

Mishlei 15-08

Hypocrisy

(Pesukim 15:8 and 15:9)

Key Concepts

Most people, whether good or bad, seek the approval and admiration of others. It enables them to view themselves through a prism of admiration and allows them to feel good about themselves, even if it is based on falsehood. And so, people have a tendency to hide their actions and thoughts if they believe these would earn them disapproval or ill will. People would like to have the best of both worlds: keeping the approval of others without having to change their behavior.

These hypocritical patterns of behavior are not limited to a person's relationships with other people. They also affect his relationship with the Creator. The person who is hypocritical towards other people is also inclined to be hypocritical when he thinks about Hashem. The problem, of course, is that Hashem knows a person's thoughts and actions, even though the individual would like to believe that he can hide them.

In the two proverbs that form this segment, Mishlei reminds the wicked that their hypocrisy is not working. The only solution is to think and do what is right. In the first proverb the focus is on those who bring sacrificial offerings in the Bais Hamikdash, although it could equally apply to any grand gesture or public act that earns him respect and goodwill.

A sacrifice is effective if it promotes a closer relationship with Hashem. Tragically, if it is a hypocritical exercise it does the opposite and so the sacrifice is perceived by Hashem as an abomination. The humble thoughts and tefillos of the individual bringing a sacrifice are his only hope for a welcome reception by Hashem. That is what Hashem is looking for. The physical act of making the sacrifice becomes secondary.

The second proverb looks beyond the bringing of sacrifices to the broad picture of a person's entire pattern of behavior, especially his *middos*. If a person insists on pleasing only himself in his choice of thoughts and actions, he should not be surprised to find that his whole way of life is an abomination to Hashem. This is ex-

acerbated by his arrogance in choosing to reject Hashem's standards and replacing them with his own.

Mishlei uses the methods of contrasting opposites to emphasize a point. Therefore, the wicked person of the second proverb is compared with the opposite extreme. The one whose only interest is in doing what is right, despite all the obstacles in his way. The seeker of righteousness devotes himself to pleasing Hashem in contrast to the wicked person who wants only to please himself, but devotes himself to misleading other people as well as His Creator. He may be able to fool others, at least for a time, but it goes without saying that Hashem cannot be fooled.

Exploring Mishlei

(ח) זָבַח רְשָׁעִים תּוֹעֵבַת ה' וּתְפִלַּת יְשָׁרִים רְצוֹנוֹ:

(8) The sacrificial offering brought by the wicked is an abomination to Hashem; but the prayer of the upright pleases Him.

(ט) תּוֹעֵבַת ה' דֶּרֶךְ רָשָׁע וּמִרְדֵּף צְדָקָה יֶאֱהָב:

(9) The way of a wicked person is an abomination to Hashem; but the one who pursues righteousness will be loved.

These two proverbs compare Hashem's attitude towards wicked people with His attitude towards those who are righteous. Wicked people, who insist upon defying the will of their Creator, are put on notice that what they are doing is an abomination to Hashem. This concept is introduced in the context of bringing sacrifices while hypocritically hoping to earn a reprieve from Hashem's harsh judgment.

The second proverb helps us understand why the reaction of Hashem is so harsh. He is angry because the hypocritical sacrifices are only a symptom of the underlying false and arrogant thinking of the wicked person. Such thinking underlies all of his behavior patterns and his *middos*.

In contrast with Hashem's negative reaction to the wicked person, Mishlei refers in the first proverb to His pleasure at hearing the sincere outpouring of tefillah from the righteous person. And in the second proverb, he refers to what is perhaps the highest goal a human being can reach and that is to sincerely aspire to always do what is right even when the goal eludes him because of his physical and emotional limitations.

Learning Mishlei

(8) **The sacrifice of the wicked — זֶבַח רְשָׁעִים**

is an abomination to Hashem — תּוֹעֵבַת ה'

It doesn't bring the individual any closer to Hashem as a sacrifice should.

In fact, it is as though he is bribing Hashem to overlook his future sins.

But the prayer of the upright — וּתְפִלַּת יְשָׁרִים

pleases Him — רְצוֹנוֹ

because it is an expression of their sincerity. Without the honest outpouring of the heart, even the most expensive sacrifice is abominable.

(9) **The way of a wicked person, — דֶּרֶךְ רָשָׁע**

his *middos* and his behavior patterns,

is an abomination to Hashem — תּוֹעֵבַת ה' .

But the one who pursues righteousness — וּמִרְדֵּי צְדָקָה

will be loved — יֵאָהֵב

even if he does not actually accomplish

the righteous act he set out to do.

Additional Insights

First Proverb

(1) The repugnance that Hashem feels toward the sacrifices brought by the wicked is increased by the fact that the funds used to buy the offering are not honestly obtained. (אבן עזרא)

(2) The proverb is describing Hashem's negative attitude towards the wicked. However, this is subject to complete reversal once they have done *teshuvah* and asked forgiveness. (מצודות)

(3) The essence of a sacrificial sin offering (*Korban Chatas*) is not the sacrifice itself but the feelings of regret for his sins that the person has when he offers the sacrifice. Likewise, if the sacrifice is a thanksgiving offering (*Korban Todah*), Its essence is the sincere gratitude he feels for having survived a danger. But a wicked person who expects to earn favor with the sacrifice itself is creating an abomination. (מלבי"ם)

(4) Sincere *tefillah* unaccompanied by an animal sacrifice has meaningful value in pleasing Hashem, but a sacrifice unaccompanied by *tefillah* has little value. Even when the *tefillah* of an upright person is a substitute for a sacrifice, its value is greater than the sacrifice of a wicked person. (חניך לנער)

Second Proverb

(5) A person who seeks to do what is right is beloved by Hashem even if circumstances prevent him from carrying out his objective. (מצודות)

(6) Just as when a person does a good deed, Hashem appreciates the good intent that motivates the act more than the act itself, so it is that when he does a bad deed, the underlying attitude is a greater source of Hashem's displeasure than the physical act. (מלב"ים)

(7) Hashem loves the person who guides others in doing what is right (אבן יחייא, הגר"א). (צדקה מרדף)