

Mishlei 10-11

Speech

Key Concepts

Hashem gave man the precious power of speech so that he could share wisdom, do kindnesses, and communicate with his Creator. Thus, when used by a righteous person (*tzadik*) the human mouth becomes a source of life. In contrast, wicked people (*resha'im*) use the mouth as an instrument to mislead so that the victims of their selfishness are prevented from defending themselves.

Exploring Mishlei

(יא) מְקוֹר חַיִּים פִּי צַדִּיק, וּפִי רְשָׁעִים יִכְסֶה חֶמְס׃

(11) The mouth of the tzadik is a wellspring of life, but the mouth of the resha'im conceals the harm that they are perpetrating.

The *tzadik* uses his mouth to fulfill the purpose for which it was given to him. And the wisdom that he communicates with this powerful instrument is the key to life for those who receive it, as described in Mishlei Segment 03-04.

However, because of its great power, the mouth can easily be misused to cause great harm. One way is to cover up evil intentions so that the *resha'im* can carry out their evil designs.

The mouth of *resha'im* was previously featured in Mishlei Segment 10-06 (The Community). In that proverb, whose words parallel the second part of the present proverb, Mishlei pointed out how the evil speech that issues from the mouth of the *resha'im* serves as an obstacle to block the flow of blessings rather than a conduit for good.

Learning Mishlei

(יא) מְקוֹר חַיִּים פִּי צַדִּיק,
וּפִי רְשָׁעִים יִכְסֶה חֶמְס׃

A wellspring of life — מְקוֹר חַיִּים

is the **mouth of the tzadik — פִּי צַדִּיק**

because of the life-giving wisdom he shares

but the mouth of the wicked — וּפִי רְשָׁעִים

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creates false illusions and **conceals** the **harm** – **יְכַסֵּה חֶמְסוֹ** – that they are perpetrating.

Additional Insights

THE MOUTH OF THE TZADIK

- (1) The wisdom issuing from the mouth of the tzadik offers guidance which gives life to those who learn from it. (אבן עזרא)
- (2) The wisdom flowing from the mouth of the tzadik may be compared to the life-giving water flowing from a bubbling spring. (רבינו יונה)
- (3) The tefillos issuing from the mouth of the tzadik draw forth life-giving blessings from Hashem to the world. (שבט מיהודה)

THE MOUTH OF RESHA'IM

- (4) The speech issuing from the mouth of *resha'im* covers up the hatred that is buried in their heart. (רש"י)
- (5) The *resha'im* are skeptical of the wisdom issuing from the mouth of the tzadik. They try to turn the tables on him and accuse him of what they are guilty of, that is, using the power of speech to cover up harm. (אלשיך)
- (6) The *resha'im* cover the world in harm because their evil speech draws forth defensive arguments from those they accuse. The result is an endless interplay between hurt and harm. (הגר"א)