

Mishlei 16-29

Criminality

Key Concepts

A criminal is a person who consciously sets himself apart from the standards of society. In this way he frees himself from the restraints that prevent civilized people from acting upon each other with violence and injustice.

Despite the selfish motivations that cause a person to choose a criminal way of life, many criminals pay a high price in the form of rejection by lawful people and in the feeling of guilt that overwhelms them from time to time.

To assuage these negative feelings, criminals like to form gangs or outlaw associations which provide a sense of recognition and acceptance within their closed circle.

Naturally, members of a circle of wrongdoers are always on the lookout for suitable individuals from the general society who might be induced to join them. This means that ordinary people who come into contacts with groups of offenders need to be aware that they might be targets of such recruitment efforts. They need to be on guard and resist the blandishments of erstwhile friends who try to draw them into unacceptable behavior..

Exploring Mishlei

(כט) אִישׁ חָמָס יִפְתֶּה רֵעֵהוּ וְהוֹלִיכוֹ בְּדֶרֶךְ לֹא טוֹב:

The criminal entices his friend and leads him in a way that is not good.

This proverb focuses on the kind of person who violates the accepted patterns of lawful behavior and is therefore rejected by law-abiding people. The violent or unjust man (אִישׁ חָמָס) has a powerful need to be accepted and therefore he entices (יִפְתֶּה) any likely individual to join his way of life. Mishlei is cautioning such an individual to resist the enticements because although they may seem attractive, they are clearly not good (לֹא טוֹב) and will cause him great harm.

The importance of resisting corrupting enticements is highlighted in the first Perek of Mishlei. (See Segment 01-10, Bad Influences).

Why are people drawn into bad company? In some cases, an individual may be lonely and frustrated with his life. He is persuaded that the smooth-talking criminals have his best interests at heart and that they are giving him an opportunity to get rich. He wants to believe that the offenses of which the criminals are guilty are not as bad as they seem, and that the money will be put to good causes. This is why Mishlei tells him **לא טוב**, "not good." The promises of a good life are not valid. If you follow the way of the criminals, the outcome will not be good.

Learning Mishlei

(29) **The criminal – אִישׁ חָמָס**
entices his friend – יִפְתֶּה רֵעֵהוּ
and leads him – וְהוֹלִיכוֹ
in a way that is not good – בְּדֶרֶךְ לֹא טוֹב,

Additional Insight

(1) If you are approached by someone offering you a shady deal, remember that he is making it sound good because he wants to entice you. He is not doing you any favors and has his own interests at heart. (רבינו יונה)

(2) The criminal who has become an **אִישׁ חָמָס** didn't get there all at once. It was a gradual process, which came about through the influence of others who had already gone through it. The end state of being an **אִישׁ חָמָס** is to carry that way of life forward and to corrupt other innocents to become like him. (תבונת משלי)