

Mishlei 05-07

Managing Temptation

[Pesukim 5:7 thru 5:23]

Key Concepts

This segment presents a discussion of three stages in the development of temptation. Typically, a person is in one of the three stages at any time regarding any sin he may be tempted to commit.

Curiosity. The first stage is when no sin has occurred and temptation is very weak. In this stage the most noticeable attraction to sin may be the power of curiosity. Why are other people having a good time in sinful practices? What is it all about?

Addiction. In the second stage the person has exposed himself to sin and feels the searing flame of mindless compulsion. How can he stop himself now?

Regret. In the third stage he has momentarily satisfied his urges and has begun to feel regret. He asks himself whether the passing pleasure of sin was worth the pain he now feels.

What is the antidote to temptation? Mishlei teaches that to resist temptation a person should be content with his own life. He demonstrates this lesson with respect to the example of marital bliss. To inoculate himself against the temptation of sin, a person should make every effort to live a meaningful and fulfilled married life.

Mishlei concludes the segment by tracing the downward spiral of self-delusion that leads from sinful behavior to death.

Exploring Mishlei

INTRODUCTION.

The introduction to this segment emphasizes the importance of having continued access to the legacy of wisdom that we received as we were growing up. Constant awareness of our store of Torah wisdom at each stage of temptation will empower us to cope with it and emerge at peace with ourselves and our Creator.

(ז) וְעַתָּה בְּנִים שְׁמְעוּ לִי, וְאַל תִּסְוּרוּ מֵאֲמַרֵי פִי:
(7) And now my children, listen to me,
and do not stray from the words of my mouth

CURIOSITY.

Here Mishlei addresses the first of three stages in the development of temptation. No actual sin has occurred, and temptation is relatively weak because the taste of sin has not yet been experienced.

The most noticeable attraction to sin in this stage is the power of curiosity. Curiosity is a subtle yearning to experience something that is external to the person.

We have been given the power of curiosity as a motivation to gain knowledge of the Torah before we have fully tasted its sweetness. However, the *yetzer hara* (evil inclination) uses that very same power to attract a person to experience the flavor of something forbidden, even though he has never tasted it. The person says to himself, “Let me just taste it once and then at least I will know what it is like.”

But he is fooling himself because once he has tasted it, the temptation to continue experiencing the forbidden fruit becomes much greater and much more difficult to resist. Before long he has moved beyond the first stage and is now into the second stage of temptation — addiction.

As before, Mishlei illustrates his lesson with the metaphor of the “strange woman” who entices the unwary male into forbidden sexual intimacy. Such intimacy is the final step in a progression of approaches, each of which brings the victim closer to the point where he is overwhelmed with physical desire, an emotion that he never imagined he might be subject to.

The first steps in this progression are the easiest to resist. What is initially drawing him is simple curiosity. Since he is still in full command of his emotions, Mishlei firmly admonishes him to suppress his curiosity and avoid the area where the “strange woman” plies her trade. If he has failed this initial test and finds himself on her street, it will take more determination to avoid passing near the door to her house.

(ח) הֲרַחֵק מֵעֲלֶיהָ דְרָכָךָ וְאַל תִּקְרַב אֶל פֶּתַח בֵּיתָהּ:
(8) Arrange your route at a distance from her,
and do not approach the door of her house.

Of course, this is only an analogy and in real life we are bombarded with all kinds of opportunities to sin. Every person's life includes all the normal activities necessary to survive and function effectively. Many of these activities correspond to being in the vicinity or the street of the "strange woman." Therefore, the power of curiosity will always need to be carefully guarded and managed.

ADDICTION.

Mishlei now addresses the second stage in the tragic life cycle of temptation. In this stage the individual has tasted the fruit of self-indulgence and is overwhelmed by the pleasure he is sensing. If he feels drawn to keep repeating the experience it may mean that he has become addicted. Addiction occurs when a person knows that he is harming himself and would like to stop but cannot resist the sense of pleasure that is clouding his mind and suppressing rational thought.

Under such conditions the sinner needs to be shaken up by a really disturbing thought or experience. Mishlei provides this in the form of a wakeup call, in effect asking the sinner, "Are you ready to lose everything? What about everything you have worked so hard to achieve? How will you feel if someone else takes what you have built and calls it his own? Are you ready to turn your back on your Creator?"

