

Mishlei 10-20

Perseverance

Key Concepts

Every righteous man (*tzadik*) has a responsibility to have a positive moral and spiritual effect on others. In this proverb Mishlei shows how this is easier said than done. On the one hand, the *tzadik* takes great pains to carefully consider the effect his well-meaning admonition will have on the listener. He hopes his own heartfelt words will strike a chord in the hearts of those he is trying to influence.

On the other hand, if the listeners are *resha'im* and have built up a shell of resistance, access to their hearts and minds may be limited. The moral of the story is that the *tzadik* should not be discouraged but should keep trying until he finds the brief moment when his listeners will be receptive.

Exploring Mishlei

(כ) כֶּסֶף נִבְחָר לְשׁוֹן צַדִּיק לֵב רְשָׁעִים כְּמַעֵט:

*(20) The tongue of the tzaddik is like choice silver,
but the the heart of resha'im is fleeting.*

The painstaking effort of the *tzadik* to find the right words to affect his listeners may be compared to choice silver which must go through many steps of refinement to remove impurities.

Despite his praiseworthy efforts, the *tzadik* must be prepared to be patient because the window of opportunity into the hearts of the *resha'im* is very small, and is quickly closed.

Learning Mishlei

(כ) כֶּסֶף נִבְחָר לְשׁוֹן צַדִּיק
לֵב רְשָׁעִים כְּמַעֵט:

An admonition from **the tongue of a *tzadik*** — לְשׁוֹן צַדִּיק
is like **choice silver** — כֶּסֶף נִבְחָר

that has been patiently refined to remove impurities.

He carefully considers in his heart how his words will be received before he utters

them. If the listener is worthy, he will respond to the speaker's heartfelt sincerity. **But the opportunity to reach the heart of *resha'im* – לֵב רְשָׁעִים – is fleeting – כְּמַעֵט.**

Additional Insights

THE TONGUE OF THE TZADIK

- (1) A *tzadik* formulates his admonition with words that are carefully selected. He has a responsibility to get his carefully composed message across in the shortest way possible. (רש"י, אבן עזרא, רבינו יונה בשע"ת)
- (2) The words of a *tzadik* are free of ulterior motives, just as choice silver is free of other metals. In the ideal case, these words thus penetrate the heart of a wicked man (*rasha*) and encourage him to repent. When the *tzadik* is successful, his sincere words melt the heart of the *rasha*, like wax, so that it will cease to drive him. (אלשיך)
- (3) When addressing a group of people, the *tzadik* must anticipate that the *resha'im* among them will not respond with *teshuvah* (penitence). However, he must hope that those who are worthy will be affected positively. (שבט מיהודה)
- (4) The tongue symbolizes internal speech that reflects the current thoughts of the speaker as opposed to the lips which symbolize speech that is external and reflects conclusions the speaker has reached earlier. (מלבים)

THE HEART OF THE RESHA'IM

- (5) The heart of the *resha'im* is constantly shifting attention from one subject to another and it is therefore difficult for them to focus on a serious message. (רבינו יונה)
- (6) Even when the *tzadik's* words penetrate a sinner's heart, the effect may be short-lived. This is not necessarily a reflection of the *tzadik's* shortcomings, but rather of the sinner's capriciousness. (הגר"א)