

Mishlei 11-13

Confidentiality

Key Concepts

Information can be deadly because it can easily be misunderstood and, in any case, can provoke resentment and anger. Thus, information that is not carefully managed can be a source of strife, undermining the peace of a community.

Because of its power, people may be tempted to use harmful information as a source of entertainment, treating it as a commodity which is traded for the pleasure of seeing how people react. Typically, such information consists of one person's opinion of another, conveyed in words that are not always carefully chosen.

When a person is exposed to potentially hurtful information, he should treat it as confidential and reveal it only for a valid purpose, and only to those who can deal with it in the right way.

Mishlei tells us not to reveal such information to a gossipmonger who is likely to pass it on to a person who may be hurt by hearing it, or even to a third party who will put it into circulation so that the affected person will ultimately be hurt.

Exploring Mishlei

(יג) הוֹלֵךְ רְכִיל מְגַלֶּה סוֹד וְנֹאֲמָן רוּחַ מְכַסֶּה דָבָר :

(13) A gossipmonger reveals what should be a secret, but a trustworthy person conceals a matter.

Mishlei advises us to recognize potential gossipmongers (pedlars of gossip) and avoid sharing sensitive information with them. The gossipmongers are contrasted with people who can be trusted to suppress information that might cause harm to others. Such trustworthy people of noble character are described as having a faithful spirit (*ne'eman ruach*).

Learning Mishlei

(יג) הוֹלֵךְ רְכִיל מְגַלֶּה סוֹד וְנֹאֲמָן רוּחַ מְכַסֶּה דָבָר :

(13) A gossipmonger reveals what should be a secret, but a trustworthy person conceals a matter.

(13) **A gossipmonger** — הוֹלֵךְ רָכִיל
 is by nature untrustworthy and so he
reveals what should be a secret, — מְגַלֵּה סוֹד,
but a trustworthy person — וְנֶאֱמָן רוּחַ
conceals a sensitive matter. — מְכַסֶּה דָבָר
 even when it is not formally designated as a secret
 and even when he is not requested to keep it confidential.

Additional Insights

THE GOSSIPMONGER

(1) The gossipmonger is like a pedlar who travels about selling his wares. He offers information for sale and is repaid with information that he passes on to the next customer. (אבן עזרא)

(2) If you see a person who is eager to hear gossip you can be sure that he will reveal a secret. Therefore, you should not entrust him with your secrets, because he is not likely to respect them. (רבינו יונה)

(3) Even though there is already an explicit prohibition against gossipmongering in the Torah (Vayikra 19:16), Mishlei speaks strongly against this practice because it is harmful to civic peace. It destroys friendships and goodwill among people. Whether or not there is any truth to the gossip, the strife that it arouses can even lead to bloodshed. (המאירי)

(4). The essence of gossipmongering is revealing to someone that which another person has said about him. However, when one reveals this information to a third party he is also guilty of gossipmongering because once the rumor is out, it will in time come to the ears of the person affected. (מצודות)

THE TRUSTWORTHY PERSON

(5) A *ruach ne'eman* (faithful spirit) is one who can be trusted to maintain control over the information to which he is privy, revealing it only to those who are worthy. (הגר"א)

(6) A secret is like a valuable that is entrusted for safekeeping. A person should not entrust his valuables to anyone who is not trustworthy. (מלבי"ם)

(7) A person who is made privy to sensitive information should not dwell upon it, but should try to forget it as soon as possible. (המאירי)

(8) The only people who respect the need for restricting access to sensitive information are those described as having a faithful spirit. They will keep it secret even when not requested to do so. (רבינו יונה)