

Mishlei 14-02**Fear of Hashem****Key Concepts**

In his behavior a person inadvertently reveals much about his personal attitude towards the Creator. If he conducts himself in a disciplined, consistent manner he is demonstrating that a sense of awareness of Hashem is an important factor in his life. His reverence towards Hashem is expressed by the term "fear of Hashem" because he fears that his behavior will be inadequate relative to Hashem's expectations of him. That fear prevents him from neglecting his efforts to do what is right in every situation and prevents him from being influenced by enticements that are likely to lead to inappropriate behavior.

Resisting distractions and deviations from the straight path is a challenge to each individual, although some people are blessed with a more disciplined nature and a better sense of what is right in their personal situation. Therefore, every person needs to carefully examine his own conscience and ask himself if his attitude towards Hashem is what it should be and what he would like it to be.

Exploring Mishlei

(ב) הוֹלֵךְ בְּיִשְׁרוֹ יֵרָא ה' וְנִלְוֹ דְרָכָיו בּוֹזֵהוּ:

*If one consistently follows his personal straight path in his behavior,
it is a sign that he fears Hashem,*

but if his ways are unstable, it is a sign that he scorns [disregards] Hashem

This proverb contrasts the behavior that reflects whether a person fears Hashem and honors Him with his behavior or instead shows his disregard for Hashem by exposing himself to distractions that pull him in different directions.

Learning Mishlei

If one consistently follows

his own straight path — הוֹלֵךְ בְּיִשְׁרוֹ,

it is a sign that he fears Hashem — יֵרָא ה'.

for his respect towards Hashem prevents him from being distracted by varied interests and enticements, **but if his ways are vacillating – וַיִּלְוּ דְרָכָיו, he is effectively scorning Hashem – בּוֹזֵהוּ.**

Additional Insights

(1) The word *yashar* (straight) is defined by the shortest distance between two points. A person whose thinking process is *yashar* is drawn to what is right and, does not allow himself to get distracted by irrelevant issues. Thus, he sticks to the truth and avoids misleading analogies and irrelevant tangents. (מלבי"ם)

(2) By definition, *yiras Hashem* (fear of Hashem) can be driven by awe and reverence or by fear of punishment. However, from this proverb we see that the most worthy form of *yiras Hashem* is arrived at through awareness and respect for what is right (*yashar*). From the last phrase of the proverb (וַיִּלְוּ דְרָכָיו בּוֹזֵהוּ) we see that the person who fears Hashem honors Him by his *yirah*. Thus, the person who lacks *yirah* is effectively relating to Hashem with scorn, the opposite of *yirah*. (רבינו יונה)

(3) The proverb speaks of הוֹלֵךְ בְּיִשָּׁרוֹ, going along on his own straight path because each person is born with a unique combination of *middos* (character attributes). Therefore, the right way for each individual must take into account his own character. He has to do what is necessary to leverage his own good qualities and suppress his bad qualities. What is right for one is not necessarily right for someone else. However, the common denominator is that the way a person follows must always be defined by his *yiras Hashem*. A person who perverts or twists what is right for him in order to be admired by other people is guilty of scorning Hashem rather than honoring Him. He has demonstrated fear of man rather than fear of Hashem. (הגר"א)

(4) True fear of Hashem does not leave us in doubt about what we should do. It is like a guiding star that shows us the course of our duty and allows for no deviations. But whoever disdains this guiding star, remains without any support. The most varied interests and enticements, both inner and external, pull him in different directions and gain alternating influence over him. (רשר"ה)