

## Mishlei 07-10

# A Tragedy

[Pesukim 7:10 thru 7:27]

### Key Concepts

In the previous segment we have seen how human character can begin to deteriorate under the influence of the *yetzer hara* (the evil inclination). The *yetzer hara* operates inside a person's mind, even without an external stimulus. However, there are times when a person is subject to the influence of external circumstances or people that provoke him into sinful behavior. Unfortunately, if the person has a weak character he may succumb.

In this segment Mishlei wants to prepare the reader to face a challenge of this kind. When describing the lesson to be drawn we will refer to such a challenge as the "*koach hara*" (power of evil) that a person can come across at any time.

Following the approach used in previous chapters, Mishlei uses the metaphor of the "strange woman" to symbolize the *koach hara*. In this case she is a married woman who has chosen a career as prostitute. The foolish young man described in the previous segment wanders into her neighborhood and allows himself to come under her influence.

### Exploring Mishlei

Mishlei now describes the interaction between the foolish young man and the "strange woman" in the form of a series of stages in the advance of the *koach hara* as it conquers the weak-minded individual. We will see how each stage is symbolic of the general method of the *koach hara*.

**THE APPROACH.** The young man is loitering in front of her house and it has gotten dark. She has also been loitering, on the lookout for potential clients, and now she makes her approach without hiding what kind of woman she is. In fact, her laxity in dress and comportment promotes loose behavior.

(י) וְהִנֵּה אִשָּׁה לְקָרְאֲתוֹ שֵׁית זֹנָה וּנְצַרְתָּ לֵב: (יא) הַמִּיָּה הִיא וְסָרְרַת  
בְּבֵיתָהּ לֹא יִשְׁכְּנוּ רַגְלֶיהָ: (יב) פַּעַם בַּחוּץ פַּעַם בְּרַחֲבוֹת וְאֶצֶל כָּל פִּנָּה  
תֵּאָרֵב:

**(10) Behold, a woman advances toward him. She presents herself as an immoral woman whose integrity is in ruins, like a city under siege. (11) She speaks provocatively and excitedly. It is evident that in her house her feet do not rest. (12) She is constantly on the move, sometimes in the courtyard, sometimes in the streets. She stops to lurk at every corner.**

**THE ADVANCE.** She takes the initiative and confronts him. She makes physical advances and speaks to him in a highly persuasive way so that his defenses are gradually undermined.

(יג) וְהִחֲזִיקָהּ בּוֹ וְנָשְׁקָה לּוֹ הֵעֲזָה פָּנֶיהָ וּתְאֹמַר לוֹ: (יד) זָבַחִי שְׁלָמִים עָלַי הַיּוֹם  
שְׁלַמְתִּי נְדָרַי: (טו) עַל כֵּן יֵצְאֲתִי לְקָרְאֲתֶךָ לְשַׁחַר פְּנֶיךָ וְאֶמְצָאֲךָ: (טז) מִרְבֵּדִים  
רַבְדֹּתַי עֲרֹשֵׁי חֲטָבוֹת אֶטוֹן מִצָּרִים: (יז) נִפְתִּי מִשְׁכָּבִי מִרְ אֶהְלִים וְקִנְמוֹן:

**(13) She grabs hold of him and kisses him. She brazenly says to him, (14) "I have sacrificial meat to serve in my house and today I have fulfilled my vow. (15) That is why I came out to meet you, to invite you. And I found you! (16) I have adorned my couch with spreads, cut from Egyptian linen. (17) What's more, I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon."**

**THE ATTACK.** He has been taken in by her advances and accepts her invitation. She wastes little time moving on to the next stage, blatantly making her indecent proposal.

