

Mishlei 10-23**Quickness****Key Concepts**

Quickness is a characteristic of human behavior that may or may not be praiseworthy depending on the circumstance. To illustrate the concept of quickness Mishlei compares it to the phenomenon of laughter. When a person sees or hears something funny, he may burst into laughter without warning. In fact, it often happens so fast that his laughter is uncontrollable.

An example of undesirable quickness is the behavior of a fool who has not developed moral restraints on his physical or psychological urges. As soon as the immoral thought comes into his mind, he is driven to immediately act on it.

An example of desirable quickness is the behaviour of a learned man, who has developed insight through extensive analysis and review. As a result, he is so familiar with his knowledge that he is able to quickly respond to any challenging question. He seems to have the answer at his fingertips.

Exploring Mishlei

(כג) בְּשִׂחּוֹק לְכָסִיל עֲשׂוֹת זִמָּה וְחִכְמָה לְאִישׁ תְּבוּנָה :

(23) It is like a burst of laughter for a fool to implement an immoral thought and for wisdom coming to a man of understanding.

A burst of laughter can come suddenly and without warning to somebody with a sense of humor. This phenomenon is characteristic of the way a fool responds to an immoral thought; he acts on it quickly without thinking.

The same phenomenon describes the way a man of understanding responds to a challenging question for which he is well prepared. He is able to respond quickly with the appropriate words of wisdom.

Learning Mishlei

(כג) כְּשֶׁחֹק לְכָסִיל עֲשׂוֹת זְמָה וְחֻכְמָה לְאִישׁ תְּבוּנָה :

It is like bursting into laughter – כְּשֶׁחֹק
for a fool – לְכָסִיל
to act on an immoral thought – עֲשׂוֹת זְמָה,
 because the thought appears suddenly
 and he doesn't stop to think of the
 consequences of his actions.

Similarly, **wisdom – וְחֻכְמָה**
 appears quickly **to a man of understanding – לְאִישׁ תְּבוּנָה**
 who responds briskly to a question
 with a wise answer because he has
 previously thought it through many times.

Additional Insights

THE FOOL

(1) Just as laughter comes easily to the fool, so do immoral acts. (אבן עזרא, מצודות)

(2) Just as laughter is governed by instinct, so is immoral behavior to a fool. It is second nature, governed by instinct and habit. (אלשיך, מלבי"ם)

(3) Just as laughter comes without thinking, so does the fool turn immoral thoughts into acts, all without the application of wisdom. He does not distinguish between thoughts whose outcomes are worthwhile and those which have serious consequences. (רבינו יונה, רשר"ה)

(4) Just as a person cannot restrain himself from laughing at a joke, so is it with a fool who cannot restrain himself from immoral acts. (הגר"א)

(5) As soon as a thought enters the mind of a fool he rushes to carry it out. It is like the mechanism of laughter which is an automatic unconscious reaction. (המאירי, חנוך לנער)

(6) Just as he enjoys laughter, the fool enjoys his immoral actions, all without looking back in regret. (המאירי)

THE MAN OF UNDERSTANDING

(7) Wisdom flows as easily as laughter from the man of understanding. (רש"י)

(8) When the man of understanding is tempted to an immoral action, he does not rush into it, but stops to think of its consequences. He replaces laughter with wisdom. (המאירי, רשר"ה)

(9) Just as laughter comes to a person quickly and without preparation, so do words of wisdom come to the lips of the man of understanding. (הגר"א, מלבי"ם)