

Mishlei 21-21

Setting Goals

Key Concepts

Mishlei teaches us the importance of setting goals in life and striving to achieve those goals. A person without goals floats through life but is not likely to achieve anything worthwhile. However, choosing goals that are meaningful to the individual and that are consistent with what Hashem expects of us will always be a challenge.

By studying the proverb in this segment, we can gain some insight into our choice of goals and the guidance that we get from Hashem in meeting them. Mishlei is telling us that if our goals are meritorious, the appropriate achievement or reward will come, seemingly as a chance discovery. One day we will realize that we have been finding what we are looking for.

Exploring Mishlei

The first part of the proverb identifies two worthwhile goals as something to be pursued energetically. These goals are stated in general terms, the implication being that Hashem will guide the individual to tailor them to the circumstances of his life.

(כא) רִדְף צְדָקָה וְחֶסֶד יִמְצָא חַיִּים צְדָקָה וְכְבוֹד :
 (21) *He who pursues righteousness and kindness,*
will find life, prosperity, and honor.

The second part of the proverb describes how those circumstances will lend themselves to a rewarding and effective result. The end result of each person's pursuit is described as something that is "found" because the control over that result belongs to Hashem. To us it will appear as a welcome surprise, the way a found object appears. In general, the "finding" that results from working toward each goal will be something that helps us as we continue pursuing it, the way that the gift of life enables us to perform *mitzvos*.

Learning Mishlei

(21) He who strives for righteousness — רִדָּף צְדָקָה
 and kindness, — וְחֶסֶד
 will find, — יִמְצָא
 life, — חַיִּים
 prosperity, — צְדָקָה
 and honor. — וְכְבוֹד.

Additional Insights

[1] The first of the sample goals is *tzedakah*, which may be understood as the charity that the individual hopes to give over the course of his life. It may also be understood as righteousness (*tzidkus*), which is the characteristic of an individual who is strongly motivated to do what is right, that is, to please Hashem with everything he does.

[2] The second of the sample goals is *chesed* or kindness, which refers to characteristic acts of kindness with which the individual treats others.

[3] The first of the sample rewards is life, which is both a reward and enabling quality. The second is *tzedakah*, which can be translated as the “prosperity” that enables a person to give charity and perform other acts of kindness. The third is *kavod* (honor), which gives the person the public recognition that enables him to perform leadership functions.