

Mishlei 12-26

Role Models

Key Concepts

Each person's character is constantly being molded and adjusted by the example of the people with whom he comes in contact. Mishlei advises him to make a conscience effort to choose a *tzadik* as his role model. He should be attracted by the *tzadik's* refined *middos* (character traits) and work to emulate them.

In contrast, he should guard against being influenced by the example set by the *resha'im* that he encounters. Even when their way of life seems to offer visible attractions such as economic success, he should realize that in the long run their example will lead him to a tragic end.

Exploring Mishlei

(כו) יִתֵּר מִרְעֵהוּ צַדִּיק וְדָרְךְ רָשָׁעִים תִּתְעַם:

(26) *Better than the ways of his fellow are the ways of the tzadik, but the way of the resha'im leads them astray.*

This proverb advises choosing a *tzadik* as a role model because of his superior *middos*. The *tzadik* is contrasted with *resha'im* whose way of life can lead people astray, especially when the *resha'im* are blessed with economic success.

Learning Mishlei

(26) **Better than a man's friend** — יִתֵּר מִרְעֵהוּ

as the choice for a role model

is a righteous man — צַדִּיק.

But emulating the **way of resha'im** — וְדָרְךְ רָשָׁעִים

would lead people astray — תִּתְעַם.

Additional Insights

(1) One of the superior characteristics of the *tzadik* is that he is willing to forego his personal preferences to avoid conflict. He is also a model of patience and gen-

erosity. In contrast the *resha'im* look to win every encounter, especially when it comes to money matters. (רש"י, רלב"ג, רבינו יונה)

(2) People who go astray are misled by the economic success of *resha'im* and so they neglect the opportunity to emulate the superior qualities of the *tzadik*. (מצודות)

(3) A person should not rely on his first impressions. He should be careful not to be led astray and so after observing the noble and serene life of the *tzadik* he will come to emulate his ways. (מלבי"ם)

(4) The person who is attracted to the way of life of *resha'im* relies on his own superficial judgment which is swayed by their apparent success. (מלבי"ם)

(5) The *tzadik* emulates the good character of other *tzadikim* whereas the *rasha* emulates the bad character of other *resha'im* because of their economic successes. (חנוך לינער)

(6) A wise man is not satisfied with the current state of his character. He sees the superior qualities of one who is more righteous than he is and tries to emulate him. (שבט מיהודה)