

Mishlei 12-13

## Unguarded Speech

**Key Concepts**

Some people think of talking as merely a pleasant way of passing the time. They fail to consider the great damage that can occur as a result of careless speech. A person should always think about the implications of what he is saying and consider its possible effects. He should choose his words carefully so that they will not be misinterpreted and lead to unintended consequences.

**Exploring Mishlei**

**(יג) בְּפֶשַׁע שִׁפְתַּיִם מוֹקֵשׁ רָע וַיֵּצֵא מִצָּרָה צַדִּיק:**

*There is a dangerous trap in the misdeed of the lips,  
but a tzadik escapes the trouble.*

The proverb describes unguarded speech as a dangerous trap and associates this trap with a misdeed of the lips. This is because the lips symbolize superficial, thoughtless talk. They are the organ of speech that is furthest from the mind and therefore they represent a weakening of the power of the mind in controlling speech.

The *tzadik* (righteous person) chooses his words carefully so that the chances of their being misinterpreted are minimized. Furthermore, if he suspects that his thought has not been adequately communicated, he can correct the possible misunderstanding and thereby prevent any potential harm.

**Learning Mishlei**

**(13) In the misdeed of the lips — בְּפֶשַׁע שִׁפְתַּיִם,  
there is a dangerous trap — מוֹקֵשׁ רָע**

of unintended consequences.

**But a tzadik escapes the resulting trouble — וַיֵּצֵא מִצָּרָה צַדִּיק**

because he chooses his words carefully and  
is therefore able to correct misunderstandings.

## **Additional Insights**

(1) Lips are the most visible organ of speech. When a person says foolish things, it is as though his lips are moving without control. (מלבי"ם)

(2) A person speaking in the presence of a king or a court of law (or his boss) must be especially careful about saying the wrong thing. Of course, we are always in the presence of our Creator. (מלבי"ם)

(3) A person who has chosen his words carefully will find it easier to explain what he really meant. (חנוך לנער)

(4) A person who intends to harm another, keeps his true intentions a secret so that the victim is not forewarned. However, Hashem protects the innocent and causes the perpetrator to fall into a trap and reveal himself by a slip of the tongue. (הגר"א)

(5) A person who speaks carelessly may find himself in a trap that he himself has set. He has made promises that he did not mean and set expectations that he never intended to meet. (דעת סופרים)