

Mishlei 13-05**Truth and Falsehood****Key Concepts**

Truth is a theoretical ideal that most people admire. However, in practice people are constantly tempted to utter falsehoods without even being aware of it. They lie through exaggeration and through making unjustified assumptions when they don't have sufficient information. People make statements which they pretend "they didn't really mean." People lie to others to make an argument and they lie to themselves when they subconsciously suppress knowledge that conflicts with what they want to do or believe.

In light of this unfortunate characteristic of human nature, Mishlei uses a proverb to teach the value of raising one's sensitivity to falsehood. The *tzaddik* (righteous person) despises falsehood and therefore has developed an attitude of recognizing and avoiding the patterns of falsehood in speech. In contrast the *rasha* (wicked person) tends to focus on whatever he thinks will help his situation. He does not want to be bothered by fine distinctions between truth and falsehood.

A *tzaddik* is careful never to use falsehood to gain personal advantage. (However, he may be motivated by kindness to hide a painful truth through silence or vague language.)

To avoid making false assumptions when there is insufficient information, the *tzaddik* will make a concerted effort to investigate the truth of what he wants to say. If he finds that to be impractical he will couch his words in a form which recognizes the ambiguity in the facts at hand.

Exploring Mishlei

(ה) דְּבַר־שָׁקֶר יִשְׁנָא צַדִּיק וְרָשָׁע יִבְאִישׁ וַיְחַפֵּיר:

(5) *A tzaddik despises falsehood but a rasha dirties and insults [others through the use of falsehoods].*

This proverb compares the attitude of the *tzaddik* and the *rasha* toward the use of falsehoods. Because the *tzaddik* hates falsehoods he will be sensitive to anything that is untrue. Therefore, he will reject the temptation of falsehoods to gain advantage over another person. In contrast the *rasha* does not see any great difference between truth and falsehood. Therefore he is happy to employ falsehoods

to gain advantage, especially because falsehoods make a stronger case.

Learning Mishlei

(ה) דְּבַר שֶׁקֶר יִשְׁנָא צַדִּיק
וְרָשָׁע יִבְאִישׁ וַיַּחְפִּיר:

A **tzaddik** despises falsehood — דְּבַר שֶׁקֶר יִשְׁנָא צַדִּיק and is careful not to employ it to gain advantage over another, **but a rasha** is ready to use a falsehood for any purpose. For example, he **dirty** the good name of his adversary — וְרָשָׁע יִבְאִישׁ and **insults** — וְרָשָׁע יִבְאִישׁ וַיַּחְפִּיר — him to his face with false accusations.

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.

Wisdom in Words

- (1) The proverb does not use the word אֱמֶת (truth) because there can be only one truth, but there are many varieties of שֶׁקֶר (falsehood), all of which must be avoided. The *tzaddik* will allow his lips to utter only truth.
- (2). The word יִבְאִישׁ. refers to the use of falsehoods to dirty another person's reputation. It is based on a root meaning a bad odor. (People will avoid a person exuding a bad smell.)
- (3) The word יַחְפִּיר refers to shaming and humiliating by direct insults. It is the next step after dirtying a person's reputation.

Other Insights

- (4) Because the *tzaddik* is so sensitive to anything false he is quick to detect and reject lies that may be told to him.
- (5) The basic attitude of the *tzaddik* is founded upon a love of truth. He knows that anyone who yields to falsehood he will not be acting righteously whether it be in making judgements, giving testimony, or being an agent for transmitting gossip and slander.
- (6) Even when a *tzaddik* has a valid reason to dispute with another, he is careful to avoid using falsehoods to make his point. He definitely would not

use the methods employed by the *rasha*.

(7) Effective admonition and rebuke depends upon adherence to truth. If a person is able to describe a situation accurately he is able to show how it can be corrected.

(8) Not only does the *tzaddik* reject falsehood, he rejects anything said by a person who is motivated to prove a false point of view. Such a person distorts the truth to make his argument.

(9) Lying is a tool used to commit a great variety of serious offenses to morality including threats, instigation, hypocricisy, flattery, corruption, deception, and fraud. Besides all that, the lie becomes a crime in itself, undermining moral and social welfare.

Sources

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

(6) - רבינו יונה

(7) - המאירי

(8) - המאירי

(9) - רשר"ה

(1) - אבן יחייא

(2) - מצודות

(3) - הגר"א

(4) - מצודות

(5) - אבן עזרא, מלבי"ם

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