

Mishlei 14-01

Women's Wisdom

Key Concepts

The wisdom that a Jewish woman brings to building her home involves a whole combination of knowledge, insight, abilities and skills, as well as moral virtue and spiritual excellence. These qualities are recognized by Mishlei as the wisdom of women. It is a wisdom that women have carried forward through the generations. Each new generation inherits the wisdom that has been molded by the experience of the generation that came before.

The glory of a happy home and a grateful family depends upon the practice of this collective wisdom by each individual woman as she addresses the unique circumstances of her life.

However, Mishlei also calls attention to the dangers lurking beneath the surface of domestic bliss. These dangers can result in a catastrophic harm to the peace of the home and the lives of its members. Because the building of the home is so dependent on the wisdom of the woman at its center, the foolish woman who chooses to disregard or neglect the collective wisdom that is every woman's heritage may conceivably be the instrument that destroys her home.

Exploring Mishlei

(א) חֲכָמוֹת נָשִׁים בְּנִתְהָ בַיְתָהּ וְאִוֵּלֶת בְּיָדֶיהָ תִּהְרָסֶנּוּ:

(1) *The woman of character builds her home relying upon the inherited wisdom of women, but the foolish woman destroys her home with her own hands.*

This proverb contrasts the process of building a home with that of destroying it. Building the home depends on a great deal of wisdom, consisting of many parts, expressed with the word חֲכָמוֹת. Although women's wisdom is not formally taught all women have access to it in one form or another. Tragically, destruction of the home can occur when a foolish woman unwittingly challenges the wisdom that is her heritage.

Learning Mishlei

Relying upon **the inherited wisdom of women** — **חִכְמוֹת נָשִׁים**
the woman of character builds her home — **בְּנִתָּהּ בֵּיתָהּ**.

and earns the gratitude of her family,

But the foolish woman — **וְאִוֶּלֶת**

who disregards the experience of previous generations,

destroys her home with her own hands — **בְּיָדֶיהָ תִּהְרָסֶנּוּ**.

Additional Insights

(1) Mishlei uses the term **חִכְמוֹת נָשִׁים** to refer to all the individual wise women as well as the specific forms of the received wisdom that women share. All wisdom originates from the cosmic mind of Hashem and flows down to mankind. However, the wisdom of women is passed down through generations of women, reflecting their collective experience. (רש"י, אבן עזרא, רלב"ג, מלבי"ם, הגר"א)

(2) The term **בְּנִתָּהּ בֵּיתָהּ** refers to the individual woman of wisdom who builds her home based on the received wisdom of women. (רש"י, מצודות, מלבי"ם)

(3) The term **אִוֶּלֶת** refers to the foolish woman whose attitude is based on skepticism. She turns away from received wisdom, thinking she can find her own way. Such a woman can destroy her home through her neglect and lack of attention. (רלב"ג, אבן יחיאל, מלבי"ם)

(4) The woman's role in building the home is no simple art. The conduct of domestic life involves an abundance of seemingly minor relationships; but the wise or unwise handling of these can be so decisive for the happiness of the home that simple wisdom is not sufficient. That is why **חִכְמוֹת** is expressed in the plural form. (רש"י)

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