

Mishlei 16-14

Anger

Key Concepts

A feeling of anger may be aroused in response to a real or perceived offense. Typically, the angry person relieves his frustration by expressing himself with harsh words or actions. Unfortunately, anger is like a drug that distorts his thinking so that he does not adequately take into account the severity of the offense and his response may be wildly out of proportion to the situation. This is especially true if his ego convinces him that he should not have to put up with being subjected to the offender's behavior. In contrast, the more humble a person is, the more willing he is to accept a temporary offense such as a loss of dignity.

In general, a person should avoid letting anger take hold because once he is under the influence of this dangerous emotion, he loses the ability to make rational decisions. This can lead to the unwarranted destruction of a relationship. Even if the moment of anger passes, the consequences of what the angry person does may be long-lasting.

The problems that anger causes in an ordinary man are multiplied if his position in society gives him authority and power. This would be the case for a king, employer, or judge. For such a man there are higher expectation of being respected and a lower threshold of the frustration that triggers anger. Furthermore, because of his powerful position the unchecked harm that he may cause is all the greater.

In addition, the powerful individual may feel that ihe has a duty to the position he holds and his duty mitigates against relenting from his disciplinary attitude. Well-developed diplomatic skills and abundant tact are needed on the part of the peace-maker to gently bring him down to a more forgiving frame of mind.

Exploring Mishlei

(יד) חַמַּת מֶלֶךְ מְלַאכֵי מוֹת וְאִישׁ חָכָם יִכַּפְרֶנָּה :

(14) A king's anger is like angels of death;
but a wise man will pacify it.

This proverb uses the metaphor of the angel of death to illustrate the highly destructive consequences of anger. In the case of a powerful king, there is more than one such angel involved for the king's anger may bring deathly harm not only to the one who has offended him, but even more so to the king himself.

Furthermore, a king may feel that he has to teach the offender a lesson and that his duty prevents him from giving in, even after the emotion that caused the anger has abated. It takes a wise man indeed to placate the king and bring him gently back to normal thinking.

Learning Mishlei

(14) A king's anger — חַמַּת מֶלֶךְ
is potentially as lethal as angels of death — מַלְאָכֵי מוֹת.

But a wise man — וְאִישׁ חָכָם
will pacify it — יִכַּפְּרָנָה.

Additional Insights

(1) The anger discussed in this proverb is a deep-seated burning rage. This is in contrast to the kind of pretended anger that a father may assume when disciplining a child. (מלבניים)

(2) The angel of death represents the forces that implement the most severe punishment. Such a severe punishment may be unwarranted and unfair in a specific situation. (חנוד לנער)

(3) A king is typically surrounded by a circle of advisers. It is their duty to act the role of the "wise man" and avoid promoting the angry attitude. (חנוד לנער)

(4) A person who has angered the king may send an intermediary to plead his case. However, this may turn out to be the messenger of death if he is not a true friend or is biased by personal advantage. Therefore, it is often wiser for a person to plead his own case. (חנוד לנער)

(5) A person should work diligently to avoid putting himself in a situation of anger. For he can easily bring upon himself his own angel of death. (שבט מיהודה)