

Mishlei 14-26

Devotion

(Pesukim 14:26 and 14:27)

Key Concepts

The Jewish nation survives today because of the promise that Hashem made to our forefather Avraham. Hashem made that promise in response to the selfless devotion that Avraham showed to Him, as it says, “Now I know that you are a G-d-fearing man” (*Bereishis 22:12*).

Avraham bequeathed his devotion to his descendants and so in each generation, Jews have continued to follow his example by living a life of devotion to Hashem. That ultimate devotion is described as *yiras Hashem* (fear of Hashem), a term that encapsulates two major concepts: reverence for the awesome majesty of the Creator and apprehension of incurring His displeasure.

To practise this devotion, the individual organizes his life around activities and behaviors that will please Hashem, as defined by the wisdom of the Torah that Hashem provided to His people and mankind.

In this segment Mishlei presents two proverbs that link the practice of *yiras Hashem* to the promise that it guarantees and also to the wisdom that is essential in guiding the individual to its effective fulfillment.

Exploring Mishlei

(כו) בִּירְאֵת ה' מְבֹטָח עַד וּלְבָנָיו יִהְיֶה מְחֻסָּה:

(כז) יִרְאֵת ה' מְקוֹר חַיִּים לְסוּר מִמִּקְשֵׁי מוֹת:

(26) *With the fear of Hashem, there is a firm promise,
and it will be a shelter for his children.*

(27) *The fear of Hashem is the wellspring of life,
to avoid the snares of death.*

In the first proverb (v. 26) Mishlei links *yiras Hashem* to the original promise made to Avraham. The person who behaves with *yiras Hashem* is assured that the

promise is still effective. He is also assured that the benefits of that promise will continue to be passed on to his own children.

In the second proverb (v. 27) Mishlei associates *yiras Hashem* with the wisdom of the Torah that his *yiras Hashem* inspires him to follow. That association is expressed by the expression "the wellspring of life" which was used in Segment 13-13 in reference to wisdom.

The essential combination of *yiras Hashem* and wisdom provides the individual with the necessary motivation and guidance to please His Creator and thereby to be worthy of the promise of life. Furthermore, since the challenges of life are given to man in the form of temptations, Mishlei points out that the fear of Hashem is a direct factor in motivating the individual to resist those temptations.

Learning Mishlei

(26) When there is no fear of Hashem,
a man's wisdom alone will leave him
with uncertainty about the future.

Only **with the fear of Hashem** — בְּיִרְאַת ה' .

is there a **firm promise** — מְבֹטָח עוֹ

for the future. **And for his children** — וּלְבָנָיו

it will be a shelter — יִהְיֶה מְחֻסָּה

They will be protected by the legacy of
righteousness that their father left them.

(27) When combined with wisdom,

the fear of Hashem — יִרְאַת ה'

is the **wellspring of life** — מְקוֹר חַיִּים.

It enables the person **to avoid** — לְסוֹר

the temptations of sin, keeping

from the snares of death — מִמְּקַשְׁי מוֹת

Additional Insights

(1) Wisdom cannot survive without *yiras Hashem* because even if a person has full command of the principles of wisdom, the temptations of life would easily entice him away from them. It is *yiras Hashem* that gives him the discipline to control his impulses. (מלב"ם)

(2) One *middah* (personal quality) may be identified as the ultimate source underlying all worthy activities and all other personal qualities. That ultimate source *middah* is *yiras Hashem*. (רבינו יונה)

(3) Wisdom is described as the source of life in Segment 13-13, but wisdom itself may be viewed as a derivative of *yiras Hashem*. (רלב"ג)

(4) Included within the concept of *yiras Hashem* is *ahavas Hashem* (love of Hashem). One of the derivative *middos* is *yiras ha'onesh* (fear of punishment). This type of *yirah* is of lesser significance because it lacks the component of *ahavas Hashem*. *Mishlei* states that a person should turn away from the "snares of death," referring to *yiras ha'onesh*. *It is better to focus on yiras Hashem*. (חנך לנער)