

Mishlei 20-12**Diligence – Alertness****Key Concepts**

In order for a person to function in this world he needs to be aware of what is going on around him. To enable this awareness, Hashem provided him with a variety of sensing instruments, the most valuable of which are his eyes and ears. But those senses can only give him the information he needs when he is awake and actively using them. Periods of sleep are necessary, but a person's senses are effectively shut down when he drifts off into the state of unconsciousness that is sleep.

In the course of two proverbs, Mishlei now urges us to maximize our periods of sensory wakefulness and alertness so that we can more effectively fulfill our obligations to our Creator and our families.

Exploring Mishlei

(יב) אֶזֶן שְׁמַעַת וְעֵין רֹאֶה ה' עָשָׂה גַם שְׁנֵיהֶם:

(12) *A hearing ear and a seeing eye, Hashem made also both of them.*

Mishlei begins by identifying our two most valuable sensory instruments, the ears and the eyes. Their unique value is emphasized by mentioning only one of each. However, the ear is listed before the eye because we are concerned here with alertness. The ear is always open. So, it is alert and ready to hear even when the person is sleepy. In contrast, the eyelid is physically closed as the person's alertness begins to slow down.

The point we need to remember is that each of these two types of sensory instrument offers its own dimension into the world around us (sound and images). That means neither of the two can substitute for the other and both were provided to us by Hashem so that we can fully use the capability that they provide us.

(יג) אַל תִּאָהֵב שְׁנָה פֶּן תִּנְרָשׁ פִּקַּח עֵינֶיךָ שְׁבַע לָחֶם:

(13) *Don't love sleep lest you become poor.*

Open your eyes to be gratified with food.

In the second proverb Mishlei emphasizes the importance of alertness by urging us to reduce our attachment to the pleasures of sleep. Sleep can be very comforting, but it comes at a high price. Too much sleep can easily be associated with poverty because the necessary work is not being done.

The proverb continues by revealing the symbolic function associated with our eyes. Our eyes offer a window into the physical world, but also into the spiritual and intellectual world. One comes with the other. The visual images that one perceives in the physical world serve as a platform to imagine ideas.

Furthermore, once a person realizes the relationship between work and reward, he will be positioned to be rewarded with the food that he grows or earns. The term “food” corresponds, not only to the bread we eat but the substance of all the obligations we are able to fulfill by means of the clarity of mind that comes with alertness. For example, to gain the ability to learn Torah, one must be willing to forego a corresponding amount of sleep.

Learning Mishlei

(12) A hearing ear — אֵזֶן שְׁמַעַת —
and a seeing eye — וְעֵין רֹאֶה —
Hashem made both of them — ה' עָשָׂה גַם שְׁנֵיהֶם — .

(13) Don't love sleep — אַל תֶּאָהֵב שְׁנָה —
lest you become poor. — כִּן תִּהְיֶה עָשׂוּר —
Open your eyes — פְּקַח עֵינֶיךָ —
so that you will be motivated to work. And so you will be gratified with food — שְׂבַע לָחֶם .

Additional Insight

[1] We understand what we are seeing based on the ideas that we have gained by listening to other people. Thus, hearing comes before sight. (מלבים)

[1] Hashem not only made the physical ear, He also made the ability of the ear to perceive sound. Similarly, he made the eye and also the ability of the eye to perceive images. This duality is implied in the first proverb by the word **גַּם**, “also”. (מצודות)