

Mishlei 12-22

Betrayal

Key Concepts

Some people misuse the great gift of speech, making promises or commitments that they do not intend to honor. In so doing they are betraying the trust that innocent people give to them. By taking unfair advantage in this way they shatter the social bonds that make civilization possible and so their behavior is viewed by Hashem as an abomination.

People whose trust has been betrayed are less likely to accept someone's word the next time. This leads to a general spread of skepticism which distorts all human interaction and results in a breakdown of constructive cooperation among people.

In contrast, people who take their own words seriously and follow through by carrying out what they have committed to do, are a delight to their Creator. Their behavior demonstrates their appreciation and gratitude to Him for His gift of speech.

Exploring Mishlei

(כב) תוֹעֵבַת ה' שְׁפִתֵי־שֶׁקֶר וְעֹשֵׂי אֱמוּנָה רְצוֹנוֹ:

(22) ***False lips that make insincere promises are an abomination to Hashem, but people who act faithfully are his delight.***

The proverb compares the negative extreme of the person who makes commitments that he does not intend to keep with the positive extreme of the person who recognizes the obligation implied by his words and then proceeds to do what he has promised.

The lips are identified as the speech organ of those who treat their own words carelessly. Lips signify an external, superficial involvement in what is being said, in contrast to the tongue which is more actively involved in choosing one's words. The symbolic role of the lips in speech are also explored in Segment 12-19. Of

course, all organs of the body can be used for good or bad, and it is up to the individual to make proper use of what he has been given by Hashem.

Learning Mishlei

(22) **An abomination to Hashem** — תועבת ה'
are **false lips** — שפתי שקר
that make insincere promises
but **those who act faithfully** — ועשי אמונה
and keep their word
are His delight — רצונו.

Additional Insights

(1) Hashem cares very much about the nature of our behavior. The range of attitudes He will take towards what we have done run the gamut from an extremely negative reaction called *toevah* (abomination) to an extremely favorable reaction called *ratzon* (desire or delight). (מלבי"ם)

(2) Corresponding to the extremes of Hashem's reaction are the extremes of behavior eliciting that reaction. (מלבי"ם)

(3) With regard to speech, the kind of speech that is seen as an abomination, is the speech that is consciously false at the time it is spoken because the individual speaking it knows that he will not fulfill it. (רבינו יונה)

(4) The kind of speech that is most desirable is recognized by the resulting physical deed that fulfills those words, and by the thoughts in the depths of the heart that match the words. (הגר"א)