

## Mishlei 14-25

# Reputation

### Key Concepts

A person with a sensitivity for truth cannot permit himself to utter a falsehood even in minor matters. Such a person develops a reputation of integrity and people rely on what he says. He is symbolized by the truthful witness who saves the life of an innocent person accused of a major crime and saves the life and property of someone who is being victimized.

A person who has not trained himself to avoid falsehood will be quick to express his opinion based on a partial and superficial impression, which is often wrong, even though he does not intend to lie. The falsehoods that result from his careless talk create an atmosphere of deception and cause incalculable harm.

### Exploring Mishlei

(כה) מְצִיל נַפְשׁוֹת עַד אֱמֶת וְיִנְחַח כְּזָבִים מִרְמָה:

*A truthful witness saves lives, but he who tells lies is a man of deception.*

This proverb compares the reputation of a truth teller with that of a liar. The truth teller is thought of as a truthful witness who saves lives with his talk. The liar is recognized as a man who promotes harmful deception, even if that is not his intent.

**Navigating Mishlei.** The importance of truth is examined in the context of a court case in Mishlei segment 12-17. The proverb there contrasts the **credibility** of a witness who has developed a sensitivity to truth with the untrustworthiness of the habitual liar.

The proverb in Mishlei segment 14-05 compares the **language** used by the truth teller with that used by the liar. If a person is consciously speaking the truth his language will be clear and precise. His statements will have a finality about them because truth does not change. In contrast, a person who is careless about the truth, will prefer vague statements, which he is then constantly amending and reinterpreting. This frees him from the burden of assuring himself that everything he says passes the test of truth at the time it is spoken.

The harm done by a false witness is emphasized in Mishlei Segment 06-04.

There it is listed as one of **six sinful behaviors** that Hashem hates.

## Learning Mishlei

(כה) מִצִּיל נַפְשׁוֹת עַד אֱמֶת  
וְיִפְחֵ כְזָבִים מִרְמָה:

**A truthful witness is a saver of lives – מִצִּיל נַפְשׁוֹת עַד אֱמֶת, but a speaker of falsehoods promotes deceit – וְיִפְחֵ כְזָבִים מִרְמָה.**

## 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 man who consciously speaks the truth should think of himself as a man who saves lives, including his own which he is saving from Gehinnom. (Maalos Hamidos)

(2) A man who has a habit of lying should realize that he is promoting the practice of deceit. (Chanoch, Daas)

## Sources

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

(2) - חנוך לנער, דעת סופרים

(1) - מעלת המדות