

## Mishlei 17-24

# Learning

### Key Concepts

The wisdom of the Torah is designed to be learned by ordinary human beings. But many people find great difficulties in learning because they approach it from the wrong perspective. If a person's thinking dwells on the massive quantities of knowledge that is encompassed by the Torah, he may get discouraged and fail to grasp any part of it. Such an unwise person is sure to fail.

And if he thinks he will only be able to learn if he has the benefit of a great scholar as his teacher, he may find that the scholar presents the material at a level of complexity which he is unable to grasp. He may gain much more knowledge from a teacher who can present knowledge at a basic level even though the student may be too proud to advertise this to his friends.

### Exploring Mishlei

(כד) אֶת פְּנֵי מַבִּין חֲכָמָה וְעֵינֵי כֹסִיל בְּקֶצֶה אָרֶץ :

***Right in front of an intelligent person there is wisdom;  
but the eyes of the fool are focused on the end of the earth.***

Mishlei refers to the intelligent student as a **מַבִּין**, that is, a person who understands what is right for him. In contrast, the unwise student is referred to as a **כֹּסִיל**, a fool who is motivated by the kind of pride that distorts his judgement.

Mishlei visualizes the intelligent student as having knowledge right in front of him. It is like a delicious meal which is there to be eaten and the student is thrilled to savor it. The fool has convinced himself that Torah knowledge is inherently difficult and is remote from him. Instead of focusing on what is in front of him, his eyes are directed to distant objectives. He thinks anything worthwhile cannot be right here.

The analysis of learning given here by Mishlei is primarily oriented to the student, distinguishing the intelligent student from the foolish student. At a later point ([18-15](#)) Mishlei presents an analysis of the modes of learning from the perspective of the Torah scholar.

## Learning Mishlei

(24) **Right in front – אֶת פְּנֵי**  
**of an intelligent person – מִבֵּין**  
there is **wisdom – חֵכְמָה**,  
**but the eyes of the fool – וְעֵינֵי כְסִיל**  
**are focused on the end of the earth – בְּקִצֵּה אֶרֶץ**

## Additional Insight

(1) The intelligent person looks at events in his immediate vicinity and gains wisdom from everything he sees and from anyone he speaks to. The fool disdains whatever is happening before his eyes. He thinks anything worthwhile must be in a distant land. (רלב"ג, רשר"ה)

(2) The wise student is open to gaining knowledge wherever he can find it. The fool does not recognize the truth even when he is looking at it. He judges wisdom by the prestige of the speaker and since there are no famous speakers in his immediate vicinity he remains ignorant. (רבינו יונה)

(3). The fool judges the value of what he is learning by its volume. He puts in effort only if he thinks he will be able to claim having acquired a complete book or chapter. If this is beyond him, he gives up. The wise student is happy with each element of knowledge, no matter how small. (הגר"א)