

Mishlei 11-05

Righteousness

Key Concepts

This proverb helps us understand how a person who is eager to do the right thing can make the right choice even in an ambiguous situation. We refer to such a person as a *tzaddik* and we refer to the *tzaddik's* intense desire to do what is right in the eyes of his Creator as *tzidkus* (righteousness).

The self-discipline (conscientiousness) that the *tzaddik* needs to ensure consistent perfection in his practices is called *temimus* (integrity). If he has *temimus*, we refer to him as a *tamim*.

But how does he know what he should do in a case where the law is unclear or the circumstances are murky? For that he calls upon his *yashrus* (embedded sense of right and wrong). He may have been born with a high degree of *yashrus*, but it is more likely that he developed it through training of his intellect, motivated by his *tzidkus*.

In any case, Hashem rewards his *tzidkus* by granting him *siyata dishmaya* (Heavenly assistance) to help him along. Once he has found the straight path, which is the path of *yashrus*, he will be able to avoid stumbling on the many obstacles that he is sure to encounter on the wrong path.

The opposite of *tzidkus* is *rishus* (wickedness), the embedded desire that some people have to be rebellious and choose what Hashem hates. The *rasha* (wicked person) is likely to stumble into the wrong choice even when he is unsure of what is right and wrong because Hashem does not grant him the help he would need to recognize the risks in the choices he wants to make.

Exploring Mishlei

(ה) צְדִקְתַּת תְּמִימִים תִּישָׁר דְרָכּוֹ וּבִרְשָׁעָתוֹ יִפֹּל רָשָׁע:

(5) The righteousness of a conscientious person will straighten his path, but the rasha will fall because of his wickedness.

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. What motivates him to acquire and use that discipline? His *tzidkus* (eagerness to do what is right).

The second part of the proverb illuminates the role of *tzidkus* by contrasting it with the impact of its opposite quality (*rishus*). Because of his *rishus*, the wicked person forfeits the benefit of *siyata dishmaya* and is likely to make the wrong choices, thereby allowing him to fall by the wayside.

Learning Mishlei

**The righteousness (*tzidkus*) of the man of integrity (*tamim*) — צְדִקַּת תְּמִיִּם —
will straighten his path — תִּישָׁר דְרָכָו —**

so that his intellect is able to teach him what is right in any ambiguous situation.

**But because of his wickedness — וּבִרְשָׁעָתוֹ —
the *rasha* will fall — יִפֹּל רָשָׁע —**

because he lacks the sense of what is right and has not made the effort to develop it.

Additional Insights

THE RIGHTEOUS

(1) A person who is *tamim* has a high degree of perfection in his *middos*. He may have this as the result of his upbringing or as the result of self-training. (רבינו יונה)

(2) The merit of the *tzidkus* of the *tamim* earns him a level of *yashrus* in his actions so that he knows how to do what is right. Thus, the *hashgachah* of Hashem arranges circumstances so as to lead to a good outcome in every situation. (רבינו יונה, חנוך לנער)

(3) The very act of goodness that the *tzaddik* performs will lead him to the right path, which will benefit him. (מצודות)

(4) Through his conscious desire to do good, the *tzaddik* introduces the strength of his intellect to bear to supplement his *temimus* and bring him to the right path. (הגר"א)

(5) The *tamim* is enabled to get on the straight path as a result of his habit-forming practices of doing the right thing. (מלבי"ם)

THE WICKED

(6) The *rishus* of the wicked person makes him liable to fall under the influence of sin. The *hashgachah* of Hashem arranges circumstances so as to lead to a bad outcome so that he is faced with temptations that he cannot resist. (רבינו יונה, חנוך לנער)

(7) The very act of *rishus* that the *rasha* has planned to cause harm will become a trap for the perpetrator. (מצודות)