

Mishlei 22-05

Prudence

Key Concepts

Every step that we take in life is guarded by Hashem. But that doesn't mean we can be careless about taking normal precautions for our well-being. If we took such a negligent attitude, it would suggest that we are counting on Hashem to perform miracles for us. Recklessly exposing ourselves to danger is like testing Hashem's willingness and ability to protect us.

Exploring Mishlei

(ה) צְנִיִּים פְּחִים בְּדֶרֶךְ עֵקֶשׁ שׁוֹמֵר נֶפְשׁוֹ יִרְחַק מֵהֶם :
 (5) *Thorns and traps are to be found on a rugged path,
 the prudent person takes care to avoid them .*

A prudent person takes extra care when walking on a rugged path strewn with obstacles. Such a path may have natural obstacles such as thorns (צְנִיִּים) or man-made obstacles, such as traps or snares (פְּחִים). Either way a bad misstep can lead to serious injury.

Learning Mishlei

(5) Thorns and traps — צְנִיִּים פְּחִים
 on a rugged path, — בְּדֶרֶךְ עֵקֶשׁ
 a prudent person — שׁוֹמֵר נֶפְשׁוֹ
 should avoid (distance himself from) them. — יִרְחַק מֵהֶם

Additional Insights

[1] In an alternate translation, the words צְנִיִּים פְּחִים refer to extremes of cold and heat. A person who has a habit of going out in harsh weather without the proper clothing is foolishly risking his health. (מלב"ים)

[2] The proverb is also teaching that just as extremes of heat and cold are unhealthy, a person should choose avoid extremes in behavior patterns. He

should train himself to find a balanced mixture of character traits.

(מלבי"ם)

[3] The literal meaning of the expression **שׁוֹמֵר נַפְשׁוֹ** is “guardian of his soul”, but it may be translated as referring to one who watches himself, that is, he guards his health.