

## Mishlei 01-01

# Introduction

[Pesukim 1:1 thru 1:6]

### Key Concepts

In this first segment (01-01) of Mishlei Chapter 1, Shlomo Hamelech (King Solomon) introduces himself as the author of the book. He explains what it is meant to accomplish and what techniques he will use. The basic building block is the allegory (*mashal*), which is used to present a principle of moral and spiritual guidance so that the book may be thought of as a series of allegories (*Mishlei*).

However, as used here the term “*mashal*” is not limited to a narrative allegory, such as a parable. It also includes the use of metaphors and images to make abstract concepts come alive. In many cases, the principles of righteous moral behavior are stated bluntly without the embellishment of allegory and for this reason, the more inclusive term “Proverbs” is sometimes used in referring to this book.

### Exploring Mishlei

**THEME OF THE BOOK.** Shlomo Hamelech introduces the subject matter of the book. He then describes its purpose which is to teach a person how to make good choices in life. This requires knowledge and the enlightened moral discipline necessary to apply that knowledge. The book also instructs the student in how to acquire an insight into three essential uses of personal judgment in social relationships: righteousness (*tzedek*), justice (*mishpat*), and fairness (*meisharim*).

(א) מְשָׁלִי שְׁלֹמֹה בֶן דָּוִד מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל.  
(ב) לְדַעַת חֲכָמָה וּמוֹסָר לְהַבִּין אֲמָרֵי בִינָה.  
(ג) לְקַחַת מוֹסָר הַשְּׂכֵל צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט וּמִיִּשְׁרָיִם.

***(1) The allegories of Shlomo son of David, King of Yisrael. (2) To know wisdom and moral discipline (mussar), to comprehend abstract ideas. (3) To acquire enlightened mussar, righteousness, justice, and fairness.***

**AUDIENCE.** The author describes for whom the book of Mishlei was intended. Included are naive people and young people who have not had the benefit of learning

from experience, as well as learned people who want to acquire analytical tools to add to their store of learning.

(ד) לַתֵּת לַפְתָּאִים עֲרֻמָּה לְנֶעַר דַּעַת וּמִזְמָה.  
 (ה) יִשְׁמַע חָכָם וַיּוֹסֶף לָקַח וְנַבֹּן תַּחְבֻּלוֹת יִקְנֶה.  
 (ו) לְהַבִּין מָשָׁל וּמְלִיצָה דְבָרֵי חֲכָמִים וְחִידוֹתָם.

**(4) To provide cleverness to naive people; knowledge and thoughtfulness to the young. (5) Let the learned man listen and add to his store of learning; and let the deep thinker acquire analytical tools. (6) To understand allegory and interpretation, teachings of the wise and their enigmas.**

**ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS.** As explained by Rav Shmshon Rafael Hirsch, the underlying root of the word “*mashal*” is the same as that of “ruler” (*moshel*). It is something that determines the role or function of other entities. The “*mashal*” points to the underlying message (*nimshel*) just as the “*moshel*” points to the group of people over which he rules.

The book relies heavily upon narrative allegories and metaphors. These are essential tools to support a person’s grasp of intellectual concepts by relating them to the instinctive knowledge that he has gained through experience. Thus, the intellect can acquire an understanding of the unknown by clothing it in images of the known.

In contrast to Tehillim, where each *mizmor* (chapter) has a unique theme, many of which are connected, Mishlei is organized as a series of relatively independent messages or “*meshalim*.” Therefore, this elucidation of Mishlei is presented here as a series of independent segments, each reflecting a specific theme or moral lesson. Each segment will be numbered by the chapter (*perek*) in which it appears and its location within the *perek*.

We are now in segment 01 of Chapter 1 of Mishlei (01-01). We will begin by learning each of the six pesukim (verses) that make up this segment.

## Learning Mishlei

### THEME OF THE BOOK.

(א) מְשָׁלֵי שְׁלֹמֹה בֶן דָּוִד מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל.

(1) This book contains the instructive **allegories** — מְשָׁלֵי — and other wise teachings of **Shlomo** — שְׁלֹמֹה, who was granted profound wisdom by Hashem. Shlomo was the **son of King David** — בֶּן דָּוִד — who taught him the wisdom he had learned in a life of many challenges. Like his father, Shlomo was **King of Yisrael** — מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל — and acquired additional wisdom through interaction with his people.

