

## 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 **בלי עול**, that is a man who is **בלי עול** – without a yoke or restraint.

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

### Exploring Mishlei

(כז) אִישׁ בְּלִיעֵל כָּרָה רָעָה וְעַל שִׁפְתָּיו כָּאֵשׁ צָרְבֶת:

*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 evil 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

(כז) אִישׁ בְּלִיעַל כָּרָה רָעָה  
וְעַל שִׁפְתוֹ כָּאֵשׁ צָרְבֶת:

**An unprincipled man digs up evil** in his thoughts – **אִישׁ בְּלִיעַל כָּרָה רָעָה** **and on his lips there is a scorching fire** – **וְעַל שִׁפְתוֹ כָּאֵשׁ צָרְבֶת**, because the words on his lips give him away.

## 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 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.

(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.

(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.

## Sources

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

(3) - חבל נחלה

(1) - רבינו יונה, רלב"ג

(2) - אבן יחיא