

Mishlei 19-08**Heart****Key Concepts**

A person's physical heart occupies a central and active role in the survival of his body throughout his lifetime. It is also a metaphor for his mind, character, and personality, all of which are spiritual qualities that affect his very existence as a human being, his very soul. As long as his heart continues to pump life-giving blood throughout every part of his body, the person is alive. In a similar manner, the ability of his mind to think and to control his behavior is critical to his continued existence as a person.

Mishlei is concerned with all of the qualities that exist within the framework of the person's spiritual heart. Whereas the physical heart operates autonomously without conscious attention, the individual is directly responsible for his spiritual heart at all times. This means he needs to actively work on developing and enhancing his spiritual qualities by building up his store of Torah wisdom and strengthening his ability to use that wisdom in directing his behavior.

Exploring Mishlei

ח - קָנָה לֵב אֱהֵב נַפְשׁוֹ שָׁמַר תְּבוּנָה לְמַצָּא טוֹב:

(8) One who acquires a heart loves his soul, he guards his understanding to find good.

This proverb speaks of acquiring "heart" which implies taking possession of all of the qualities that compose the spiritual, emotional, and intellectual framework that is essential to the person's existence in this world.

The proverb begins with the word קָנָה, making clear that each person has an active role in taking possession of something which Hashem has made available to him.

There are many ways of acquiring Torah wisdom and developing personal character. It is up to each individual to make use of them.

This is not easy to do, and the person who engages in it is showing his appreciation for his spiritual existence (נַפְשׁוֹ). The person's relationship to נַפְשׁוֹ is described as one of love (אֲהַב), reflecting his gratitude to Hashem for having created him and for having given him both physical and spiritual life.

The proverb continues by paying tribute to the role of his understanding (תְּבוּנָה) in managing and marshaling the person's spiritual resources. To be effective in his life's mission the person needs to guard (שָׁמַר) his understanding of Torah wisdom and his own relationship to that wisdom.

Such guarding requires constant effort because his path through life is strewn with distractions that pull him in other directions. However, if he keeps in mind that his efforts need to be constantly redirected to what is good (טוֹב), he will achieve his goal with Hashem's help. His access to טוב is described as a process of finding (לְמַצֵּא), suggesting that what he seeks is really there and has been provided for him. It is up to him to find it.

Learning Mishlei

One who **acquires** – קִנָּה
his spiritual, emotional and intellectual **heart** – לֵב
loves his soul – אֲהַב נַפְשׁוֹ.

He guards – שָׁמַר
and actively uses his gift of **understanding** – תְּבוּנָה
to find – לְמַצֵּא
only **good** – טוֹב.

Additional Insights

(1) A person's spiritual heart needs to master the emotional center of his personality so that he can take control of his instincts and govern them in accordance with the laws of morality. (מלבי"ם)

(2) Gaining true understanding is a challenging and difficult process. It is especially important to retain what one has learned so that he can translate it into action and actively develop himself as a person. (רבינו יונה)