(ב) לְדַעַת חֲכָמָה וּמוֹסָר לְהַבִּין אֲמָרֵי בִינָה.

(2) The purpose of this book is for the student to **clearly know** — לְדַעַת — the principles of **wisdom** (*chochmah*) — חֲכָמָה. Wisdom is the knowledge that guides a person in making good choices in life. Because such wisdom often runs counter to the person's instinctive nature, it cannot be derived from human experience but must be acquired through Divinely inspired teachings.

The teachings of this book also guide the student in the **moral discipline** (*mussar*) — וּמוֹסָר, to apply the wisdom that he has learned. He needs this discipline to overcome the inclination to make unwise choices in life. At its root the basis of moral discipline is the fear of Hashem.

To facilitate these objectives, the teachings of this book instruct the student in how to analyze and **comprehend abstract ideas** — לְהַבִּין אֲמָרֵי בִינָה.

The tool for achieving this understanding is the human intellect, which has the capacity to absorb received truths and gain new insight into them by deriving truths from one another.

(ג) לְקַחַת מוֹסָר הַשֶּׁכֶּל צֶדֶק וּמִשְׁפָּט וּמִיִּשְׁרָיִם.

This book also instructs the student in how to acquire — לְקַחַת — a higher form of **moral discipline** — מוֹסָר.

that is **enlightened** — **הַשְׁכִּיל**

by reverence for the greatness of Hashem, as opposed to the fear of punishment.

In addition, this book instructs the student how to acquire an insight into three essential uses of personal judgment in social relationships and to know when to apply each one, depending on the circumstance:

1) righteousness — **צְדָקָה**,

which is going beyond the letter of the law.

2) and justice — **וּמִשְׁפָּט**,

which is adhering to the exact requirement of the law,

3) and fairness — **וּמִיִּשְׁרָיִם**,

which is acting in an equitable and balanced manner even when the law is not specific.

### AUDIENCE FOR THE BOOK

(ד) לְתֵת לְפִתְאִים עֲרָמָה לְנֹעַר דַּעַת וּמְזֻמָּה.

This book can **provide** — **לְתֵת**

**naïve people** — **לְפִתְאִים**

with **cleverness** — **עֲרָמָה**.

People who have not worked on developing their moral strength may easily be swayed by the *yetzer hara* (evil inclination). This book will teach them what to look for and how to resist it.

Furthermore, this book can provide

the **inexperienced youth** — **לְנֹעַר**

with knowledge — **דַּעַת**

of the temptations that exist in the world

and the discretion — **וּמְזֻמָּה**

to guard against them.

(ה) יִשְׁמַע חָכָם וַיּוֹסֶף לְקַח וְנָבוֹן תַּחְבֵּלוֹת יִקְנֶה.

The **learned man will be able to listen** — **יִשְׁמַע חָכָם**

to the teachings of this book

and **add** to his store of **learning** — **וַיּוֹסֶף לְקַח**

by exploring and interpreting the ideas presented here.

**And the deep thinker — וְנָבוֹן**  
**will acquire analytical tools — תְּחַבֵּלוֹת יִקְנֶה**  
 by which he can discover insights that would otherwise have escaped him.

(ו) לְהַבִּין מָשָׁל וּמְלִיצָה דְּבָרֵי חֲכָמִים וְחִידָתָם.

Working with this book the student will learn

**to understand — לְהַבִּין**

four basic forms in which the subject matter  
 of chochmah and mussar are presented,  
 in this book and elsewhere:

(1) **Allegory — מָשָׁל**,

which includes parables, images, and metaphors as used throughout the *Tanach*,  
 but especially in this book

(2) **Interpretation — וּמְלִיצָה**

of the allegory. The interpretation may be clearly implied by the context, by tradi-  
 tion, or through inspired analysis by Torah scholars. An allegory may have multi-  
 ple levels of interpretation, each of which is valid.

(3) **Teachings of the wise — דְּבָרֵי חֲכָמִים**,

*chochmah* and *mussar* presented in the Oral Torah *as an extension and  
 enhancement of the Written Torah*.

(4) **and their Enigmas — וְחִידָתָם**,

additional teachings of the wise that are stated in enigmatic form, but which can  
 be elucidated through the allegories like those in this book.