

Mishlei 19-20**Wisdom – Truth**

(Pesukim 19:20 and 19:21)

Key Concepts

Mishlei teaches us the value of wisdom based on truth. This is Torah truth, revealed in the national experience of the Jewish people and in the testimony of that experience as passed on to us by successive generations over thousands of years.

However, every new generation is challenged to recognize Torah truth again in the face of misleading systems of thought that are constantly being introduced by the world at large. This problem is not new and Mishlei confronts it head on in the two proverbs that make up this segment.

Exploring Mishlei

First, Mishlei urges the reader to pay close attention to the wisdom being shared by his parents and teachers. The student cannot expect to be rewarded with a full understanding of all wisdom immediately. However, he is encouraged to continue his efforts in acquiring true wisdom as he matures in the years to come.

(כ) שְׁמַע עֵצָה וְקַבֵּל מוֹסֵר לְמַעַן תִּהְיֶה בְּאַחֲרֵיתָּךְ :
(20) Listen to counsel and accept moral instruction
in order that you will ultimately become wise .

Here in the first of two proverbs the student is encouraged to focus his attention on the practical knowledge of Torah, described as counsel (עֵצָה) and moral instruction (מוֹסֵר). The motivation to embark on these fundamental areas of learning is the promise that they they will ultimately lead to the wisdom of a satisfying and rewarding grasp of Torah concepts.

Mishlei assures him that his efforts are justified despite the unending flow of false information and erroneous ideas in the world. The wisdom of the Torah clearly outclasses all other competing sources as it comes to us from the mind of Hashem, our Creator.

(כא) רבות מחשבות בלב איש ועצת ה' היא תקום:
 (21) *There are many ideas in the heart of man, but it is the
 counsel of Hashem, that will prevail.*

But what about all the new thoughts that appear in the world scene in every generation. These are described as “the many ideas in the heart of man”. If they fit into the framework of Torah they can be understood as the counsel of Hashem, and the proverb assures us that this Torah wisdom will prevail. However, any ideas that conflict with Torah will not prevail and they are destined to be discarded.

Learning Mishlei

(20) Listen to the counsel — **שְׁמַע עֲצָה**

of your parents and teachers.

and gladly accept their moral instruction — **וְקַבַּל מוֹסֵר**

in order that you will ultimately become wise — **לְמַעַן תִּחְכְּמוּ**

at your life's end — **בְּאַחֲרֵיתֶךָ**.

(21) There are many thoughts — **רבות מחשבות**

in the heart of man — **בְּלֵב אִישׁ**,

but it is the counsel of Hashem — **וְעֵצַת ה'**,

that will prevail — **היא תקום**.

Additional Insights

[1] The word **בְּאַחֲרֵיתֶךָ** (at your life's end) suggests that a person should not wait too long before paying attention to guidance. He may think he has all the time in the world. But no one one knows how long he has to live. (רבינו יונה)

[2] The many thoughts (**מחשבות**) in the heart of man may also refer the many possibilities for a person's course of action, but the ultimate decision depends upon the will of Hashem. (מלב"ם)