Mishlei appeals to the sinner's ego and his natural instinct for self-protection. And he appeals to the sinner's hunger for life, which is shared by all creatures. If these appeals succeed, well and good. The sinner is on the way back. But if not, the sinner advances to the third stage where severe damage has been done and it is time for painful regret.

(ט) פֶּן תִּתֵּן לְאַחֵרִים הַיּוֹדֵךְ וְשָׁנְתִיךָ לְאַכְזָרִי :

(9) Lest you give up your glory to those others, and your years to the cruel one the angel in charge of the nether world (Gehinnom).

(י) פֶּן יִשְׁבְּעוּ זָרִים כֹּחֲךָ וְעֲצָבֶיךָ בְּבַיִת נְכָרִי :

(10) Lest strangers satisfy themselves with your strength and your painfully earned wealth in a stranger's house.

REGRET.

Here Mishlei warns the sinner about the regret he will feel if he persists into the last stage of the tragic life cycle of temptation.

In this stage he looks back on his life and asks himself how he got here. His years have sped by, and he has so little to show for them. The sinful pleasures that seemed so gratifying are now but a dim memory and are of little value in comparison to the price he will have to pay in the next world.

Mishlei warns the sinner that he will feel bitter regret. He will be deeply sorry for the sins he committed. But, even worse, he will feel true regret for the foolish choices he has made.

He chose to disregard the wisdom of the Torah that was available to him from his teachers. Instead, he listened to his misguided ego which induced him to think he would not be harmed if he took risks to satisfy his curiosity and thereby to open himself up to the glamor of temptation.

He now knows better, but it is too late, and he sees how badly he has harmed himself when he could so easily have made the right choice.

(יא) וְנִהְיֶתָּה בְּאַחֲרֵיתָךְ בְּכָלוֹת בְּשָׂרְךָ וּשְׂאָרְךָ :
 (יב) וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵיךְ שָׁנֵאתִי מוֹסֵר וְתוֹכַחַת נֶאֱצָ לְבִי :
 (יג) וְלֹא שָׁמַעְתִּי בְּקוֹל מוֹרֵי וְלִמְלַמְדֵי לֹא הִטִּיתִי אָזְנוֹי :
 (יד) כִּמְעֵט הֵייתִי בְּכָל רֶעַ בְּתוֹךְ קָהָל וְעֵדָה :

(11) You will groan at your life's end, when your flesh and your body are weakening.

(12) Then you will say, "How could I have hated mussar and my heart spurned rebuke?"

(13) I did not listen to the voice of my teachers. I did not incline my ear to my mentors.

(14) Because of a small bit of impatience I have become in total disrepute among the congregation and assembly.

CONTENTMENT.

Previously, Mishlei admonished the reader to resist the pull of idle curiosity. The man who gives in to his curiosity can easily find himself in situations where he is vulnerable to the temptation that leads to sin.

Curiosity is like an itch which attacks the person who is bored. Such an individual is drawn to look at others to find the excitement that he thinks may be missing in his

own life. Mishlei now teaches us that the antidote to curiosity is contentment. A person who finds satisfaction in learning Torah will not be curious about strange philosophies and religions. A person whose married life is satisfying will not be curious about the “strange woman.”

This means that to resist temptation a person should be content with his own life. Mishlei demonstrates this lesson with respect to the example of marital bliss. To inoculate himself against the temptation of the “strange woman” a person should make every effort to live a meaningful and fulfilled married life.

Clearly this does not happen without commitment and self-sacrifice on the part of both husband and wife. But, as Mishlei is suggesting, the effort is well worth it.

Mishlei begins with the metaphor of water. Marital bliss is symbolized by drinking water from one’s own well. The fruits of a happy marriage are worthy children who are like pure streams of water that carry forward the good name of their parents into future generations. A happy marriage depends upon contentment, which comes from seeking the satisfaction of companionship and emotional warmth within one’s own home.

(טו) שְׁתֵּה מֵיִם מִבּוֹרָךְ וְנִזְלִים מִתּוֹךְ בְּאֵרְךָ:
 (טז) יִפּוּצוּ מֵעֵינֹתֶיךָ חוּצָה בְּרַחֲבוֹת פְּלָגֵי מַיִם:
 (יז) יִהְיוּ לְךָ לְבַדָּךְ וְאִין לְזָרִים אֶתְךָ:
 (יח) יִהְיֶה מְקוֹרְךָ בְּרוּךְ וְשִׂמְחַ מֵאִשְׁתְּ נְעוּרֶיךָ:
 (יט) אֵילַת אֲהָבִים וַיַּעֲלֶת חֵן דְּדָדֶיךָ יִרְוֶךָ בְּכָל עֵת בְּאֲהָבָתָהּ תִּשְׂגָה
 תְּמִיד:

(15) Drink water from your cistern and flowing water from your wellspring.

