

## Mishlei 14-02

# Fear of Hashem

### Key Concepts

People like to think of their relationship with Hashem as being very private and personal. However, in his behavior a person inadvertently reveals much about his personal attitude towards the Creator. A person who conducts himself in a disciplined, consistent manner 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 יִרְאֵהוּ וְנִלְוֹ דְרָכָיו בּוֹזֵהוּ:

*If one follows his straight path, [it is a sign that] he fears Hashem, but if his ways are irresolute it is a sign that he scorns [and neglects] Hashem*

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

### Learning Mishlei

(ב) הוֹלֵךְ בְּיִשְׁרוֹ יִרְאֵהוּ

וְנִלְוֹ דְרָכָיו בּוֹזֵהוּ:

If **one follows his** own personal **straight path** — הוֹלֵךְ בְּיִשְׁרוֹ, it is a sign that **he fears Hashem** — יִרְאֵהוּ for his respect towards Hashem prevents him from being

distracted by varied interests and enticements, **but if his ways are irresolute** — **וּנְלוּ דַרְכָּיו**, **he is** effectively **scorning** Hashem — **בּוֹזֵהוּ**.

## 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.

(1) The word **ישר** (straight) is defined by the shortest distance between two points. A person whose thinking process is **ישר** 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.

(2) By definition, '**יראת ה'**, 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 '**יראת ה'** is arrived at from awareness and respect for what is right (**ישר**). From the last phrase of the verse (**וּנְלוּ דַרְכָּיו בּוֹזֵהוּ**) we see that the person who fears Hashem honors Him by his **יראה**. Thus, the person who lacks **יראה** is effectively relating to Hashem with scorn, the opposite of **יראה**.

(3) The proverb speaks of **הוֹלֵךְ בְּיִשְׁרוֹ**, 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 '**יראת ה'**. 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.

(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.

## Sources

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

(3) - הגר"א

(4) - רשר"ה

(1) - מלבי"ם

(2) - רבינו יונה

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