

Mishlei 05-02.

The Ultimate Fraud (5:3 - 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 תִּטְפֹּן שִׁפְתֵי זָרָה וְחֶלֶק מִשְׁמֶן חֶכְמָה: (ד) וְאַחֲרֵיתָהּ מָרָה כְּלֶעֱנָה חֲדָה
כְּחָרֵב פִּיּוֹת: (ה) רִגְלֶיהָ יִרְדּוּת מָוֶת שְׂאוֹל צִעְדֶיהָ יִתְמַכּוּ: (ו) אֲרַח חַיִּים פֶּן תִּפְלֹס
נָעוּ מֵעִגְלוֹתֶיהָ לֹא תִדְעַ:

(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 (02-03) 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 the Mizmor

(ג) כִּי נֹפֶת תִּטְּפֶנָּה שְׂפָתַי זָרָה
וְחֶלֶק מִשְׁמֶן חֶכְמָה:

For — כִּי 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. You need wisdom to protect yourself from the wiles of a **strange woman** — זָרָה whose **lips** — שְׂפָתַי speak sweet words that **drip with honey** — נֹפֶת and that are **smoother than oil** — וְחֶלֶק מִשְׁמֶן as they glide between her tongue and **her palate** — חֶכְמָה.

(ד) וְאַחֲרֵיתָהּ מָרָה כְּלַעֲנָה
חֲדָה כְּחֶרֶב פִּיּוֹת:

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** — וְאַחֲרֵיתָהּ **is bitter as wormwood** — מָרָה כְּלַעֲנָה. Although the speech from her palate is as smooth as oil, its effect **is as sharp as a two-edged sword** — חֲדָה כְּחֶרֶב פִּיּוֹת a sword that cuts anyone who wants to caress it.

(ה) רַגְלֶיהָ יִרְדּוּת מָוֶת
שְׂאוּל צִעְדֶיהָ יִתְמַכּוּ:

Don't think you will be able to walk away from her after you have sampled her wares. It will then be too late because she will have started to run after you. **Her** swift **feet** will carry her along, **descending to** a tragic **death** — רַגְלֶיהָ יִרְדּוּת 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 will support the netherworld** (*Gehinnom*) — שָׂאוֹל צְעָדֶיהָ יִתְמַכּוּ by supplying it with the souls of her victims.

(ו) אֶרֶח חַיִּים פֶּן תִּפְלֵס

Don't try to **put the road of life on a scale** — אֶרֶח 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.

נָעוּ מֵעֲגֻלְתֶּיהָ לֹא תִדְעַ:

But **her byways are** constantly **moving** — נָעוּ מֵעֲגֻלְתֶּיהָ and shifting. 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.

Sources

The primary sources used in the interpretation of the verses of this segment are listed below.

ה - מדרש משלי, המאירי, מצודות, שבט מיהודה
ו - רש"י, אבן יחיאל, חנוך לנער, הגר"א

ג - מצודות, מלבי"ם
ד - מדרש משלי, אבן יחיאל, הגר"א

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