(16) Your well springs will spread outwards, streams of water into the thoroughfares.

(17) The love of your family will be yours alone. Unworthy strangers will not share them with you.

(18) Your source will be blessed, and you will rejoice with the wife of your youth.

(19) She will be a beloved gazelle, attractive to you. You will find comfort at her breast at every time of need. In her love you will always find gratification.

SELF-DELUSION.

(כ) וְלִמָּה תִשָּׂגָה בְּנִי בְּזָרָה וּתְחַבֵּק חֵק נְכַרְיָה :
 (כא) כִּי נִכַח עֵינַי ה' דְּרָכַי אִישׁ וְכָל מַעְגְּלֹתָיו מִפְּלִס :
 (כב) עֲוֹנוֹתָיו יִלְכְּדֵנוּ אֶת הַרְשָׁע וּבְחַבְלֵי חַטָּאתוֹ יִתְמַד :
 (כג) הוּא יָמוֹת בְּאֵין מוֹסֵר וּבְרַב אֲוִלְתּוֹ יִשָּׂגָה :

(20) Why, my son, should you foolishly err with a strange woman, and why embrace the bosom of an alien woman.

(21) For a man's ways are directly in front of Hashem's eyes. Hashem weighs all his devious courses.

(22) The wicked person's own offenses will ensnare him. He will now be hung by the ropes fashioned from his sins

(23) He will die because of no mussar, because of the excessive delusion with which he fooled himself.

Mishlei now traces the downward spiral of self-delusion that leads from sinful behavior to death. He continues to use the example of the “strange woman” to symbolize the temptations that lead to sinful deception.

Mishlei begins by challenging the sinner to recognize how disgraceful his behavior is (5:20). Does the sinner realize that he is abandoning the virtue of faithfulness, which is essential to Jewish identity?

Mishlei then attacks the sinner's delusion that he can get away with anything because he is sure that no one is watching (5:21). Not only does Hashem see everything, He even knows what the sinner is thinking and He knows how the sinner is deceiving himself.

The downward spiral now closes upon itself as the sinner encounters the destructive consequences of his behavior (5:22). He is snared by the very subterfuges which he used to deceive himself and others. His tools of sin become traps and he is strangled by the very ropes with which he supported his deception.

The segment closes by driving home the error of self-delusion (5:23). The sinner had rejected guidance and *mussar* because he deluded himself into thinking that whatever misfortunes happened to him were the result of chance occurrence. He

now thinks that if his luck had been better, he might have evaded the consequences of sin. The tragedy is that the downward spiral ends without the sinner ever having understood what he has been doing to himself.

Learning Mishlei

INTRODUCTION.

(ז) וְעַתָּה בָּנִים שְׁמְעוּ לִי וְאַל תִּסּוּרוּ מֵאִמְרֵי פִי:

And now, my sons — וְעַתָּה בָּנִים,
listen to me — שְׁמְעוּ לִי

and accept my guidance. I ask this now while you are still my innocent youngsters, who will readily obey me. I am hopeful that as you grow older you will naturally continue in the ways of your youth.

Do not stray — וְאַל תִּסּוּרוּ
from the words of my mouth — מֵאִמְרֵי פִי,

which I am now about to share with you. Continue to review them so that they will never be far from you. Then you will be reminded of them whenever temptation strikes.

CURIOSITY.

(ח) הֲרַחֵק מֵעֲלִיָּה דְרָכָךְ וְאַל תִּקְרַב אֶל פֶּתַח בַּיְתָהּ:

When you plan a walk, choose a route that avoids the vicinity where the “strange woman” is located. You cannot be sure that your natural curiosity won’t lead you to glance at something that can tempt you further.

Arrange your route at a distance from her location — הֲרַחֵק מֵעֲלִיָּה דְרָכָךְ,
even though it is inconvenient for you. You may have passed that way a number of times without problem, but sooner or later you are likely to encounter a moment of weakness.

If you have unwittingly entered the vicinity where temptation exists, fight your curiosity and focus your attention on a worthy activity.

Do not approach — וְאַל תִּקְרַב
the door of her house — אֶל פֶּתַח בַּיְתָהּ,
because the power of curiosity will gain in intensity the nearer you are to the place of temptation.

