

Mishlei 11-09

Flattery

Key Concepts

One of the most effective ways of influencing another person is to say something that person wants to hear. Since we all wish we were better and more qualified than we really are, we are naturally drawn to someone who assures us we really are better, even though in our hearts we know it is only flattery.

Thus, flattery is often used by people who want to sell us something. It is also used by *resha'im* (wicked people) who want to tempt us to sinful behavior, either because it satisfies an evil instinct, or simply to ease their conscience about their own behavior.

Mishlei teaches us to be on guard against flattery for although it may seem pleasant, it can very destructive. The *tzadikim* (righteous people) who resist flattery are empowered by their Torah knowledge which helps them see things as they really are, rather than through the false prism of wishful thinking.

Exploring Mishlei

(ט) בָּפֶה חָנֵף יִשְׁחַת רֵעֵהוּ וּבְדַעַת צְדִיקִים יִחְלְצוּ:

(9) *With a flattering mouth he destroys his fellow,
but tzadikim are extricated through Torah knowledge.*

The *rasha* first gains the confidence of his victims through flattery, and thereafter he proceeds to destroy them. His instrument of destruction is his mouth but in his heart he knows he is spouting falsehoods. The people who avoid the trap which the flatterer sets are described as *tzadikim* because they look to the Torah for guidance. Their Torah knowledge teaches them to always seek the truth and to reject hypocrisy and falsehood.

Learning Mishlei

(9) **With a flattering mouth** — בָּפֶה חָנֵף
the *rasha* **destroys his fellow,** — יִשְׁחַת רֵעֵהוּ
by drawing him into sin.

But through Torah knowledge — וּבְדַעַת
tzadikim **extricate themselves.** — צְדִיקִים יִחְלְצוּ

Additional Insights

- (1) The flatterer gains the confidence of his victim through smooth talk and flattery, Thereafter, he proceeds to destroy him by persuading him to sin. (מצודות, רבינו יונה)
- (2) When someone begins behaving badly, the flatterer praises him for his faults instead of criticizing him, and this leads him to sink deeper and deeper into the ways of of sin. (רבינו יונה)
- (3) The gullible person thinks that the flatterer is his friend and that what he is saying is the truth, and so he does not put up his defenses. (חנוך לנער)
- (4) *Tzadikim* are saved from the corrupting effects of flattery because of their knowledge of Torah which teaches them to put up their defenses and not let compliments make them become conceited. (רבינו יונה)
- (5) The Torah knowledge of *Tzadikim* helps them recognize the emptiness in any false ideas that are being presented to them. (הגר"א)
- (6) *Tzadikim* have the benefit of Torah learning to recognize the evil qualities of *resha'im* and so they avoid their company and remain skeptical of what they have to say. Thus, they are saved from falling into their trap. (הגר"א)