(יח) לָכֵה נְרוּהָ דְדִים עַד הַבֶּקֶר נִתְעַלְסָה בְּאֶהָבִים: (יט) כִּי אֵין הָאִישׁ  
בְּבֵיתוֹ הִלֵּךְ בְּדֶרֶךְ מִרְחוֹק: (כ) צְרוּר הַפֶּסֶף לָקַח בְּיָדוֹ לְיוֹם הַפֶּסֶא יָבֵא  
בֵּיתוֹ:

**(18) "Come, let's take our fill of lovemaking until the morning. Let's enjoy ourselves with loving embraces, (19) for the man my husband is not at home. He has gone on a long journey. (20) He won't be back because he has taken the money pouch with him. He will come home only at the appointed time."**

**SURRENDER.** The transition from from independence of mind to surrender of will is sudden. Without even realizing it, the victim has fallen into the trap.

(כא) הִטְתּוּ בָּרַב לְקַחָהּ בְּחֶלֶק שְׂפָתֶיהָ תִּדְיַחְנּוּ: (כב) הוֹלֵךְ אַחֲרֶיהָ

פְּתָאם פְּשׁוֹר אֶל טֶבַח יָבוֹא וּכְעֶכֶס אֶל מוֹסֵר אֹיִל: (כג) עַד יִפְלַח חַץ

בְּיָדוֹ כְּמַהֵר צִפּוֹר אֶל פֶּח וְלֹא יָדַע כִּי בְּנַפְשׁוֹ הוּא:

*(21) She bends him to her will with the abundance of her persuasive talk. She entices him away with the glibness of her lips. (22) He suddenly follows her as an ox goes to the slaughter and as a man fettered in chains goes unthinkingly to the rebuke of a fool, (23) until the arrow of the jealous husband splits his liver. He is like a bird hurrying to the trap, unaware that its life will be lost.*

**THE MORAL.** Mishlei now summarizes what has been learned from the story. Everyone who hears it should take it heart because the danger is real and once the victim has begun to fall, he will not be able to save himself.

(כד) וְעַתָּה בָּנִים שְׁמְעוּ לִי וְהִקְשִׁיבוּ לְאִמְרֵי פִי: (כה) אֵל יִשָּׁט אֶל

דְּרָכֶיהָ לִבָּךְ אֵל תִּתַּע בְּנִתִּיבוֹתֶיהָ: (כו) כִּי רַבִּים חֲלָלִים הִפִּילָה וְעֲצָמִים

כָּל הֶרְגִּיהָ: (כז) דְּרָכֶי שְׂאוֹל בֵּיתָהּ יִרְדּוּת אֶל חֲדָרֵי מוֹת:

*(24) And now, children, listen to me and pay attention to the words of my mouth. (25) Don't let your heart veer off into her ways. Don't go astray in her paths. (26) For she has struck down many dead; the number of her victims is huge. (27) The roads to her house lead to the grave, descending to the chambers of death.*

## Additional Thoughts

It is important to remember that the *koach hara* can appear at any time and in a variety of disguises. Almost any sin that a person may be tempted to commit can be presented to him by a corresponding *koach hara*.

Rav Yerucham Levovitz points out that when Yaakov Avinu's daughter Dinah succumbed to the persuasiveness of Shechem, it was because "he spoke to her heart" (*Bereishis* 34:3). This was an example of the *koach hara*, and just as the daughter of Yaakov Avinu failed in meeting its challenge, it could happen to anyone.

## Learning Mishlei

### THE APPROACH.

#### (י) וְהִנֵּה אִשָּׁה לִקְרָאתוֹ

(10) The young man's foolish behavior has invited "trouble". Yet he seems surprised when, lo and behold — וְהִנֵּה, a woman advances toward him — אִשָּׁה לִקְרָאתוֹ. She is actually responding to him, although he is shocked to realize that.

*The woman symbolizes the "koach hara" — power of evil, which makes its move to break down a person's defenses as soon it senses a lack of commitment. The individual should examine himself because he may have invited that force by his own behavior.*

#### שִׁית זֹנָה וּנְצִרַת לֵב:

In her style of clothing, **she presents herself as an immoral woman** — שִׁית זֹנָה, **whose heart** (her integrity) **is** in ruins, like a city **under siege** — וּנְצִרַת לֵב.

In the way she walks and dresses, she appears disheveled, lacking decency. This woman exhibits behavior that is in total contradiction to the *tznius* (modesty and reserve) to which the young man is accustomed among the women of his home. This should prompt him to flee the scene; yet he is "hooked." and he can't tear himself away.

