

Mishlei 10-30

Speech and Goodwill

Key Concepts

When used by a righteous person (*tzaddik*) the human mouth becomes a source of life (see Segment 10-11). With the power of speech the *tzaddik* can share wisdom, promote goodwill, and communicate with his Creator. In contrast, wicked people (*resha'im*) use their power of speech to instigate controversy and strife.

Exploring Mishlei

(לא) פִּי צַדִּיק יִנּוּב חֲכָמָה וּלְשׁוֹן תְּהַפְּכוֹת תִּכְרַת:

(31) *The mouth of the tzaddik sprouts wisdom, but a perverse tongue will be severed*

(לב) שִׁפְתֵי צַדִּיק יִדְעוּן רָצוֹן וּפִי רֶשָׁעִים תְּהַפְּכוֹת:

(32) *The lips of a tzaddik know how to placate, but the mouth of resha'im speaks perversity.*

In the two proverbs of this segment Mishlei addresses two aspects of the positive use of the power of speech as used by the *tzaddik*: (1) sharing wisdom with others, and (2) reducing strife by placating those who have been wronged.

In contrast, the two proverbs tells us that *resha'im* use speech in a perverse way. They antagonize people and foment strife. Since Hashem hates strife and ill will, He will surely bring that ability to an end (v.31).

Learning Mishlei

(לא) פִּי צַדִּיק יִנּוּב חֲכָמָה

וּלְשׁוֹן תְּהַפְּכוֹת תִּכְרַת:

The mouth of a tzaddik sprouts wisdom — פִּי צַדִּיק יִנּוּב חֲכָמָה, **thereby promoting peace** and long life. **But a perverse tongue** foments strife and **will be severed** — וּלְשׁוֹן תְּהַפְּכוֹת תִּכְרַת, that is, it will be prevented from bringing its quarrelsome ideas into action.

(לב) שְׁפִתֵי צַדִּיק יִדְעוּן רָצוֹן
וּפִי רְשָׁעִים תִּהְפְּכֹת:

The lips of a tzaddik know how to placate Hashem and people — שְׁפִתֵי צַדִּיק יִדְעוּן רָצוֹן, but the mouth of resha'im speaks perversity — וּפִי רְשָׁעִים תִּהְפְּכֹת.

Additional Insights

THE MOUTH OF THE TZADDIK (v. 31)

(1) The tzaddik is compared to a blossoming tree (See Mizmor 001, v. 1:3) that produces bountiful fruit. Just as the nature of the tree is to produce fruit and sheltering leaves, so is the nature of the tzaddik to produce wisdom that enlightens all who have access to his words.

(2) The tzaddik is motivated by the welfare of others and so he uses the power of speech to make wisdom palatable to the people.

(3) The tzaddik speaks in terms of wisdom and mussar, thereby elevating the moral level of the people.

THE LIPS OF THE TZADDIK (v. 32)

(4) The tzaddik uses the power of speech to placate the person who has been wronged. In this way he prevents strife.

(5) The tzaddik placates the anger of Hashem in tefillah, thereby saving the world from harsh judgment.

(6) Although the tzaddik speaks in terms of truth, he knows how to couch his words in such a way as to maintain peace among contending parties.

THE TONGUE OF PERVERSITY (v. 31)

(7) In their perversity, the resha'im speak the opposite of wisdom, that is, the opposite of truth. And just as the the fruit of the tzaddik is wisdom, the fruit of the resha'im is pride, which leads to strife.

(8) The perverse tongue will be prevented from bringing its quarrelsome ideas into action.

THE MOUTH OF RESHA'IM (v. 32)

(9) In their perversity, the resha'im do not practice the humility needed to placate their adversaries. On the contrary they falsely insist that they have done no wrong and therefore they don't back down from their antagonistic stance.

(10) When the resha'im try to placate someone they do so in a dishonest way, using the power of falsehood to deceive.

Sources

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

- | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| (6) - רבינו יונה | (1) - רבינו בחיי |
| (7) - רבינו יונה, רבינו בחיי | (2) - אבן יחייא |
| (8) - המאירי | (3) - מצודות |
| (9) - חנוך לנער | (4) - חנוך לנער, אבן יחייא |
| (10) - הגר"א | (5) - רש"י |

© COPYRIGHT NOTICE

All rights to this document are reserved by the author. For further information contact Isaac Kirzner at isaac@kirzner.com