

Mishlei 10-20

Perseverance

Key Concepts

Every righteous man (*tzaddik*) has a responsibility to have a positive effect on others. In this proverb Mishlei shows how this is easier said than done. On the one hand, the *tzaddik* takes great pains to carefully consider the effect his rebuke 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 wicked (*resha'im*) they have built up a shell of resistance so that access to their hearts is limited. The moral of the story is that the *tzaddik* 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 כְּמַעֲט:

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

The painstaking effort of the *tzaddik* 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 *tzaddik* must be prepared to be patient because the window of opportunity into the heart of the *resha'im* is very small, and is quickly closed.

Learning Mishlei

(כ) כֶּסֶף נִבְחָר לְשׁוֹן צַדִּיק

לֵב רְשָׁעִים כְּמַעֲט:

An expression of rebuke from **the tongue of a tzaddik is like choice silver** — **כֶּסֶף נִבְחָר לְשׁוֹן צַדִּיק** 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 pierce the shell of **the heart of resha'im is fleeting** — **לֵב**

רְשָׁעִים כְּמַעֵט.

Additional Insights

THE TONGUE OF THE TZADDIK

(1) A tzaddik formulates his rebuke with words that are carefully selected. He has a responsibility to get his carefully composed message across in the shortest way possible.

(2) The words of a *tzaddik* are free of ulterior motives, just as choice silver is free of other metals. These words thus penetrate the heart of a wicked man, and encourage him to repent. When the *tzaddik* is successful in his rebuke, his sincere words melt the wicked man's heart like wax, so that it will cease to control him.

(3) When addressing a group of people, the *tzaddik* 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.

(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.

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.

(6) Even when the *tzaddik's* words of rebuke penetrate a sinner's heart, the effect may be short-lived. This is not necessarily a reflection of the *tzaddik's* shortcomings, but rather of the sinner's capriciousness.

Sources

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

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| (1) - רש"י, אבן עזרא, רבינו יונה (בשע"ת) | (4) - מלבי"ם |
| (2) - אלשיך | (5) - רבינו יונה |
| (3) - שבט מיהודה | (6) - הגר"א |

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