

Mishlei 14-06

Attitude

Key Concepts

A person must have the right attitude if he wishes to learn any subject, but especially if the subject is the wisdom of the Torah. The attitude that is called for is one of humility and respect for what is being taught. Because learning takes effort, some people are inclined to develop a negative attitude that will justify their lax behavior in their own minds. For example, they will unconsciously put everything in a humorous frame of reference so that nothing needs to be taken seriously and everything is fit for mockery and scorn. Such a person is referred to as a לֵיטַז (*leitz*), a scoffer.

Because he excuses himself from a commitment to learning, the *leitz* often has time on his hands. Thus, the typical *leitz* is an expert at frittering away his time in idleness.

However, there is a price to pay for the irresponsible life of mockery and idleness. That price is ignorance.

Learning is a process that takes time, and wisdom must be absorbed to be of any value. When the *leitz* is in need of wisdom to resolve an important personal matter, he may try to call upon his store of acquired wisdom, but it won't be there.

The process of acquiring wisdom involves building upon that which is taught by parents and teachers. Through the process of review and reflection the person gains insight and understanding, also known as בִּינָה, *binah*. He finds that the wisdom that he has acquired is easily accessible because he has internalized it and it has become part of him. The insightful wisdom that has become internalized in a person's mind and heart is referred to as דַּעַת (*daas*), knowledge. The individual who goes through the process of internalizing his knowledge is referred to as a נָבוֹן (*navon*), man of understanding.

Exploring Mishlei

(ו) בְּקֶשׁ לֵץ חִכְמָה וְאִין וְדַעַת לְנָבוֹן נֶקֶל:

(6) *When the scoffer searches for wisdom there is none, but knowledge comes easily to the man of understanding.*

This proverb compares the availability of wisdom to people with contrasting attitudes. The scoffer, who avoids learning will find that it is unavailable when he needs it. The man of understanding who has worked on acquiring wisdom and internalizing it will find it readily accessible.

Guidance on the process of acquiring Wisdom may also be found in Mishlei segment 04-05.

Learning Mishlei

(6) When the **scoffer** searches his heart — בְּקֶשׁ לֵץ
 for wisdom — חִכְמָה
 there is none — וְאִין ,
 but even the most intense knowledge — וְדַעַת
 comes easily — נֶקֶל
 to the **man of understanding** — לְנָבוֹן

Additional Insights

- (1) A person must have wisdom in his heart if he wishes to make use of it. (רש"י)
- (2) The man of understanding (*navon*) has accustomed himself to wisdom through his efforts of learning and review. Thus, he is familiar with it and is able to call upon it when he needs it. (מצודות)
- (3) The scoffer (*leitz*) is engaged in two related activities that complement each other: mockery and idle conversation. The net effect is to distance him from wisdom. (רבינו יונה, אלשיך)
- (4) The process of internalizing wisdom is *binah*. It can be achieved only through fear of Hashem. A person who has no fear of Hashem will not receive the Divine

help that he needs to link one thought to another and establish a concept in his mind. (הגר"א)

(5) Not only is the scoffer unable to access new wisdom, in time he will lose any wisdom that he acquired. (הגר"א, שבט מיהודה)