

Mishlei 14-15

Judiciousness

Key Concepts

We are all exposed to continuing flows of information, opinions, and advice. Some of it comes from parents, and teachers. But in addition, there is a variety of input from friends, acquaintances and the media. Much of what we hear is conflicting and much is wrong. If we spend too much time on it, we are likely to cause problems for ourselves, especially if we act on it.

Obviously, the need to weigh and prioritize what we hear and see is critical, but not everyone is equally capable of discriminating between the good and the bad. Furthermore, not everyone is sufficiently motivated to make the effort.

A wise and clever person looks beyond surface appearances and is continually questioning what he hears and sees. He judges everything in terms of its implications for action. Should he act and if he does so will it be the right thing to do?

The first thing to remember is that a person needs to take responsibility for how he reacts to what he hears. If he passively accepts everything, he is a simpleton. By failing to be judicious he will end up being a sinner.

Exploring Mishlei

(טו) פְּתִי יֶאֱמִין לְכֹל דְּבַר וְעָרוֹם יִבִּין לְאֲשֶׁרוֹ:

*(15) The simpleton believes everything,
but the clever man deliberates until he understands its validity.*

This proverb defines a simpleton in terms of his passive acceptance of everything he hears. Such a person is contrasted with the clever man who rouses himself from passivity and judiciously evaluates what comes to his attention. Through this process he gains an understanding of how valid it is and he is able to decide whether to believe it and whether to act on it.

Learning Mishlei

(15) **The simpleton believes** — פְּתִי יֶאֱמִין —
every provocative thing — לְכֹל דְּבַר

he hears from a gossip monger or demagogue without making a concerted effort to understand its spiritual implications or validity.

But the clever man — וְעָרוֹם

thinks it through until he

understands its validity — יָבִין לְאֲשֶׁרוֹ

for his spiritual well-being.

Related Concepts

Cleverness. The quality of cleverness is also referred to as shrewdness, which is the topic of Mishlei Segment 14-08. The shrewd or clever person is mentally alert and his mind is involved in proactive thought processes. If he is wise, he is continually questioning himself to be sure that he is doing the right thing. If not, he may use his mental alertness to take advantage of others.

Discretion. Whereas judiciousness is described here as the quality that enables a proper reaction to what one hears, a similar quality is needed to judge what information to share with others. In Segments 10-14 and 12-23 this quality is referred to as discretion.

Discernment. Whereas judiciousness is needed to discriminate between the good and bad things one hears, a similar quality is needed to judge the implications of a course of action. This involves discerning what will happen in the future and is referred to as “discernment” in Segment 14-12.

Complacency. In Segment 14-14 the quality of passive acceptance is described as “complacency.” In contrast the person who is open to advice and guidance from the wise people of his generation is a “good man.” However, as we have seen here the good man needs the quality of “judiciousness” to reject advice that is not appropriate.

Humility. The message of complacency is also addressed in Mishlei Segment 12-15 (Wisdom and Humility). The proverb in that segment teaches that it is a sign of humility to resist complacency. In the absence of humility, a person’s instinctive pride causes him to assume he is right and there is no need to consult with anyone.

.Additional Insights

- (1) The simpleton is especially vulnerable to gossip mongers and slanderers. If he is judicious he will carefully investigate the validity of matters that affect his life. (רש"י, חנוך לנער)
- (2) The simpleton is not driven by desires or needs. He is basically a passive person who accepts everything he is told. (מלבי"ם)
- (3) The tendency of the simpleton to accept what people tell him is reinforced when it is expressed with confidence. (דעת סופרים)
- (4) The simpleton does not distinguish between advice that is practical or impractical. He does not distinguish between concerns that are likely or unlikely. (המאירי)
- (5) The clever person exercises the quality of judiciousness to listen to good advice and choose the right way to go. (רבינו יונה)
- (6) The *yetzer hara* (evil inclination) is like a bad advisor who is constantly suggesting unwise courses of action. The simpleton accepts this advice uncritically. The clever person looks ahead and considers with judiciousness what will happen if he is tempted to follow that advice. (הגר"א)
- (7) Sometimes bad advice is mixed in with good advice. The clever person needs to exercise judiciousness to accept the good and reject what is bad. (שבט מיהודה)