*The "koach hara" promotes laxity in standards of dress and comportment. Slovenliness in appearance leads to weakening of moral standards.*

#### (יא) הַמְיָה הִיא וְסָרְרַת בְּבֵיתָהּ לֹא יִשְׁכְּנוּ רַגְלֶיהָ:

(11) She speaks **provocatively and excitedly** — הַמְיָה הִיא וְסָרְרַת — to draw men to her in the dark. She is tempestuous and flighty so that **in her house her feet do not rest** — לֹא יִשְׁכְּנוּ רַגְלֶיהָ.

By allowing himself to be drawn into her sphere of influence the young man has entered a world of constant change, distraction, and stimulation. This is at total variance to the environment he needs to immerse himself in for productive Torah learning.

*The "koach hara" is constantly on the move, seeking for any weakness in a person's commitment.*

**(יב) פַּעַם בַּחוּץ פַּעַם בְּרַחֲבוֹת וְאַצֵּל כָּל פִּנָּה תִּאָרֵב:**

(12) She is constantly on the move, seeking foolish victims to fall into her net,

**sometimes in the courtyard — פַּעַם בַּחוּץ,**

**sometimes in the streets — פַּעַם בְּרַחֲבוֹת.**

**She stops to lurk at every corner — וְאַצֵּל כָּל פִּנָּה תִּאָרֵב**

until she finds a suitable victim.

*The “koach hara” operates everywhere. It is not limited to a particular location, but tries out every venue until it finds an opportunity to attack its victim.*

### **THE ADVANCE.**

**(יג) וְהִחֲזִיקָהּ בּוֹ וְנִשְׁקָהּ לוֹ הֵעֵזָה פְּנִיָּהּ וְתֹאמַר לוֹ:**

(13) She instinctively knows how entrap him, going quickly from one step of her unwritten agenda to another so that it is difficult for him to resist.

**She shamelessly grabs hold of him — וְהִחֲזִיקָהּ בּוֹ**

with both hands so that he cannot evade her.

*The “koach hara” attaches itself to the individual so that he cannot get back to what he should be doing.*

**She kisses him — וְנִשְׁקָהּ לוֹ**

aggressively so that he becomes confused and unable to think clearly.

*The “koach hara” tries to bond with a person unless he actively rejects it.*

**And she brazenly says to him — הֵעֵזָה פְּנִיָּהּ וְתֹאמַר לוֹ.**

*The “koach hara” speaks provocatively and disrespectfully, thereby weakening the individual’s moral standards.*

**(יד) זָבַחַי שְׁלָמִים עָלַי הַיּוֹם שְׁלַמְתִּי נְדָרַי:**

(14) “You are fortunate, because it just so happens that

**I have sacrificial meat — זָבַחַי שְׁלָמִים עָלַי**

to serve in my house today. I had pledged to bring peace-offerings in the *Bais HaMikdash*.

**and today I have fulfilled my vow — הַיּוֹם שְׁלַמְתִּי נְדָרַי.”**

[She is not embarrassed to lie about her devotion to *mitzvos* to make herself acceptable to him and to mislead him.]

*The “koach hara” weakens a person’s resistance by suggesting that there is a framework of holiness around what it is proposing. A person resists going to do something clearly labeled as forbidden, but the good feelings that are associated with doing a mitzvah, especially food and drink, can be twisted into a positive attitude towards sinful behavior.*

**(טו) עַל כֵּן יָצָאתִי לִקְרֹאתְךָ לְשֹׁחַר פְּנֶיךָ וְאֶמְצָאָךְ:**

(15) **“That is why I came out to meet you — עַל כֵּן יָצָאתִי לִקְרֹאתְךָ**

specifically, because we are kindred spirits, and so I came

**to invite you — לְשֹׁחַר פְּנֶיךָ**

to eat with me and participate in this great

*mitzvah*. You can see that my motives are pure.

**And** it was dictated by Heaven that **I found you** — **וְאֶמְצָאָךְ** immediately!”

[She is clearly lying, but he plays along with her game because

she has made him feel important and so it suits him.]

