

Mishlei 20-05

Wisdom – Insight

Key Concepts

The Hebrew word **דַעַת** (*Daas*) may be translated as knowledge or wisdom, but refers to a special type of insight that has been internalized through personal experience and deep thought so that a person who is aware of his accumulated *Daas* can be effectively guided by it throughout his life.

There is no comparison between a child being told that a flame is hot and the actual experience of being burned by a match. Thus, the child who has felt the effect of the fire has internalized the *Daas* and is more convinced of its truth.

A teacher who has transmitted knowledge with love will be more effective at bringing the student to the point of internalizing the knowledge so that it becomes truly *Daas*.

The first source of human *Daas* is the gift of intelligence granted to a person by his Creator at birth. Throughout a person's life, he has the opportunity to expand upon his store of *Daas* by learning from experience and by reflecting upon what he has observed. If used properly, his *Daas* will guide him in a continuous acquisition of ever greater *Daas*.

Daas also implies the word **עֵצָה** (counsel) because a person's *Daas* is continually available to him to advise him in every decision that he makes throughout his life.

Despite the depth of *Daas* in a person's mind and heart he will periodically be confronted by the need to consult people with even greater *Daas*, either because they are older and have had more time to accumulate it, or because their conscientious devotion to learning has helped them absorb *Daas* in more creative and more disciplined ways.

Exploring Mishlei

(ה) מִיָּם עֲמֻקִּים עֵצָה בְּלֵב אִישׁ וְאִישׁ תְּבוּנָה יִדְלָנָה

(5) *The store of insightful wisdom in each man's heart is like a well of deep water. It takes a man of understanding to draw it out and apply it to daily life.*

The two parts of the posuk are teaching us two important aspects of *Daas*. The first is that no matter how young he is, every person is in possession of a great deal of *Daas*, far more than he realizes. Everything that he knows through personal experience, and every instinct that his heart perceives gives him knowledge about himself and about the world around him.

The second part of the posuk reminds him of the opportunity he has been granted to make use of that *Daas*, but only if he makes the effort to consciously draw upon it. Because aspects of *Daas* exist at great depths, he must be ready to patiently meditate and reflect upon the lessons that life has taught him. By drawing upon his accumulated *Daas*, he has the opportunity to find the wisdom to do what is right in each situation.

Learning Mishlei

(5) There is **deep water** — **מים עמקים**
 in the well of **insightful knowledge** — **עצה**
 that is to be found in each man's heart — **בלב איש**,
and a man of understanding — **ואיש תבונה**
draws it out — **יִדְלֶנָה**.

Without using the actual word, Mishlei has chosen the metaphor of a very deep well to illustrate the process of acquiring and using *Daas*. The amount of water in the well is not apparent from its surface, but a wise person realizes that there is much more than he sees because it has accumulated over many seasons. To plumb the depth of the well, he must carefully lower his pail to the most appropriate depth and then work hard to bring up the particular sample of water that meets his needs at the time. All of this requires thought and that is why Mishlei describes him as a man of understanding — **איש תבונה**.

Additional Insights

[1] The work of drawing water from a well may be compared with a step-by-step process of investigating a situation to get at the truth. (חנוך לנער)

[2] When making a decision it is sometimes necessary to choose from a wide range of possibilities. That means each option needs to be investigated and understood before a conclusion can be reached. The demands of such analysis are suggested by the word **עצה** (counsel). (מלבי"ם)

[3] To gain full insight into a body of knowledge one must realize that knowledge exists at various levels. The teacher may begin with a superficial overview and leave it to the student to delve into ever greater depths of hidden complexity until he has reached the full truth. (רש"י)