

Mishlei 14-22

Secrecy

Key Concepts

People who are planning on doing harm often do so in secrecy, hoping that their evil intentions will not be discovered. If they were wise they would realize that their secretive behavior is self-destructive and because their secret plans lack transparency, they are likely to fail.

But secrecy is not in itself a bad thing. In fact, there are times when it is right to avoid the glare of publicity. This generally applies to somebody who wants to do a kindness. The needy person will appreciate the discreet way in which he is being helped.

Exploring Mishlei

(כב) הָלוֹא יִתְעוּ חֲרָשֵׁי רָע וְחָסֵד וְאֶמֶת חֲרָשֵׁי טוֹב:

Those who secretly plan on doing evil, will they not go astray? But those who secretly plan good deeds will achieve kindness and truth.

This proverb compares widely divergent uses of secrecy. When used to cause harm to others, such secrecy is like to fail and the plans for deception will go astray. The very secretiveness will weaken the effectiveness of the plans.

But when used to do good deeds, the use of secrecy insures that the purity of motive will be maintained and the result will be the virtuous goals of kindness (*chesed*) and truth (*emes*).

Learning Mishlei

(כב) הָלוֹא יִתְעוּ חֲרָשֵׁי רָע

וְחָסֵד וְאֶמֶת חֲרָשֵׁי טוֹב:

Will the people not go astray — הָלוֹא יִתְעוּ, **those who secretly plan on doing evil** — חֲרָשֵׁי רָע. **But kindness and truth** — חָסֵד וְאֶמֶת **will be achieved by those who secretly plan good deeds** — חֲרָשֵׁי טוֹב.

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) By definition, anyone who plans evil is straying from the straight path.

(2) Those who plan to do good deeds will be rewarded with the kindness of Hashem (*chesed*) and their purpose of doing good will be achieved and made true (*emes*).

(3) People who secretly plan to do evil will go astray because no one who can correct their errors sees what they are doing.

(4) An act of *chesed* is a kindness which is done without expectation of reward. A person who plans to do a kindness in secret has no expectation of reward and so the act is judged as *chesed*.

Sources

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

מלבי"ם - (3)

מלבי"ם - (4)

אבן עזרא - (1)

מצודות - (2)