

Mishlei 11-03

Fairness

Key Concepts

This proverb explores fairness (*yashrus*), which is an essential quality (*middah*) of a person's character. Yashrus is the decency and fair-mindedness that motivates a person to act in a balanced and equitable manner. It was introduced by Mishlei in the third posuk of segment 01-01.

A person may be fair-minded from birth or as a result of the way he was brought up. With this quality is able to recognize and appreciate fair treatment, even in ambiguous situations.

There is a special relationship between fairness and integrity (*temimus*), which refers to an intellectual sense of discipline or conscientiousness that guides the fair-minded person to maintain consistency in his practices so that he is enabled to resist temporary aberrations caused by need or temptation. Integrity was mentioned earlier in segment 11-01 in the context of maintaining discipline in commercial practices.

Because of the many challenges to his character that a person faces in life, this quality is very demanding. Integrity calls for serious self-control to achieve total perfection in one's *middos*. (See [Segment 10-09](#))

Fair-mindedness encourages a person to be grateful for favors. Thus, its opposite is disloyalty or treachery. The opposite of integrity is perversity or irresponsibility, which leads a person to neglect and resist discipline.

Exploring Mishlei

(ג) תַּמְתַּ יִשְׂרָיִם תְּנַחֵם וְסֹלֶף בּוֹגְדִים יִשְׁדֹּם :

**(3) The integrity of fair-minded people will guide them,
but the perversity of the ungrateful will rob them.**

The first part of this proverb teaches that a sense of decency (*yashrus*) is not enough. A person needs to be guided by the discipline of integrity. The second part illuminates the meaning of integrity and fairness by contrasting these attractive qualities with their opposites: perversity and ingratitude. By combining the

destructive effects of these hateful qualities a person robs his own soul of the chance for eternal life.

Learning Mishlei

The integrity of fair-minded people — תִּמְתּוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל — will provide the discipline to guide them. — תִּנְחָם — but the perversity of the ungrateful, — וְסָלַף בּוֹגְדִים — will rob them. — יִשְׁדָּם — of their chance for eternal life.

Additional Insights

GOOD MIDDOS

- (1) Integrity and fair-mindedness are complementary qualities, as it says (*Iyov* 1:1), וְהָיָה הָאִישׁ הַהוּא תָם וְיָשָׁר, “that man was conscientious and fair-minded.” (רבינו יונה)
- (2) Fair-mindedness refers to an instinctive quality of recognizing and choosing what is right. It is a quality of the heart, which includes all of the good *middos* that are deeply implanted within a person. (רבינו יונה, מלבי”ם)
- (3) Although fair-mindedness leads a person to follow the good path through life he can be diverted by physical needs and temptations. Thus, he has to apply integrity to maintain the perfection of his *middos*. (רבינו יונה, מלבי”ם, רשר”ה)
- (4) The integrity of the fair-minded leads them to the achievement of their goals in life. (רלב”ג, מצודות)

BAD MIDDOS

- (5) Repaying good treatment with bad treatment defines the opposite to fair-mindedness. (רבינו יונה)
- (6) The perversity of the unfaithful robs them of their souls. (מצודות)
- (7) Just as integrity will guide the fair-minded, the perversity of the treacherous will rob them of their ability to act with fairness, even if they have a passing inspiration to do teshuvah. (דעת סופרים)