ADDICTION.

(ט) פֶּן תִּתֵּן לְאַחֲרִים הוֹדֶךָ וּשְׁנִיתֶיךָ לְאַכְזָרִי :

Don't give in to temptation lest you fall prey to self-indulgence. If you do, what will happen to the glory which Hashem granted to you when He created you in His image? My child, act before it is too late,

lest you give up — פֶּן תִּתֵּן

your glory to others — לְאַחֲרִים הוֹדֶךָ

who have practiced self-restraint and are continuing to live a serene life in the service of Hashem.

And give up your years in the Next World to the cruel one — וּשְׁנִיתֶיךָ לְאַכְזָרִי,
the angel in charge of *Gehinnom*.

(י) פֶּן יִשְׁבְּעוּ זָרִים כְּחֶךָ וְעֲצָבֶיךָ בְּבַיִת נְכָרִי :

You have worked hard all your life to build a home for yourself and your loved ones Don't let your toil go to waste. Act before it is too late,

lest — פֶּן

strangers — זָרִים

take over what you have built and

satisfy themselves with the fruits of your strength — יִשְׁבְּעוּ כְּחֶךָ

and ingenuity. Don't let **your painfully earned wealth — וְעֲצָבֶיךָ**

end up **in a stranger's house — בְּבַיִת נְכָרִי.**

REGRET.

(יא) וְנָהַמְתָּ בְּאַחֲרִיתֶךָ בְּכָלוֹת בְּשָׂרְךָ וּשְׂאֲרֶךָ :

You will groan at your life's end — וְנָהַמְתָּ בְּאַחֲרִיתֶךָ

when your flesh and your body are weakening — בְּכָלוֹת בְּשָׂרְךָ וּשְׂאֲרֶךָ.

Your physical deterioration will remind you that your life on this earth is coming to an end and that you will have to give an accounting for the choices you made. Then you will look back and bitterly regret how you lived your life.

(יב) וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵיךְ שָׂנֵאתִי מוֹסֵר וְתוֹכַחַת נָאֵץ לְבִי :

Then you will say — וְאָמַרְתָּ,

“How could I have hated — אֵיךְ שָׂנֵאתִי

the guiding hand of *mussar* — מוֹסֵר,

and how could the warning of rebuke — וְתוֹכַחַת

been spurned by my heart — נָאֵץ לְבִי,

thinking that I knew better?”

(יג) ולא שָׁמַעְתִּי בְּקוֹל מוֹרֵי וְלִמְלַמְדֵי לֹא הִטִּיתִי אָזְנִי :

“How could it be **that I did not listen — ולא שָׁמַעְתִּי**

to the voice of my teachers — בְּקוֹל מוֹרֵי?

and that I did not incline my ear to my mentors — ולא הִטִּיתִי אָזְנִי

who were ready to explain each concept of the Torah in detail.”

(יד) כְּמַעַט הָיִיתִי בְּכָל רֵעַ בְּתוֹךְ קָהָל וְעַדָּה :

“My life has gone by so quickly and the pleasures I gained seem to me now of lit-

tle value! It would have been so easy to make the right choices if I had resisted my curiosity or if I had waited until the pull of temptation was weaker.

Because of such a small bit — כְּמַעַט of impatience

I have become — הָיִיתִי

an object of total disrepute — בְּכָל רֵעַ

among the congregation and assembly — בְּתוֹךְ קָהָל וְעַדָּה

instead of the honor I could have had!”

CONTENTMENT.

(טו) שְׁתֵּה מִמַּיִם מִבּוֹרְךָ וְנִזְלִים מִתּוֹךְ בְּאֵרְךָ :

You should **drink** stored **water from your own cistern — שְׁתֵּה מִמַּיִם מִבּוֹרְךָ**

and drink flowing water from your own wellspring — וְנִזְלִים מִתּוֹךְ בְּאֵרְךָ .

Water is essential to life. It can be compared to marital bliss which is essential to a happy, contented life. Don't let curiosity draw you to seek sensuality in alien places. You will find true bliss at home, just as the water stored up in your own cistern is faithfully waiting for you. There you will also find a love that is constantly renewed and refreshed, as symbolized by your own wellspring of flowing water. Your wife will be a treasured companion to you and a faithful mother to your children.

