

Mishlei 16-28

Instigation

Key Concepts

Unhappy and bitter people are sometimes motivated to cause dissension in a community by intentionally distorting the truth, by revealing private information, and by finding fault in every situation. And so they create misunderstandings and strife among friends and families, and even between a husband and wife, the community and its leaders, or the workers and their employer.

What causes people to behave in such a destructive and hurtful way? They may feel resentment or envy because of someone else's success. They may feel anger at having been slighted intentionally or unintentionally, or they may feel inadequate and want to be noticed or to gain the satisfaction of having an impact on the lives of other people.

Mishlei calls attention to these unfortunate behavior patterns and gives us examples of the harm they can cause. Since anyone may encounter people like this it is important to recognize their destructive qualities and either avoid them or defend against them. If a person recognizes these qualities within himself, he can work to resist them and possibly even overcome them.

Exploring Mishlei

(כח) אִישׁ תְּהַפְּכֹת יִשְׁלַח מְדוֹן וְנִרְגָּן מִפְּרִיד אֱלוֹף:

A treacherous man incites strife [by distorting the truth], and a fault finder alienates a ruler [from his people].

This proverb takes two examples of destructive behaviors and shows the harm they cause. The treacherous man intentionally perverts the truth and thereby sows suspicion and ill will between people. The fault finder looks for the weaknesses in any situation and publicly assigns blame. People then begin to lose confidence in their leaders or employers who in turn become defensive because they have been unfairly charged.

Learning Mishlei

(כח) אִישׁ תְּהַפְּכוֹת יִשְׁלַח מְדוֹן
וְנִרְגָן מִפְּרִיד אֱלוֹף:

A treacherous man – אִישׁ תְּהַפְּכוֹת – incites strife – יִשְׁלַח מְדוֹן by
distorting the truth, **and a fault finder – וְנִרְגָן – alienates a ruler – מִפְּרִיד**
אֱלוֹף, separating him from his people.

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 treacherous man is fickle by nature, constantly changing his assessments of good and bad. His motivation is not to promote a particular point of view, but to provoke quarrels by misquoting people.
- (2) The Fault finder constantly complains and criticizes the product of honest effort, no matter what it is. He imputes false motives and thereby awakens blame. He reveals private behavior in a way that may easily be misinterpreted.
- (3) By provoking quarrels, the treacherous man causes others to emulate his patterns of destructive behavior.

Sources

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

(3) - אבן עזרא

(1) - מלבים, מצודות, אבן יחיאל

(2) - מלבים, חנוך לנער