

Mishlei 10-14

Discretion

Key Concepts

Because of the great value and the power of knowledge, one needs to exercise care and discretion in choosing when and how to share it with others. A wise person recognizes that knowledge can easily be distorted and misinterpreted through the process of communication. Therefore he concentrates on gathering and developing his knowledge, ensuring its integrity and consistency. He reveals it only to those who respect it and will preserve its meaning. In contrast, the fool who lacks respect for knowledge, treats it lightly and carelessly, without taking the time to validate its accuracy. This attitude is an invitation to disaster.

Exploring Mishlei

(יד) חֲכָמִים יִצְפְּנוּ דַעַת וּפִי אֱוִיל מַחֲתָה קִרְבָּה:

(14) Wise men store up knowledge, but the mouth of the fool brings ruin near.

Wise men acquire wisdom from their teachers and from authoritative written texts. Through intense study and reflection they develop the wisdom and guard it carefully to ensure its integrity. They reveal it only at the time and to the audience that will respect that integrity. The fool who is skeptical about the truth of wisdom fails to respect it and protect it. He communicates it to others whenever it suits his immediate purpose. In this way he jeopardizes the value of wisdom and opens himself and others to tragedy. Thus, a forecast of impending danger or a timely rebuke may be disregarded and not acted upon.

Learning Mishlei

(יד) חֲכָמִים יִצְפְּנוּ דַעַת

Wise men listen carefully to their teachers and **store up** the **knowledge** – **חֲכָמִים יִצְפְּנוּ דַעַת** that they have acquired. They guard its integrity so that it is not forgotten. By reviewing it in their minds and reflecting upon it, they elevate the level of that knowledge so that it becomes even more valuable. As far as divulging it to others is concerned, they are careful about what they say and to whom they

say it, because they are concerned that it may be misunderstood. And they remain silent about whatever they don't know.

וּפִי אֲוִיל מִחֲתָה קֶרְבָּה:

But the mouth of the fool who carelessly says whatever comes to mind **brings ruin near** – וּפִי אֲוִיל מִחֲתָה קֶרְבָּה. Since the fool is careless about the accuracy of what he says, each time he repeats it, the truth is further distorted.

Additional Insights

THE WISE MAN

- (1). Through the process of carefully organizing one's knowledge a person is able to guard its integrity and insure that he will not forget it.
- (2) A wise person will never be in a rush to speak. Rather he will bide his time, choosing carefully when his words will be effective and well-received.
- (3) When a wise person is rebuked by his teacher, he listens carefully and accepts the truth and incorporates it into his life. He resists the temptation to answer back.
- (4) The wise man develops daas (insightful knowledge) through a process of careful review and analysis of the wisdom he has received. He treats knowledge as something to be shared, not hidden. However, his sharing of knowledge is carefully controlled. One who conceals knowledge is liable to use it for deception.
- (5) When a wise man is challenged by a foolish remark, he does not rush to reply, but carefully considers the implications of what has been said, and how best to respond.
- (6) A student in the presence of his teacher should ask questions until he is sure he has understood the implications of what has been taught. However, he should not begin asking questions until he has carefully thought through and explored everything the teacher has said.

THE FOOL

- (7) Through ill-considered and careless gossip a person can easily distort the truth and cause great harm to others.

(9) Through frequent talk a person is likely to lose track of what is actually true. As a result, he will forget the knowledge he has acquired.

(9) A fool reveals knowledge without considering its effect upon the listener. He runs the risk of sowing fear and terror in the hearts of people who would have been better off without the information he is imparting.

Sources

The primary sources used for the insights illuminating this segment are listed below.

(6) - החסיד יעב"ץ

(7) - רבינו יונה

(8) - המאירי

(9) - רשר"ה

(1) - רש"י, רבינו יונה

(2) - המאירי

(3) - אבן יחייא

(4) - מלבי"ם

(5) - אלשיך

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