

## Mishlei 16-27

### Principles

#### Key Concepts

To function in the world every person needs to restrain his natural instincts for gaining advantage and feeding his appetites. He may be motivated by positive forces such as an innate sense of right and wrong or by the desire to please others. Alternately, he may be motivated by fear of the consequences, whether imposed by nature, by society or by spiritual forces.

A person needs to be aware of all the motivations that are acting upon him. He should work to develop his sense of right and wrong, and he should organize his life in a way that will please Hashem. At the same time, he should maintain a healthy fear of displeasing Hashem by his thoughts, his speech, or his actions. All of these motivations are effectively the principles by which he lives his life.

To some extent a person who fails to live his life completely as he should is an unprincipled person. Mishlei refers to a man who is not restrained by principles as a **בְּלִיעֵל**, that is a man who is **בְּלִי עוֹל** – without a yoke or restraint.

To the extent that a man is a **בְּלִיעֵל**, he allows his mind to develop evil thoughts because he thinks they will help him gain some kind of benefit and because he thinks himself free of any consequences.

#### Exploring Mishlei

(כז) אִישׁ בְּלִיעֵל כָּרַח רָעָה וְעַל שִׁפְתוֹ פֶּאֶשׁ צָרְבֶת:

*(27) An unprincipled man digs up evil,  
and on his lips there is a scorching fire.*

This proverb contrasts what goes on in the mind of the unprincipled man and what happens as a result. In his mind he allows his thoughts to have unrestrained freedom to explore ways of pleasing himself, no matter how immoral or unethical they are. But inevitably he gives away some part of what is going on in his mind with the sharp and burning words on his lips, even if they are unintentional.

## Learning Mishlei

(27) An unprincipled man — אִישׁ בְּלִיעֵל  
digs up evil in his thoughts — כָּרַח רָעָה  
and on his lips — וְעַל שִׁפְתָּיו  
there is a scorching fire — כָּאֵשׁ צָרְבֶת  
because the words on his lips give him away.

## Additional Insight

(1) The act of speaking is itself a means to further develop the evil thoughts that gave birth to his evil words. This corresponds to the process of teaching wisdom (Mishlei 16-23). Through the act of enunciating words of wisdom with the lips, the teacher feels more involved in those words and his own knowledge of the subject matter is heightened. (רבינו יונה, רלבי"ג)

(2) When evil thoughts are transformed into spoken words, they incinerate the hearts of those who hear and those who are the objects of what is spoken. (אבן יחיאל)

(3) The unprincipled man develops a love for evil. He digs into every possibility of hurting and angering others. He behaves like a scorching fire. (חבל נחלה)