

Mishlei 16-01

Control

Key Concepts

We have been created with the illusion that we are in control of our lives, even on a minute-by-minute basis. However, if we stop and think we realize how much of what affects us is not under our personal control, either because someone else is doing it or because it is a “chance” occurrence.

The truth is that Hashem did not relinquish control of the world when He created it. When all is said and done, He rules the world and has always done so. Whatever happens is governed by His will and there is no such thing pure “chance.”

And yet within the vast scheme of the universe, we have been given the mysterious power of free will. However, that power is very limited. Even when we decide to do something and then go ahead and do it, that is only because Hashem has enabled our limbs to carry it out and nobody one is stopping us.

Mishlei points out that essentially our free will is operative only within our own minds. Even here, we are constantly struck by random thoughts presented to us by our natural instincts (*yetzer tov* and *yetzer hara*).

So what has been given to us as individuals? Hashem gave us the power to examine our own thoughts, to arrange their priorities, and to choose which ones should be translated into action. But the action itself, if and when it happens, will be under control of the Creator. That means if we want something to happen in a certain way, we are dependent on His help.

The particular type of action being discussed in this segment of Mishlei is speaking. Speech is unique in that the words and ideas in our minds are carried forward into the world of action and becomes spoken words and ideas. This is all happening “in real time.” But even here it is important for us to ask for Hashem’s help in finding the right words and language to express what we are thinking about.

Finally, after choosing what we want to say, we begin the process of actually saying it. If Hashem enables our speech organs as we hoped, the words will be formed and sounded. However, they may not come out the way we intended.

Words may easily be mispronounced and misunderstood. This may result in all kinds of unintended consequences. So, we are continually dependent upon Hashem.

But what if the words we have chose are forbidden gossip or slander. It should not surprise us to learn that Hashem generally does not prevent those words from being spoken. We have to bear the consequences of the actions we have initiated with our free will.

Exploring Mishlei

(א) לְאָדָם מְעַרְכֵי לֵב וּמֵה' מְעַנֶּה לְשׁוֹן:

**(1) To man are the arrangements of the heart,
but from Hashem is the tongue's utterance.**

This proverb analyzes the activity of talking and distinguishes between the role of the person's mind in formulating his thoughts and the role of his organs of speech in actually producing the spoken words. The mind (or heart) is under control of the person who is doing the talking. Although he may not originate all the thoughts that come into his mind, he arranges them and chooses which ones will be communicated. He may also choose which words will best express them. But the actual articulation of the words in spoken language is beyond the speaker's direct control. He depends upon Hashem to control the sounds that will be heard.

Learning Mishlei

To man — לְאָדָם

are given control of

the arrangements — מְעַרְכֵי,

of thoughts in his heart — לֵב

but from Hashem — וּמֵה'

is the **utterance — מְעַנֶּה.**

of the **tongue — לְשׁוֹן**

Additional Insights

(1) The word **מְעַנֶּה**, which refers to the tongue's utterance is based on the root **ענה**, respond. In effect, the utterance produced by the tongue is a response to the thought originating in the heart. (רשרייה, רבינו יונה)

(2) A person may find it easy to come up with thoughts in his mind but is still surprised to discover that when they are actually spoken, they don't come out as

he intended. Therefore, it is advisable to rehearse what he wants to say and ask Hashem for help in getting his ideas across. (רבינו יונה, המאירי)