

Mishlei 12-17

Credibility

Key Concepts

A person earns credibility by habituating himself to always speak the truth, even when he is talking of less important matters. A deceitful person is not sensitive to the value of honesty and so, even when people depend on his testimony, he has no qualms about lying. Therefore, he is not a credible witness and should be thoroughly interrogated.

One way of distinguishing the habitual truth teller from the habitual liar is the emotional content of what he is saying. Someone who is used to telling the truth is confident that he will be believed, so he expresses himself calmly. The liar suspects that he won't be believed so he may use rhetorical tricks to get his point across.

Exploring Mishlei

(יז) יִפְיַח אֱמוּנָה יִגִּיד צְדָקָה וְעֵד שְׁקָרִים מְרָמָה:

(17) **He who tells the truth** as a matter of course **testifies justly** and can be believed **but a lying witness practices deceit.**

The proverb contrasts the credibility of a person who is habitually truthful with the untrustworthiness of the habitual liar.

Learning Mishlei

He who is accustomed to **speak truthfully** — יִפְיַח אֱמוּנָה
will also testify justly — יִגִּיד צְדָקָה
but a lying witness — וְעֵד שְׁקָרִים
 can be identified by his habit of **deceit** — מְרָמָה.

Additional Insights

(1) The one who is habituated to speak the truth can be relied on because every breath that he utters reflects his devotion to truth. In effect, he “breathes” the truth (יִפְיַח). (אלשיך)

(2) The one who habitually speaks the truth tends to be speak calmly like a person who is breathing normally because he is sure people will believe him. However, a person who is lying tends to be emotional and uses an affected style of speech to get people to believe what he is saying. (מלבי"ם)

(3) Mishlei uses the word for belief (אָמוּנָה) to refer to the truth, because the truth teller is confident that what he says will be believed. (מלבי"ם)

(4) The one who is habituated to use his power of speech to deceive others will not be a reliable witness and should be thoroughly interrogated before his testimony can be believed. (מצודות)

(5) A person who is used to telling lies will lie even when there is no benefit in lying. He gains pleasure in distorting the truth and deceiving others. (רלבי"ג)