

Mishlei 16-02**Rationalization****Key Concepts**

Even when people behave badly they convince themselves that they are justified in what they are doing. Perhaps they think they have been unfairly treated and they are only taking back what is rightfully theirs. Perhaps they feel they have no choice because they are subject to a powerful urge and can't be blamed for giving in to it. People whose behavior is driven by selfish motives have a way of suppressing this fact and so they believe their motives are noble.

If they didn't find some way of easing their conscience the emotional pain would prevent them from continuing in their present course of action. It is only later when they start to feel guilty about what they have done, that they realize their attempt at self-justification was only a rationalization.

Mishlei teaches a person to question his motives at the time of his act. If he takes the perspective of his Creator, he will realize that what he is doing is wrong. Instead of waiting to feel guilty after the fact, he will look to Hashem to help him make an honest appraisal and before his choice has been made.

Exploring Mishlei

(ב) כָּל דְּרָכַי אִישׁ זָךְ בְּעֵינָיו וְתִכְן רוּחוֹת ה' :

*All of man's ways are pure in his own eyes,
but Hashem looks within human spirits.*

This proverb compares the way a man sees himself, with the true perspective as viewed by the Creator. To avoid the emotional pain of guilt and internal conflict, a man tends to convince himself that his motivations are always pure and that he is doing the right thing. However, Hashem looks into every mind and is aware of the motivations that affect each person's thinking. It is up to the person not to automatically accept his own assumptions, but to consider the possibility of a higher truth.

Learning Mishlei

(2) All of man's ways — **כָּל דְּרָכֵי אִישׁ**

are morally valid

and pure — **טָהוֹר**

in his own eyes — **בְּעֵינָיו**

because his moral vision is distorted.

But Hashem looks **within human spirits** — **וְתִכֵּן רוּחֹת ה'**

and He knows whether a man's choices

are contaminated by his selfish interest.

Additional Insights

(1) Only Hashem can discern ulterior motives. A man may be kind, honest, and humble, and yet he may be motivated by a desire for recognition and praise.

(מלבי"ם)

(2) It is human nature for a person to believe that whatever path he is currently following is good. Therefore, he is instinctively reluctant to change, even when that change is for the better. However, Hashem knows how far off the right way the person really is and Hashem is ready to help him develop his character.

(רבינו יונה)

(3) In every situation where there are choices to be made, a person has an instinctive preference that comes to his mind. He will be automatically motivated to go with that option instead of evaluating all the options on their validity. Typically, a person doesn't realize the bias and foolishly thinks his choice is pure. But only Hashem can look at the available choices with a totally pure and unbiased view.

(הגר"א)