

## Mishlei 19-23

# Fear

### Key Concepts

It is natural to feel fear when you are in the presence of a powerful force that is beyond your control. The intensity of your fear depends on what is going through your mind: (1) How real is the thing you are afraid of? (2) How much can it hurt you? (3) How much trust do you have in its good intentions?

Before the time of Avraham Avinu mankind lived in fear of heathen gods. People believed them to have the power to help them or harm them, but that imagined power was uncertain because the gods were not actually living beings.

In contrast to the people of his time, Avraham became aware that there is a single, living Creator. He grasped the reality that Hashem is totally responsible for the creation of the entire universe and for its continued existence. Avraham passed on this knowledge to his descendants with the expectation that they would live in obedience to the will of the Creator.

But since human beings were created as independent beings with free will, obedience to Hashem's universal laws of justice and righteousness did not come easy. The first and most difficult step for each person was to accept that he is a created being who is subservient to a Power that he cannot see. The individual's mission is to overcome his ordinary self-serving inclination (his *yetzer hara*) and choose what is good because that is the wish of his Creator.

Doing Hashem's will begins with the concept of Yiras Hashem, the Fear of Hashem. That means the person believes in the reality of Hashem's existence and His infinite power. It also means he totally believes in the righteousness and fairness of Hashem's ways. As a result, the Fear of Hashem is not experienced as a debilitating

emotion. It is just the opposite, bringing with it a sense of peace and security in the knowledge that he is living a life of goodness, under the protection of the Creator Whose intention is always good and just.

Basically, a life governed by the fear of Hashem is lived in obedience to the will of Hashem. Such a person relies on the protection of Hashem and so he has no reason to fear any other power. The only anxiety that he feels is the concern that he may disappoint his Creator by misinterpreting or neglecting any aspect of the eternal Torah, which is the expression of man's duty in the world.

## Exploring Mishlei

(כג) יִרְאַת ה' לְחַיִּים וְשָׂבַע יָלִין בֶּל יִפְקֹד רָע:

*The fear of Hashem leads to life; and the person will live in satisfied serenity, free of any calamity.*

This proverb summarizes the benefits of a life motivated by Yiras Hashem and lived in obedience to the will of Hashem.

The first benefit is life itself, a life that is granted by Hashem for the purpose of obeying the laws of His Torah (יִרְאַת ה' לְחַיִּים). The second benefit is peace of mind so that he can sleep at night easily (וְשָׂבַע יָלִין), secure in the knowledge that Hashem is pleased with him and that his needs will be looked after (בֶּל יִפְקֹד רָע).

## Learning Mishlei

(כג) יִרְאַת ה' לְחַיִּים  
וְשָׂבַע יָלִין בֶּל יִפְקֹד רָע:

The **fear of Hashem** – יִרְאַת ה'

leads **to** a full **life** – לְחַיִּים;

the person who lives such a life

**will sleep** secure and **satisfied** – וְשָׂבַע יָלִין .

He can be confident that

**he will not be struck by tragedy** – בֶּל יִפְקֹד רָע

for he knows that whatever happens is in the framework of Hashem's plan for the world.

## Additional Insights

(1) A life without the fear of Hashem is not free of fear. On the contrary it is a life of uncertainty. Worrying about all the things that could go wrong will affect his health and shorten his days. (מלבים)

(2) The fear of Hashem restrains a person from thirsting after luxuries that are unneeded and potentially harmful. As a result, he will rejoice in what he has and will not be frustrated by vain efforts to acquire what he doesn't have. (רלביג)

(3) Whether a day brings loss or gain, if a person has the fear of Hashem he is satisfied. He knows that his *tefillos* have been carefully considered. Even if a wish has been denied him, he is at peace with the opportunity to demonstrate his faithfulness in the face of such a denial. (רשרייה)