*The “koach hara” flatters the individual to make him feel that he was specially chosen and it was Hashem’s will for him to engage in the sinful activity.*

**(טז) מִרְבְּדִים רְבִדְתִּי עֲרֹשֵׁי הַטְּבוֹת אֶטוֹן מִצְרַיִם:**

(16) **“I have adorned my couch with spreads — מִרְבְּדִים רְבִדְתִּי עֲרֹשֵׁי**

**cut from the finest Egyptian linen — הַטְּבוֹת אֶטוֹן מִצְרַיִם.**

She offers him a comfortable place to relax, while not

suggesting that the young man do any more than that.

*The “koach hara” attracts the weak-willed person with luxurious trappings, which in themselves are not forbidden. But the luxury creates a relaxed and self-pampering frame of mind in which the person is not ready to resist further suggestions.*

**(יז) נִפְתִּי מִשְׁכְּבִי מִרְאֵה לִים וְקַנְמוֹן:**

(17) Finally, since he has succumbed to the idea of relaxing on her couch, she

speaks of her own bed: **“I have perfumed my bed with myrrh — נִפְתִּי מִשְׁכְּבִי מִרְאֵה,**

**aloes and cinnamon — אֶהָלִים וְקַנְמוֹן.**

*The “koach hara” uses the aromatic power of fragrances to evoke pleasurable feelings that break down a person’s will.*

**THE ATTACK.**

**(יח) לָכֶּה נְרוּה דְדִים עַד הַבֶּקֶר נִתְעַלְסָה בְּאַהֲבִים :**

(18) **“Come, let’s take our fill of lovemaking — לָכֶּה נְרוּה דְדִים —**  
all night long until the morning — **עַד הַבֶּקֶר.**

**Let’s enjoy ourselves with loving embraces — נִתְעַלְסָה בְּאַהֲבִים —**  
for now there is nothing to stop us.”

*The “koach hara” persuades a person that he can have unlimited pleasure with no inhibitions or feelings of guilt. And when the night with its worldly pleasure comes to an end he can do teshuvah and then there will be time return to his learning.*

**(יט) כִּי אֵין הָאִישׁ בְּבֵיתוֹ  
הֵלֵךְ בְּדֶרֶךְ מִרְחוֹק :**

(19) **“For the man [my husband] is not at home — כִּי אֵין הָאִישׁ בְּבֵיתוֹ; he has gone on a long journey — הֵלֵךְ בְּדֶרֶךְ מִרְחוֹק.”** She refers to him as “the man” because she disowns her duty to respect him as her husband and refuses to acknowledge that what she is proposing is a betrayal.

*The “koach hara” persuades the client that his pleasure will not be interrupted and there is no risk of complications or consequences. Since “the man” is far away, the day of reckoning is far off and he can enjoy himself in the present. There will be plenty of time before the need to do teshuvah.*

**(כ) צָרוֹר הַפֶּסֶף לָקַח בְּיָדוֹ לְיוֹם הַפֶּסָא יָבֵא בֵיתוֹ :**

(20) **He has taken the money pouch with him — צָרוֹר הַפֶּסֶף לָקַח בְּיָדוֹ —**  
to buy goods for his business. Since he already has all the money  
he has no reason to return suddenly.

**He will come home at the appointed time — לְיוֹם הַפֶּסָא יָבֵא בֵיתוֹ,**  
and not before then.

*The “koach hara” induces a person to abandon his emunah — faith that the Divine hashgachah (Providence) can come at any time to reward or punish human behavior. The assumption is that “business is business” and commercial needs will always take priority.*

**SURRENDER.**

**(כא) הִטְתּוֹ בְּרַב לְקָהָה בְּחִלְקָה שְׂפָתֶיהָ תִּדְיָחֶנּוּ :**

(21) **She bends him to her will — הִטְתּוֹ —**  
**with the abundance of her persuasive talk — בְּרַב לְקָהָה.**