(טז) יִפּוּצוּ מֵעִיִּנְתֶיךָ חוּצָה בְּרַחְבוֹת פְּלִגֵּי מַיִם :

The water from your well springs will spread outwards — יִפּוּצוּ מֵעִיִּנְתֶיךָ חוּצָה

and you will have worthy offspring to carry your name

into future generations. You will be proud of the achievements

that you will see from your children. They will be like

streams of water flowing into the thoroughfares — בְּרַחְבוֹת פְּלִגֵּי מַיִם

so that their reputation will be spoken of far and wide.

(יז) יְהִיוּ לָךְ לְבַדְּךָ וְאִין לְזָרִים אֶתְּךָ:

The love of your wife and the devotion of your children
will be yours alone — יְהִיוּ לָךְ לְבַדְּךָ
 because you have not allowed foreign
 influences to affect the sanctity of your home.

Thus, **unworthy strangers will not** share them **with you** — וְאִין לְזָרִים אֶתְּךָ.
 Your children will perpetuate the individual character of their parental home
 wherever they may go. They will testify that nothing alien or strange has been
 admixed.

(יח) יְהִי מְקוֹרְךָ בְּרוּךְ וְשִׂמְחַ מֵאִשָּׁת נְעוּרֶיךָ:

The woman who is **your family source, will be blessed** — יְהִי מְקוֹרְךָ בְּרוּךְ
 She, the mother of your children, will be beloved in your eyes.
And you will rejoice with her, the wife of your youth — וְשִׂמְחַ מֵאִשָּׁת נְעוּרֶיךָ.

(יט) אֵילַת אֲהָבִים וַיַּעֲלֶת חֵן דְּדָיָה יְרוּךָ בְּכָל עֵת

בְּאֵהֱבָתָה תִּשְׁגָּה תָּמִיד:

She will be your **beloved doe, ever attractive** to you — אֵילַת אֲהָבִים וַיַּעֲלֶת חֵן.
You will find comfort at her breast — דְּדָיָה יְרוּךָ
at every time of need — בְּכָל עֵת.
In her love — בְּאֵהֱבָתָה
you will always find gratification — תִּשְׁגָּה תָּמִיד.
 both emotional and physical.

SELF-DELUSION.

(כ) וְלָמָּה תִּשְׁגָּה בְּנִי בְּזָרָה וַתַּחֲבֹק חֶק נְכָרִיָּה:

Why then, my son, should you foolishly err — וְלָמָּה תִּשְׁגָּה בְּנִי
 in loving a strange woman — בְּזָרָה
 and why embrace the bosom of an alien woman — וַתַּחֲבֹק חֶק נְכָרִיָּה
 who belongs to another? You know very well that such behavior is disgraceful,
 for faithfulness is at the essence of being a Jew.

(כא) כִּי נִכַח עֵינַי ה' דְּרָכֵי אִישׁ וְכָל מַעֲגַלְתָּיו מִפְּלִס:

Don't think you can sin and nobody will see what you are doing.
For directly in front of Hashem's eyes — כִּי נִכַח עֵינַי ה'
 are the ways of man — דְּרָכֵי אִישׁ

Not only does He see all of a man's actions, He is continually evaluating the choices that man makes, and He knows not only the actual choices, but the thinking behind them.

Hashem weighs all man's devious courses — וְכֹל מַעֲגַלְתָּיו מִפִּילֵס —
He knows the degree of sincerity in every behavior.

(כב) עֲוֹנוֹתָיו יִלְכְּדֵנוּ אֶת הַרְשָׁע וּבְחַבְלֵי חַטָּאתוֹ יִתְמָדָּ:

His own offenses — עֲוֹנוֹתָיו

will ensnare the wicked person — יִלְכְּדֵנוּ אֶת הַרְשָׁע

He was drawn into those traps by his own lust, which caused him to sin, and the sin caused the traps to close upon him.

He will be hung by the ropes fashioned from his sins — וּבְחַבְלֵי חַטָּאתוֹ יִתְמָדָּ.

He thought he would be supported by those ropes, but he ended up dangling from them.

(כג) הוּא יָמוּת בְּאֵין מוֹסָר וּבְרַב אֲוִלְתּוֹ יִשָּׂגָה:

He will die because he rejected the guidance of *mussar* — הוּא יָמוּת בְּאֵין מוֹסָר

When he suffered misfortune he convinced himself that it was just bad luck. He failed to interpret it as a sign that he should do *teshuvah*. So he perished because of the excessive delusion with which he fooled himself — וּבְרַב אֲוִלְתּוֹ יִשָּׂגָה.