

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 he 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 יִכַּפְּרָנָה:

A king's anger is as angels of death; but a wise man will appease 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

חַמַּת מֶלֶךְ מְלַאכֵי מוֹת
וְאִישׁ חָכָם יִכְפַּרְנָהּ:

A king's anger is potentially as lethal as angels of death — חַמַּת מֶלֶךְ מְלַאכֵי מוֹת; but a wise man will pacify it — וְאִישׁ חָכָם יִכְפַּרְנָהּ.

Additional Insights

A series of insights illuminating this proverb are presented below. The numbers identifying the insights refer to the listing of sources at the end of the segment.

- (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. (Malbim)
- (2) The angel of death represents the forces that implement the most severe punishment. Such a severe punishment may unwarranted and unfair in a specific situation. (Chanoch)
- (3) A king is typically surrounded by a circle of advisers. It is their duty act the role of the "wise man" and avoid promoting the angry attitude. (Chanoch)
- (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.(Chanoch)
- (5) A person should work diligently to avoid putting himself in a situation of anger. For he easily bring upon himself his own angel of death. (Shevet MiY)

Sources

The primary sources used for the additional insights illuminating this segment are listed below.

- (4) - חנוך לנער
- (5) - שבט מיהודה

- (1) - מלבים
- (2) - חנוך לנער
- (3) - חנוך לנער