

Mishlei 14-29

Forbearance

Key Concepts

A major test of character occurs when a person is treated unfairly. The instinctive reaction is to be offended at the insult to his dignity. In fact, a person who tolerates insult without resentment in our competitive world is often looked down upon by others.

However, the conventional attitude is not the sensible attitude. Once a person allows himself to experience anger at the offense to his dignity, he loses the benefit of clear thinking and is unable to act intelligently in his own long-term interest.

In fact, the short-term satisfaction that comes from reacting with an angry outburst often aggravates the situation and provokes increased conflict.

A person who shows forbearance learns that self-restraint is the mark of nobility. The same quality of patience in the face of difficulty is advantageous in the search for knowledge. To achieve real understanding of a subject, much patience is called for. An impatient student does not check his work very thoroughly. He accepts the first result that comes to his mind, no matter how unwise it might be.

Exploring Mishlei

(כט) אָרְךְ אַפִּים רַב תְּבוּנָה וְקֶצֶר רוּחַ מְרִים אִוֶּלֶת:

A forbearing person has gained much understanding, but a short-tempered person has chosen foolishness.

This proverb compares the long-suffering person, who shows forbearance in the face of an offense, with the short-tempered person, who is carried away by his emotions. The difference between the two is revealed by the end result. The long-suffering person gains understanding from the situation and the short-tempered person comes to realize that he has chosen the path of foolishness because his behavior is ultimately self-destructive.

Learning Mishlei

(29) A long-suffering person — **אָרֶךְ אַפַּיִם**
 who does not easily take offense,
 demonstrates **much understanding** — **רַב תְּבוּנָה**
 but a short-tempered person — **וּקְצֵר רוּחַ**
 who cannot restrain his resentment,
chooses foolishness — **מַרְיָם אֵוֶלֶת**
 in place of wisdom.

Additional Insights

(1) A wise person avoids reacting in the heat of the moment. He waits until his emotions are quieted down and then calmly considers the appropriate course of action. In this way he gains understanding. But if he reacts too quickly he may jump to an unwise conclusion without considering all the factors involved. (רבינו יונה)

(2) A person who is angry does not take the time to understand another person's point of view. If he has patience he will learn what is really bothering the other person and he will be able to reflect that new knowledge in choosing a course of action. (רבינו יונה, רלב"ג)

(3) In the heat of the moment, a person's emotions prevent his mind from thinking clearly. If he goes ahead and responds immediately he will be acting without the benefit of his full faculties. It will then not be surprising if he acts foolishly. (רבינו יונה)

(4) A person who responds to a perceived offense with heated language will find that his own words are carrying him away. His verbal tirade becomes self-reinforcing without regard to the validity of his remarks, since he desperately feels the need to be the victor in the conflict. (רבינו יונה)

(5) A military leader who reacts emotionally by attacking his enemy without carefully considering the strategy he needs to win, is opening himself up to ignominious defeat. (חינוך לנער)

(6) A person who seeks the truth should not react emotionally to apparent conflicts in the material he is studying. If he takes the time to pursue all possible avenues of investigation, he will find the solution to his challenge. (חינוך לנער, רשר"ה)

(7) A person who is slow to anger is clearly wise, but when a person reacts with anger, not only is he acting foolishly, through his actions he publicizes his foolishness to the world and draws attention to his foolish behavior. (הגר"א)