

Mishlei 16-13

Authenticity

Key Concepts

One of the major challenges of leadership is being able to recognize people who manage what they say to make a good impression. In contrast, a king or other wise leader will favor the kinds of people that have authenticity. These are individuals who will say what they deeply believe to be right rather than what is “politically correct.”

Exploring Mishlei

(יג) רְצוֹן מְלָכִים שֶׁפִּתִּי צֶדֶק
וְדַבַּר יִשְׂרָאֵל יֶאֱהָב:

(13) *The favor of kings is earned by righteous lips,
but he loves the one who speaks sincerely.*

This proverb examines the attitude of a wise king toward his subjects. Among the king’s subjects there are those who say the right thing in the presence of the king, but cannot be counted upon to say it again elsewhere. This is because the words do not express the speaker’s inner feelings. The utterances of such people are characterized as coming from their lips rather than their heart. Even so, the king is gratified to hear the righteous words, and so the words he hears earn his favor as long as he continues to hear them.

Mishlei contrasts such inauthentic people with the rare individual who can be trusted to be consistent about any position that he takes. This rare person speaks sincerely, expressing what is in his heart. Whereas the words of the inauthentic people may earn the king’s favor, the kings truly loves only the authentic person for this is someone he can really trust.

Learning Mishlei

(13) **The favor of kings** — רְצוֹן מְלָכִים —
is earned by a person with righteous lips — שֶׁפִּתִּי צֶדֶק.

But the king truly **loves** — **יֶאֱהָב**

an authentic person

who speaks sincerely upright words of righteousness — **וְדַבֵּר יִשְׁרָיִם**.

Additional Insights

(1) The king is pleased with words of righteousness even though the speaker's heart is not in it. However, the king truly loves the one who speaks from the heart. (אלשיך)

(2) The “righteous lips” may refer to rulings of uncorrupted legal rulings, which earn the king's favor. “Sincerely upright” points to an action of kindness that goes beyond the strict demands of the law and it therefore earns the love of the king. (מלבי"ם)

(3) The “righteous lips” may refer to a statement which the speaker honestly believes, but not everyone agrees with. “Sincerely upright” refers to a statement which every righteous person recognizes as valid. (חבל נחלה)