

Mishlei 13-15

Prudence

Key Concepts

When a person wants to take a course of action, he is naturally tempted to go forward immediately, neglecting to make sure he is doing the right thing. Is he reasonably certain of the facts? Is he exposing himself to unwise risk? The clever person behaves prudently and thinks through what he is about to do before proceeding.

The foolish person is comfortable with ignorance and uncertainty because it allows him to go ahead and do what he wants to do without worrying about the consequences. He even lacks the discretion to hide his ignorance from the world.

Exploring Mishlei

(טז) כָּל־עָרוֹם יַעֲשֶׂה בְדַעַת וּכְסִיל יִפְרֹשׂ אֵוֶלֶת:

Any clever person acts with knowledge but the fool broadcasts his ignorance to the world [by his uninformed actions].

This proverb emphasizes the behavior of the clever person who is careful to take action only when he is confident that he has sufficient knowledge. He is contrasted with the fool who lets his heart dictate what he should do and thereby reveals his foolishness to everyone .

Acting with prudence corresponds to speaking with discretion. As described in Segment 12-23 a clever person behaves with discretion to avoid revealing sensitive knowledge to those who are not able to use it properly.

Learning Mishlei

(טז) כָּל עָרוֹם יַעֲשֶׂה בְדַעַת

וּכְסִיל יִפְרֹשׂ אֵוֶלֶת:

Any clever person behaves prudently, **acting** only **with** clear **knowledge** and forethought – כָּל־עָרוֹם יַעֲשֶׂה בְדַעַת, **but the fool broadcasts** his **ignorance to the world** by his uninformed actions – וּכְסִיל יִפְרֹשׂ אֵוֶלֶת.

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) A clever person refuses to take action until he knows the his action is right and serves a purpose.

(2) A foolish person allows his emotions to influence his judgment. And so he acts even when he is uncertain of the facts. He even casts doubt upon the truth in order to do what his emotions persuade him to do. (Malbim)

(3) When a clever person errs, he seeks to minimize the damage and its publicity, whereas the fool justifies his behavior and calls upon others to follow suit.

(4) The foolish person wastes his time by acting foolishly wherever he goes and therefore he never gets around to achieving what he really wants to achieve.

(5) If a person is known to be clever, you can assume that he has carefully considered the action he is taking.

(6) When a shrewd deceiver sees that he is arousing suspicion, he immediately ceases his deception before he is exposed as a liar. But the fool tries to repair the damage of one lie with two more, and ensnares himself in a net of deception.

Sources

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

(4) - רלב"ג

(5) - מצודות

(6) - אלשיך

(1) - הגר"א, מלבי"ם

(2) - מלבי"ם

(3) - שבט מיהודה, דעת סופרים

© COPYRIGHT NOTICE

All rights to this document are reserved by the author. For further information contact Isaac Kirzner at isaac@kirzner.com