

Mishlei 11-12

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 רָכִיל מְגַלֶּה סוֹד וְנֶאֱמָן רוּחַ מְכַסֶּה דְבָר:

(13) A gossipmonger reveals [what should be 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 other people. Such people of noble character are described as having a faithful spirit (*ne'eman ruach*).

Learning Mishlei

(יג) הוֹלֵךְ רָכִיל מְגַלֶּה סוֹד

וְנֶאֱמָן רוּחַ מְכַסֶּה דְבָר:

A gossipmonger — הוֹלֵךְ רָכִיל is by nature untrustworthy and **reveals** what should be **secret** — מְגַלֶּה סוֹד, **but a trustworthy person** — וְנֶאֱמָן רוּחַ

conceals a sensitive **matter** — **מְכַסֶּה דָּבָר**, even when it is not formally designated as a secret and even when he is not requested to keep it confidential.

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 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.

(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.

(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.

(4). The essence of gossipmongering is revealing to someone what another 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.

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.

(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.

(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.

(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.

Sources

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

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| (5) - הגר"א | (1) - אבן עזרא |
| (6) - מלבי"ם | (2) - רבינו יונה |
| (7) - המאירי | (3) - המאירי |
| (8) - רבינו יונה | (4) - מצודות |

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