

Mishlei 12-19

Lasting Value

Key Concepts

In comparing the value of truth over falsehood Mishlei looks at the durability of a true statement versus the short life span of a lie. The truth stands on a firm foundation and will not waver no matter how much time has passed. This is a characteristic of the wisdom of the Torah. In contrast, a false statement lives but for a moment. It does not take long for its internal contradictions to be exposed.

Exploring Mishlei

(יט) שִׁפְתֵי אֱמֶת תִּכּוֹן לְעַד וְעַד אֲרָגִיעָה לְשׁוֹן שָׁקֵר :

Words from truthful lips will last forever

but words from a false tongue are but for a moment.

The proverb contrasts the lasting value of truth with the short-term existence of falsehood. Truth is associated with the lips that have uttered it whereas falsehood is associated with the lying tongue. This is because truth stands on its own merits and even a comparatively simple instrument like the lips suffices to gain credibility and acceptance. However, falsehood requires elaborate rhetoric and deception to convince the listener.

Learning Mishlei

(יט) שִׁפְתֵי אֱמֶת תִּכּוֹן לְעַד

וְעַד אֲרָגִיעָה לְשׁוֹן שָׁקֵר :

(19) Words from **truthful lips** — שִׁפְתֵי אֱמֶת

will last forever — תִּכּוֹן לְעַד,

but words spoken by a false tongue — לְשׁוֹן שָׁקֵר

are but for a moment — וְעַד אֲרָגִיעָה.

Additional Insights

(1) The lips that speak truth will live forever because people will always want to hear that truth and they will continue to repeat it for all time. As for words from a lying tongue, once their falsity has been demonstrated the credibility of the

speaker will have been destroyed and people will no longer pay attention to those words. Then, even the speaker's valid statements will be disbelieved.

(רבינו יונה, מצודות, חנוך לנער)

(2) The words from the lying tongue exists only during the time time that they are being spoken. Shortly thereafter people recognize them as being false. As far as the speaker is concerned, he knows he is lying even as he speaks. (רבינו בחיי, מצודות)

(3) The nature of truth is that it never changes. Therefore, one who speaks the truth can have peace of mind. He doesn't have to be concerned that he will one day be shown to have lied. (חנוך לנער)

(4) Truth does not require artful language to be believed, because its honesty is self-evident. This is not the case for falsehoods. The tongue, which is a more dexterous instrument than the lips, is associated with falsehood which depends on subterfuge. In contrast the movement of the lips is visible to the eye and is therefore open to all. (חנוך לנער, הגר"א, מלבים)

(5) Falsehood (**שֶׁקֶר**) is described by the Gemara (*Shabbas* 104a) as standing on one leg whereas truth (**אֱמֶת**) is described as standing on a solid foundation. This is because the letters *shin*, *kuf* and *reish* are insecurely poised, each being written with a pointed bottom. In contrast the letters aleph, mem, and soph are firmly set, resting on two points (*aleph* and *soph*) or a horizontal bar (*mem*). (שבת קד ע"א)

(6) Truth exists through all time. It testifies about the past and continues to exist in the present and future. Falsehood exists only in the present and therefore may be described as standing on one leg. The world of our present existence is a false world (**עוֹלָם הַשֶּׁקֶר**) because it exists only in the present. It serves as the beginning to the World to Come which exists for all time and is therefore the world of truth (**עוֹלָם הָאֱמֶת**). (שבט מיהודה)