)

Other Insights

(4) When you defer fulfilling a promise that you made to another person (especially a child) it can cause great disappointment, but when you are sensitive to what the person wants and you surprise him with it, you are planting a tree of life.

(רש"י)

(5) If someone asks you for a favor, don't defer your answer for too long. You are causing him pain by making him ask again. (המאירי)

(6) A frustrated wish becomes more and more painful with the passage of time. But a wish that is quickly gratified is like a tree of life. This means, if you want to make someone happy, the time that it takes to respond to his request is critical.

(רלב"ג)

(7) A tree of life is characterized by its fruit, which appears on time, in its season. People count on it and are gratified to see it. (המאירי)

(8) Hashem longs for Yisrael to live a righteous life. Tragically, their failure to do so results in misery for them. But when His desire is fulfilled and He sees them doing the right thing, He grants them the tree of life. (רש"י)

(9) If one compares the desire for gaining Torah knowledge with that for acquiring wealth, one sees that the yearning for wealth can cause great heartache because a person is never satisfied. In contrast, each small nugget of Torah knowledge is a tree of life. (חנוד לנער)

(10) Based on our proverb, the Gemara (*Berachos* 32b) says that if a person prays long but is constantly looking to see if he is answered he will suffer heartache and disillusionment in the end. The Gemara concludes, let him study the Torah, for "the Torah is a tree of life to those who take hold of it." (Segment 03-04, Verse 3:18). (גמרא ברכות לב:)

(11) Our proverb also suggests that nothing is so detrimental to health as envy. An envious person has constant opportunity for dissatisfaction, since most people are bound to possess something that the envious person is lacking, but views as very desirable. (רשר"ה)