

## 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) בְּפֶה חָנֵף יִשְׁחַת רֵעֵהוּ וּבִדְעַת צַדִּיקִים יִחְלְצוּ:

(8) *With his mouth the flatterer destroys his friend, but tzadikim are extricated through 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 a *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

(ט) בְּפֶה חָנֵף יִשְׁחַת רֵעֵהוּ

וּבִדְעַת צַדִּיקִים יִחְלְצוּ:

**With** false praises in **his mouth** that are not in his heart — **בְּפֶה** **the flatterer destroys his friend** — **בְּפֶה חָנֵף יִשְׁחַת רֵעֵהוּ** by drawing him into sin. **But**

**tzadikim are extricated** from the trap of false illusions **through** Torah knowledge – **וּבְדַעַת צְדִיקִים יִחְלְצוּ**.

## Additional Insights

A series of insights illuminating this proverb are presented below. The numbers identifying the insights refer to the listing of sources at the end of the segment.

### THE GULLIBLE

(1) The flatterer who persuades his friend to follow a sinful path destroys him with his mouth.

(2) The flatterer destroys his friend by praising him for a quality that he does not have and so he promotes a conceited attitude which is an abomination to Hashem.

(3) The flatterer persuades his friend that he is a *tzadik* and so whatever he is doing must be good.

(4) The person who tempts others into sin does so by smooth talk and flattery. 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.

(5) 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.

(6) The flatterer says things with his mouth that are not in his heart because he knows he is speaking falsehoods.

### THE TZADIKIM

(7) *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.

(8) *Tzadikim* use their discretion to evaluate the praises of the flatterer and reject them because they realize they are being drawn into a trap.

(9) The Torah knowledge of *Tzadikim* helps them recognize the emptiness in

any false ideas that are being presented to them.

(10) *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.

(11) The *tzadik* puts himself into a cosmic perspective, realizing how insignificant he is in the overall scheme of things and so he does not fall into the trap of conceit.

(12) *Tzadikim* are saved from the sin of promoting conceit through false praise. On the contrary, *tzadikim* are more likely to rebuke people for their faults.

## Sources

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

- |                                  |                           |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| (7) - רבינו יונה                 | (1) - רש"י, רלב"ג, מצודות |
| (8) - המאירי                     | (2) - רבינו יונה          |
| (9) - הגר"א                      | (3) - שבט מיהודה          |
| (10) - המאירי, חנוך לנער, מצודות | (4) - המאירי, חנוך לנער   |
| (11) - שבט מיהודה                | (5) - המאירי              |
| (12) - רבינו יונה                | (6) - חנוך לנער           |

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