

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 attributes) 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 superficial 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) יֵתֵר מִרְעֵהוּ צַדִּיק וְדַרְךְ רְשָׁעִים תִּתְעֶם:

(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

(כו) יֵתֵר מִרְעֵהוּ צַדִּיק

וְדַרְךְ רְשָׁעִים תִּתְעֶם:

A person should choose a *tzadik* as his role model because **better than** the ways of **his fellow** are the ways of **the tzadik** – יֵתֵר מִרְעֵהוּ צַדִּיק. **But** it is a mistake to emulate **the** successful **way of the resha'im** for it **leads them astray** – וְדַרְךְ רְשָׁעִים תִּתְעֶם.

Additional Insights

A series of insights illuminating this proverb are presented below. The numbers identifying the insights refer to the listing of sources at the end of the segment.

(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 generosity. In contrast the *resha'im* look to win every encounter, especially when it comes to money matters.

(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*.

(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 emulate his ways.

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

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

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

Sources

The primary sources used for the additional insights illuminating this segment are listed below.

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| (4) - מלבי"ם | (1) - רש"י, רלב"ג, רבינו יונה |
| (5) - חנוך לנער | (2) - מצודות |
| (6) - שבט מיהודה | (3) - מלבי"ם |