

Mishlei 04-14**The Wrong Road**

[Pesukim 4:14 thru 4:19]

Key Concepts

Mishlei reminds us that as we travel our road through life, we can easily get side-tracked onto a bad road. Whereas the good road is illuminated by the light of wisdom, the bad road is immersed in spiritual darkness. That darkness causes people to stumble and fall.

Why would anyone get onto a bad road? From the time we get up in the morning we are faced with decisions, large and small. Facing so many decisions is very tiresome and so we get into the habit of not thinking about the implications of each decision. Instead, if the situation is similar to one that we faced before, we just make the same choice, hoping that if it worked before, it will work again.

So, we don't always realize what road we are on unless we stop to think about it. Mishlei suggests that we check to see who else is on that road. If the road is traveled by people lacking morality or integrity, it is the wrong road for us, even though we are confident that we can reach our destination without being affected by the *resha'im* (wicked people) we encounter on our way.

In talking about roads, Mishlei speaks about both a narrow path or lane (*orach*) that leads to a specific destination and a major road or thoroughfare (*derech*) which leads to many places. We need to be careful about all types of road because there are all kinds of decisions to be made in life.

Exploring Mishlei

STAY AWAY. Mishlei begins this segment by admonishing us to avoid the road being traveled by *resha'im*. If we find ourselves on such a road, we should get off immediately.

(יד) בְּאַרְחַ רְשָׁעִים אַל תֵּבֵא וְאַל תֵּאֲשֶׁר בְּדֶרֶךְ רָעִים :

(14) Don't go into the path of resha'im.

Don't take a step on the road of dishonest people.

(טו) פִּרְעֵהוּ, אֶל תַּעֲבֹר בּוֹ שְׂטָה מֵעַלְיוֹ וְעִבּוֹר:

(15) Reject their practices.

Don't pass by that way. Turn away from it.

PATTERNS OF BEHAVIOR. Mishlei reminds us that the *resha'im* on that road are not just innocent travelers. It is not immediately apparent, but they get their satisfaction through establishing patterns of behavior that are spiritually destructive.

(טז) כִּי לֹא יִשְׁנוּ אִם לֹא יִרְעוּ וְנִגְזְלָה שְׁנָתָם אִם לֹא יִכְשִׁילוּ:

(16) For they can't sleep if they don't practice evil.

Their sleep will be robbed if they don't cause others to fail.

(יז) כִּי לַחֲמוֹ לֶחֶם רָשָׁע וַיִּין חֲמָסִים יִשְׁתּוּ:

(17) For their bread is the bread of wickedness.

They drink the wine of violence.

CONTRAST. Mishlei concludes the segment by comparing the road traveled by *tzadikim* to the one traveled by *resha'im*. The first is illuminated with light that keeps getting stronger as the person rises to ever greater levels of spiritual growth. The second is a region of spiritual darkness which drags the unwary traveler further and further down.

(יח) וְאַרְחַ צְדִיקִים כְּאֹר נֹגֵה הַזֹּהֵר וְאֹר עַד נִכּוֹן הַיּוֹם:

*(18) The path of the righteous is like the radiant light of the sun,
growing ever brighter until high noon.*

(יט) דֶּרֶךְ רָשָׁעִים כְּאֶפְלָה לֹא יָדְעוּ בְּמָה יִכְשָׁלוּ:

*(19) The road of the wicked is like the growing darkness.
They don't know what is causing them to stumble.*

Learning Mishlei

STAY AWAY.

Avoid immoral people who have no fear Hashem, even if they seem to behave honorably in human relationships.

(יד) בְּאַרְחַרְח רְשָׁעִים אֶל תְּבֵא וְאַל תֵּאֲשֶׁר בְּדֶרֶךְ רָעִים :

Don't even go into a limited path with *resha'im* — בְּאַרְחַרְח רְשָׁעִים אֶל תְּבֵא.
Even if you don't get cheated, you will be influenced by the fundamental immorality in their way of thinking.

Don't even take a step on the main road — וְאַל תֵּאֲשֶׁר בְּדֶרֶךְ רָעִים,
with **dishonest people** — רָעִים,

Although there is much traffic and it seems safe, they are likely to draw you into perverted ways of thinking because they lack basic integrity.

(טו) פְּרִיעֵהוּ אֶל תַּעֲבֹר בּוֹ שְׂטֵה מִעֲלִיו וְעִבֹר :

It is not enough to resist emulating the sins of evil people.

Be proactive and **reject them** — פְּרִיעֵהוּ

as well as their customs and practices

so that you will not be affected by their *middos*.

Don't pass by that way — אֶל תַּעֲבֹר בּוֹ

even if it is once in a long while for a specific need.

But if you are unable to avoid it completely,

turn away from it — שְׂטֵה מִעֲלִיו

and pass on — וְעִבֹר.

PATTERNS OF BEHAVIOR.**(טז) כִּי לֹא יִשְׁנוּ אִם לֹא יִרְעוּ וְנִגְזְלָה שְׁנָתָם אִם לֹא יִכְשִׁילוּ :**

It is only after they have committed wrongdoing that they are soothed and are able to sleep.

For the *resha'im* can't sleep — כִּי לֹא יִשְׁנוּ

if they don't practice evil — אִם לֹא יִרְעוּ

and so they stay up at night looking

for opportunities to initiate trouble.

Their sleep will be robbed — וְנִגְזְלָה שְׁנָתָם

if they don't cause others to fail — אִם לֹא יִכְשִׁילוּ

in *avodas Hashem*.

(יז) כִּי לָחֶמוּ לָחֶם רָשָׁע וַיִּין חֲמָסִים יִשְׁתּוּ :

They hunger for evil and are unable to sleep

if they have not fulfilled their quota of evil for the day.

**For their bread — כִּי לֶחֶמוֹ —
is the bread of wickedness — לֶחֶם רָשָׁע.
And they drink the wine of violence — וַיִּין חֲמָסִים יִשְׁתּוּ —**

CONTRAST.

(יח) וְאִרְחַ צְדִיקִים כְּאֹרֶךְ הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה וְאִרְחַ רְשָׁעִים כְּאֹרֶךְ הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה:

In contrast to the wicked who feel the need to cause harm, the *tzadikim* are driven by the need to help others and add value to their lives.

Thus, the light illuminating **the path of the righteous — וְאִרְחַ צְדִיקִים —
is like the radiant light of the sun — כְּאֹרֶךְ הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה —**
that begins faintly in the morning,
growing ever brighter until high noon — הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה וְאִרְחַ רְשָׁעִים כְּאֹרֶךְ הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה.

(יט) לֹא יָדְעוּ בְּמָה יִפְּשְׁלוּ:

But the limited visibility on **the road of the wicked — דֶּרֶךְ רְשָׁעִים —
is like the growing darkness — כְּאֹפֶלֶת —**

Their darkness gets more intense as the night progresses, and they do not see the needs of others. On the contrary, they themselves are like the darkness that causes people to stumble and fall. But ultimately, they are tripped up because they do not see the obstacles in the road ahead.

They don't know what is causing them to stumble — לֹא יָדְעוּ בְּמָה יִפְּשְׁלוּ.
They are like dumb animals who respond only to their physical needs. Since they lack wisdom, they don't see the implications of their actions.