

Mishlei 12-05

Thoughts

Key Concepts

A person's mind is continuously active during his waking hours. Much of this thinking is directed towards what he will be doing or experiencing in the near and distant future. These considerations have three primary aspects: (1) visualizing possible situations and courses of action, (2) choosing a particular course of action, and (3) developing contingency schemes to implement that course of action in various real-life situations.

The first of these aspects involves simple, straightforward thinking. Such thinking is based on one's experience and attitude. A righteous person (*tzadik*) is naturally inclined to use this style of thinking for he has trained his mind to visualize courses of action and goals that lead to doing what is right and good.

The second aspect involves focused thinking to choose a course of action, but the *tzadik* has less need to call upon this for his way is clear to him after a lifetime of study.

The third aspect involves deep thinking and intense analysis to respond to whatever contingency may arise. This style of thinking is characteristic of the wicked person (*rasha*) who develops complex schemes to deceive and defraud others. He knows that "if you can't be good, be careful."

Exploring Mishlei

(ה) מַחְשְׁבוֹת צַדִּיקִים מִשְׁפָּט, תְּחִבֵּלוֹת רְשָׁעִים מְרָמָה:

***(5) The thoughts of tzadikim are toward justice,
but the strategies of resha'im are toward deceit.***

In this proverb *tzadikim* and *resha'im* are contrasted by the type of thinking about the future in which they are likely to be engaged. The *tzadikim* have it easy because their pattern of thinking is based on the Torah. They are drawn to act justly to protect the rights of others. Such simple, straightforward thoughts are referred to as *mach'shavos*.

At the other extreme are the *resha'im* whose thinking tends to require elaborate schemes. This is because their goal is to deceive and defraud others. They cannot

be sure how their victim will react so they need to prepare contingency strategies. These are referred to as *tachbulos*.

Learning Mishlei

(5) Even **the preliminary thoughts of *tzadikim*** — **מחשבות צדיקים** — **משפט** — **justice** — **משפט** but the carefully plotted **strategies of *resha'im*** — **תחבולות רשעים** — **deceit** — **מרמה**.

Additional Insights

(1) The three aspects of thinking correspond to military planning. The first step is to consider what may happen and what options are available. This is referred to as basic thinking (*mach'shavah*). The second step involves choosing the best option that is consistent with one's goals. This is referred to as counsel (*eitzah*). The third step involves analyzing what the enemy forces might do in response to the chosen course of action and determining which *eitzah* to use in dealing with it. This is referred to as strategizing (*tachbulah*). (מלבי"ם)

(2) The thinking of *tzadikim* is honest and straightforward. An unethical course of action is so remote from their frame of reference that it doesn't dawn on them. (הגר"א)

(3) The *tzadik* maintains control of his thoughts and doesn't allow himself to even envision himself doing improper deeds; thus, he is never tempted to act them out. (דעת סופרים)

(4) Because of the lack of transparency in the schemes of the *resha'im*, even when it seems they are saying something positive, they have a harmful intent. (הגר"א)

(5) The *tachbulos* of the *resha'im* are likened to **חבל**, a rope spun out of many threads and a net tied out of many ropes. Thus, rather than being straightforward and uncomplicated, their thoughts are directed toward deception and trickery. (רשר"ה)