

Mishlei 17-19

Faultfinding

Key Concepts

There are times when constructive criticism is of great value to help people improve themselves. However, such criticism should generally be applied very gently and with great wisdom. Tragedy can result when a person adopts an attitude of continual faultfinding. He falls into the habit of looking for mistakes or defects in everything and criticizing people because of them. In such cases, the critic is not motivated by kindness toward the person that he is criticizing but by the opportunity to demonstrate his own superiority.

The faultfinding critic is happiest in social situations where there is conflict. In such situations he can act more easily as a bully. He can apply his sharp tongue to take control of an argument and emerge in a position of superiority. The victim is overwhelmed by reluctance to confront the aggressor and has no choice but to accept defeat, at least initially. But the bully must realize that he has created a wounded enemy who will bide his time and may ultimately take his revenge with potentially tragic results.

Exploring Mishlei

(יט) אֱהָב פְּשַׁע אֱהָב מִצָּח מִגְבִּיָּה פִתְחוּ מִבְּקֶשׁ שָׁבֵר :

***He who loves to find fault loves conflict;
he who opens his mouth arrogantly invites tragedy.***

This proverb describes the habitual faultfinder as an **אֱהָב פְּשַׁע**, one who loves to find fault. This instinctive critic tends to promote quarrels by always finding fault and is therefore also an **אֱהָב מִצָּח**, a lover of conflict.

The proverb then proceeds to describe how the faultfinder operates. He opens his mouth arrogantly from an elevated position of condescension, **מִגְבִּיָּה פִתְחוּ**, [literally] “he raises his opening”. By doing so, this bully, who thinks he has improved his relative position in society is actually inviting tragedy, **מִבְּקֶשׁ שָׁבֵר**.

Learning Mishlei

(19) He who loves to find fault — אהב פֶּשַׁע

loves conflict — אהב מִצָּח

because he can most easily take control of a situation that is already in turmoil. To achieve his selfish purpose, the faultfinder **opens his mouth arrogantly** — מִגְבִּיהַ פֶּתָחוֹ. but by doing so, he **invites tragedy** — מִבְּקֵשׁ שָׂבָר.

Additional Insights

[1] Quarrelling can become a passion. A quarrelsome person enjoys expressing his opinion, no matter what the subject is. He likes to be right always, and to have the last word; he quarrels for the sake of quarrelling. (רשר"ה)

[2] The phrase מִגְבִּיהַ פֶּתָחוֹ can be translated as “he raises his doorway.” This suggests someone who displays his sense of superiority at the front entrance of his home even though the rest of the house is small because his act of superiority has no foundation. (מלבים)