**With the glibness of her lips — בְּחִלְקָהּ שִׁפְתֶיהָ**  
**She entices him away from the straight path — תְּדִיחֵנוּ**

*The “koach hara” uses language skills and sophisticated arguments to overwhelm the inexperienced victim.*

**(כב) הוֹלֵךְ אַחֲרֶיהָ פִּתְאֵם כְּשׁוֹר אֶל טֶבַח יָבוֹא וּכְעֶכֶס אֶל מוֹסֵר אֹוִיל:**  
 (22) **Without stopping to think, he suddenly follows her — הוֹלֵךְ אַחֲרֶיהָ פִּתְאֵם,**  
**as an ox goes without being prodded to the slaughter — כְּשׁוֹר אֶל טֶבַח יָבוֹא,**  
**and as a prisoner in chains to the rebuke of a fool — וּכְעֶכֶס אֶל מוֹסֵר אֹוִיל.**

*The “koach hara” prevents the victim from stopping to think about what he is doing. He offers no resistance but does not even say he needs time to think it over.*

**(כג) עַד יַפְלֹחַ חַץ כְּבִדּוֹ כְּמִהַר צְפוּר אֶל פֶּחַ וְלֹא יֵדַע כִּי בִנְפֹשׁוֹ הוּא:**  
 (23) **He blithely remains ignorant of what is in store for him,**  
**until the arrow splits his liver — עַד יַפְלֹחַ חַץ כְּבִדּוֹ.**  
**He is like a bird hurrying to the trap — כְּמִהַר צְפוּר אֶל פֶּחַ**  
 because of the few kernels of grain that it sees there,  
**unaware that its life will be lost — וְלֹא יֵדַע כִּי בִנְפֹשׁוֹ הוּא.**

*The “innocent” victim does not realize that his own actions are bringing about his downfall. He starts haltingly, but gets carried away by the eagerness of desire and rushes to his own destruction. And when he is struck by the arrow of the irate husband who has suddenly returned, the victim hardly notices it.*

### THE MORAL.

**(כד) וְעַתָּה בְּנִים שִׁמְעוּ לִי וְהִקְשִׁיבוּ לְאִמְרֵי פִי:**  
 (24) **And now, in light of this story, my children, — וְעַתָּה בְּנִים**  
 while you are still under my influence, **listen to me — שִׁמְעוּ לִי.**  
**Pay careful attention to the words of my mouth — וְהִקְשִׁיבוּ לְאִמְרֵי פִי**  
 so that my admonitions will continue to ring in your ears when  
 you are on your own.

**(כה) אַל יִשְׁטֹ אֶל דְּרָכֶיהָ לְבָדָּה אֶל תִּתַּע בְּנִתִּיבוֹתֶיהָ:**  
 (25) **Don’t let your heart veer off into her ways — אַל יִשְׁטֹ אֶל דְּרָכֶיהָ לְבָדָּה**  
 of seduction and passion, which you recognize as clearly destructive.  
**Don’t even go astray in her minor paths — אֶל תִּתַּע בְּנִתִּיבוֹתֶיהָ,**  
 which you might think you can safely follow, such as conversation or just looking.

**(כו) פִּי רַבִּים חֲלָלִים הִפִּילָה וְעַצְמִים כָּל הַרְגִּיהָ:**

**(26) For many are the corpses she has brought down — פִּי רַבִּים חֲלָלִים הִפִּילָה; the number of her victims is huge — וְעַצְמִים כָּל הַרְגִּיהָ.**

*Don't view the story I have related as an exception. Many people, even the most stalwart, have fallen under her spell and have suffered the consequences. Don't think you are immune to her blandishments.*

**(כז) דְּרָכֵי שְׂאוֹל בֵּיתָהּ יִרְדּוֹת אֶל חֲדָרֵי מָוֶת:**

**(27) Even though they may seem innocuous, the roads to her house lead to the grave — דְּרָכֵי שְׂאוֹל בֵּיתָהּ, descending precipitously to the chambers of death — יִרְדּוֹת אֶל חֲדָרֵי מָוֶת.**

*The descent is so steep that you won't be able to save yourself once you have begun to fall.*