

in me [the Torah] will you lengthen days, and years of life will be added to you” (*Mishlei* 9:11). And it says: “An abundance of days is at its right; at its left are riches and honor” (*Mishlei* 3:16). And it says: “For an abundance of days, years of life, and peace shall they increase for you” (*Mishlei* 3:2).

MISHNAH 7

⚔ *Torah: The Source of Life*⁵⁶ ⚔

My son,⁵⁷ pay attention to my speech; to my words incline your ear. Let them not move from [before] your eyes; guard them inside your heart. For they [the Torah’s words] are a source of life for those who find them, and a source of health for one’s whole body.

In these three verses, Shlomo HaMelech is adjuring the nation to remain loyal to the Torah. He speaks in the Torah’s voice, admonishing the people to make sure that three of their organs — their ears, their eyes, and their hearts — follow

56. The Mishnah posits that the Torah is a source of life and health for its students and adduces a number of proof-verses. The commentary will analyze some of those verses to show how they are relevant to the theme. This first section has been adapted from the Alshich’s commentary to *Mishlei* 4:20–22 and *Shemos* 15:26.

57. *Mishlei* 4:20–22; the Alshich’s commentary ties these three verses together, even though the Mishnah adduces only the third verse, *For they are a source of life... for one’s whole body.*

יְמִיךָ וְיוֹסִיפוּ לְךָ שְׁנוֹת חַיִּים (שם ט,יא). וְאוֹמֵר: אָרְךָ יָמִים
בְּיָמֶיךָ בְּשִׂמְאוֹלָה עֶשֶׂר וְכָבוֹד (שם ג, טז). וְאוֹמֵר: כִּי אָרְךָ
יָמִים וְשְׁנוֹת חַיִּים וְשָׁלוֹם יוֹסִיפוּ לְךָ (שם ג, ב).

faithfully in the Torah's ways: *My son, pay attention ... incline your ear... your eyes...your heart.* Why does he specify those particular parts of the body?

The Sages teach that the heart and the eyes are the scouts for the body's baser lusts; they solicit sins for the pleasure of the body. The eyes seek until they see something immoral; the heart desires what the eyes see; and the body carries out the sin.⁵⁸ Now, sin is the major cause of sickness, and restraining oneself from sin is the best way to preserve one's health. Thus Hashem proclaimed, *If you will listen well to the voice of Hashem... and you will give ear to His mitzvos... any of the maladies that I placed upon Egypt I will not place upon you, for I am Hashem, your Healer!* (*Shemos* 15:26). Interestingly, we find the ears singled out here as well from all the bodily organs for special mention concerning loyalty to the Torah's ways.

The prophet makes a similar statement: *Incline your ear and come to Me; listen and your soul shall live* (*Yeshayahu* 55:3). The Midrash expounds on this verse with a parable: If a man falls from the roof and breaks many of his bones, the doctor will apply splints, casts and bandages to all the parts that were injured. But Hashem says, "I heal in a different manner. I have supplied each person with 248 body parts,⁵⁹ two of which are

58. *Midrash Tanchuma, Shelach* 15, cited in Rashi to *Bamidbar* 15:39.

59. See concluding Mishnah, footnote 9, p. 383.

the ears. I apply a single bandage to the patient — the verse, *Incline your ear... listen, and your soul shall live* — and if the patient takes that to heart, his entire body is healed from its spiritual maladies and regains its vibrancy.”

This is the meaning of Shlomo HaMelech’s message: *My son, pay attention ... incline your ear... your eyes...your heart.* The wise king is teaching us how we can train our eyes to seek out what is good and to turn them away from what the Torah considers abominable. If you pay attention and incline your ears to the Torah’s words, then your eyes will also absorb what your ears are listening to and they will abandon your body’s base animal lusts; they will seek out mitzvah opportunities for you instead. And after you have won over one of your body’s scouts, your eyes, the other scout (your heart) will follow suit. Then all the rest of your organs will join them in quick succession. *My son, pay attention... incline your ear,* [then the Torah’s words will] *not move from* [before] *your eyes;* [and you will] *guard them inside your heart.* [Then those words will be] *a source of life for* [you], *and a source of health for* [your] *whole body.*

≡ *Torah: The Tree of Life*⁶⁰ ≡

[THE TORAH] *is a tree of life for those who support it.* According to the Sages, this first part of the verse refers to donors who partner with Torah students by supplying them with all their needs, thus freeing them to pursue their studies full time. Just as the Torah is a source of life and health for its students, so it is for the generous donors who sustain those students with

60. This section has been adapted from the Alshich’s commentary to *Mishlei* 3:18.

the financial support that enables them to dedicate their lives to Torah pursuits. But to what kind of support does the verse refer? The Midrash cites a long-lasting partnership that began with Yaakov Avinu's sons Yissachar and Zevulun and was continued by their offspring, the Tribes of Yisrael that bore their names. In their unique partnership, Yissachar and his descendants would spend their days in the *beis midrash*, studying and teaching Torah, while Zevulun and his descendants would engage in commerce. Zevulun would supply Yissachar with full financial support and Yissachar would share the rewards of his Torah study with Zevulun.⁶¹ This part of the *pasuk* refers to just such a joint venture.

Note that it does not mention that the Torah is *a tree of life* for those who study it, but for those who support it. That is because such mention would be superfluous, for it is logical that if the Torah is a tree of life for one who merely supports Torah study, it must function in the same role for the one who actually spends all his time studying and teaching Torah.

The provider of full support for a Torah student can be compared to one who plants a tree, waters it regularly, and nurtures it in every way necessary for the tree to thrive. But we are not speaking of an ordinary tree; rather, we mean a tree with special fruits that endow those who consume them

61. *Midrash Tanchuma, Vayechi* 11 and *Bereishis Rabbah* 99:9; cited in Rashi's commentary to *Bereishis* 49:13 and *Devarim* 33:18. Another example of such a partnership is found in the first Mishnah of *Maseches Zevachim*, which cites the opinion of a Tanna known as "Shimon the brother of Azariah." Rashi there explains that those two brothers had formed a Yissachar-Zevulun partnership and, because Azariah supported his brother's studies, Shimon was referred to as "the brother of Azariah." See also Rashi to *Sotah* 21a.