



MUSINGS ON MISHLEI

THE CHALLENGES OF OUR GENERATION

By Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita

Mishlei is a sefer that is renowned for its untarnished common sense. Every posuk beckons us closer, offering some understanding in a world filled with turmoil. Our lives are spinning on the high octane fuel of materialism that has not been known in any previous generation. Technology races forward, leaving us trying to catch up. New challenges spew forth, and we become weary with worry about how we can cope, striving to understand which aspects are positive and which spell danger.

The secular world can never understand what the Yiddisher neshoma feels, what these challenges mean to us. Society keeps changing its norms. Today normal is something that is anything but normal. The rules that used to guide common decency have been thrown overboard. In their place is a political correctness that drives people into an abysmal sinkhole of permissibility and leaves the world dark and empty. The neshoma of a Yied needs more than the diversion of technological toys and false friends that are neither real nor friends. We have a need that will never be fulfilled through accessing emptiness on a screen or chasing after celebrity, even if it is dressed in heimishe garb.

“The light of our Rebbes brings us the illuminating source of true rejoicing”

Mishlei tells us:

“He who goes with the wise will become wise, but he who befriends the fools will be broken.” (3:20)

In this rush towards the abyss we have but one tool to hand: we can heed the voice of our Torah leaders, striving to absorb their sacred guidance into our individual reality. Throughout our long Golus we have been challenged by unfathomable situations. Each generation had difficulties that were tailor-made for that particular moment in history. Today’s neshomas are tailor-made for the particular dangers we are facing. No other generation could have faced this onslaught. This is our challenge and we have been granted Gedolim whose Torah can lead us through it all. Our problem starts when we veer away on our own, thinking we know better.

“The instruction of a wise man is a spring of life, to turn away from the snares of death.” (13:14)

We have in our hands so much Torah knowledge. More seforim are being published now than ever before. Even technology has an ability to give us Torah lectures and guidance from leaders from every corner of the world. We can beat this darkness that threatens us; the answers can be found in our shuls, yeshivas, Beis Yaakov mosdos, shtieblech, and kollelim. In a storm, it is the tree with deep roots that remains standing. Our roots are truly deep; they start from Har Sinai and our holy ancestors. Our young need to be given this wealth of spirituality in a way they can grasp, and this must come from our Sages.

I write these words on the Yohrzeit of the Piaseczna Rebbe ztl, the Aish Kodesh. His was another generation, one that faced its own unique challenges. Even before the Churban, Poland and the rest of Eastern Europe suffered from the Holocaust that was the “enlightenment”. Thousands of Torah-loyal Jews lost its children to the idols of all the “isms” that beckoned to the weak and downtrodden. It was the holy illumination that came forth from our leaders that kept the faith of Klal Yisroel alive and whole. The Aish Kodesh was just such a light. The Bobover Rebbe ztl, Rav Shloma, went to visit the Rebbe when he was in Warsaw. He wanted to hear first-hand the Rebbe’s insights on education and how to give over to the troubled youth a sense of vibrant Yiddishkeit.

The Rebbe left us a few of his holy seforim. One was a journal, something of a rarity in those times but well worth learning. In it he shares his thoughts at reaching the age of forty:

I need to commit myself to do more, but do what? To learn more? I think that as far as possible, I don’t waste any time. To abstain from physical pleasures? If my own desires are not fooling me, Boruch Hashem, I am not attached to them. So what am I missing? Simply to be a Yied

The Rebbe goes on to explain that beyond all the learning and avodah he had attained, the one vital need his soul sought was to be a plain, simple unvarnished Yied.

We may think such words hold no place in our complicated world. In a time where everything is superficial, where would a plain simple Yied be able to survive? The answer can be found in another passage from this perek of Mishlei.

“The light of the righteous will rejoice, but the candle of the wicked will ebb away.” (13:9)

The light of our Rebbes brings us the illuminating source of true rejoicing. Their sparks continue to ignite our inner souls with eternal light. All the battery-operated gizmos of the modern world ultimately fail; their darkness drags us down.

The Rebbe wrote these words for all future generations. He understood that there would be a time when we would be left questioning what it is Hashem wants of us. He speaks with sweet humility; all there ever was, will ever be, is to seek to be a Yied.