

Mishlei 05-03**The Ultimate Fraud**

[Pesukim 5:3 thru 5:6]

Key Concepts

Mishlei began this chapter by emphasizing the importance of a solid foundation in the wisdom of the Torah. That grounding is essential if wisdom is to serve as a bulwark against sinful behavior.

He now helps us understand why wisdom is so effective. It is because the temptation to sin is a massive fraud that is perpetrated upon man by his *yetzer hara* (evil inclination). Like any fraudulent scheme, the sinful behavior is presented to man in the most attractive form. It is only later that the victim realizes he has been had and that the consequences of his brief pleasure are unpleasant indeed.

Exploring Mishlei

(ג) כִּי נֹפֶת תִּטְפֶּנָּה שְׂפֵתֵי זָרָה וְחֶלֶק מִשְׁמֶן חֶפֶה :

(ד) וְאַחֲרֵיתָהּ מָרָה כְּלַעֲנָה חֲדָה כְּחָרֶב פִּיּוֹת :

(ה) רַגְלֶיהָ יִרְדּוּת מָוֶת שְׂאוֹל צִעְדֶיהָ יִתְמַכּוּ :

(ו) אֲרַח חַיִּים פֶּן תִּפְלֵס נְעוּ מֵעִגְלָתֶיהָ לֹא תִדָּע :

(3) For dripping with honey are the lips of the strange woman and smoother than oil is her palate.

(4) But her final effect is bitter as wormwood and as sharp as a two-edged sword.

(5) Her feet descend to death. Her footsteps support the netherworld.

(6) Don't put the road of life on a scale. Her byways are moving; you cannot know when you will fail.

Just as in an earlier segment (02-07) Mishlei illustrates the fraudulence of sin with the metaphor of an immoral woman who uses her feminine charms to seduce a

weak-willed man. This is an apt metaphor because the sweetness in the way she presents herself is a cover for the destruction that follows in her wake, both in this world and the next. Her victim does not realize that he has been badly cheated until it is too late.

The metaphor used by Mishlei is especially appropriate for the attractions of wealth and luxury. At first these trappings of the “good life” seem to promise only happiness, but they come with a high-risk factor for pain and suffering.

Another category of sin that fits well with the metaphor of an immoral woman is the temptation to be influenced by the culture of non-religious people. Their permissive point of view may seem especially appealing to the individual whose grounding in Torah wisdom is weak.

Mishlei concludes this segment by a reminder to guard the integrity of his Torah observance. Because of the temptations with which an individual is faced, he may begin to make personal judgments about the relative weight of individual *mitzvos*. In this way he gives the “strange woman” the opportunity to launch her victim upon the path of self-destruction.

Learning Mishlei

With only a superficial knowledge of the Torah you will be unable to defend yourself against the slick reasoning of a wicked person who wants to lead you astray from the true *derech* (way), whether it be your *emunah* (faith) or your morality.

(ג) כִּי נֶפֶת תִּטְפֶּנָּה שִׁפְתֵי זָרָה וְחֶלֶק מִשֶּׁמֶן חֶכְמָה:

(3) For — כִּי

you need wisdom to protect yourself

from a **strange woman** — זָרָה

whose attractive **lips** — שִׁפְתֵי

speak words that **drip with honey** — נֶפֶת תִּטְפֶּנָּה

and that are smoother than oil — וְחֶלֶק מִשֶּׁמֶן

gliding between her tongue and **her palate** — חֶכְמָה.

(ד) וְאַחֲרֵיתָהּ מָרָה כִּלְעֵנָה חֲדָה כְּחָרֵב פִּיּוֹת:

(4) My son, the attractions of such a woman may seem sweet at first, but if you have wisdom, you will realize that both her beauty and her charming voice are a fraud.

Although the words of her lips are sweet as honey,
her final effect — וְאַחֲרֵיהָ
is bitter as wormwood — מְרַחֵם כְּלֶעֱנָה.

Although the speech from her palate is smooth as oil,
 its effect **is as sharp as a two-edged sword — חֶדְהָ פְּחָרֵב פִּיּוֹת**
 that cuts anyone who wants to caress it. Don't think you will be able to walk away
 from her after you have fallen into her trap. It will then be too late because she
 will have started to run after you.

(ה) רַגְלֶיהָ יֵרְדוֹת מָוֶת שְׂאוֹל צָעָדֶיהָ יִתְמַכּוּ:

(5) Her swift feet will descend to a tragic death — רַגְלֶיהָ יֵרְדוֹת מָוֶת
 and that is where you will end up, amidst painful suffering,
 both physical and emotional. And her evil does not stop in death.

Her footsteps—צָעָדֶיהָ
 will support the netherworld—שְׂאוֹל יִתְמַכּוּ
 by supplying it with the souls of her victims.

(ו) אַרְחַ חַיִּים פֶּן תִּפְלֵס נָעוּ מֵעֲגֻלְתֶּיהָ לֹא תִדְעַ:

(6) Don't try to put the road of life on a scale — אַרְחַ חַיִּים פֶּן תִּפְלֵס,
 thinking that you can judge the relative value of *mitzvos*. You may be tempted to
 temporarily digress from the true road so that you can indulge in selected pleasures
 in the byways frequented by the forbidden woman.

But **her byways are constantly moving — נָעוּ מֵעֲגֻלְתֶּיהָ.**
 You will get confused and lose track of where you are
 and where the truth lies.

You cannot know — לֹא תִדְעַ
 when you will fall. Surely this is a risk you cannot afford to take.