

Mishlei 17-20

Perversity

Key Concepts

To do what is right a person needs to be able to recognize truth, but that can only be done if he has a clear mind and thinks things through. His mind will then influence his heart to find the right way through life under the guidance of the Torah and his teachers. Such a person is referred to as a **חכם לב** (wise of heart). Note that for our purposes the mind and the heart are synonymous. However, the word heart is used here to refer to the part of the human personality that impels a person to action.

If a person's thinking suffers from a lack of clarity he may be unable to recognize truth. His flawed mind will then be unable to guide his heart in finding the right way. Such a person is referred to as an **עקש לב** (flawed of heart).

A person who is able to think clearly but chooses not to acknowledge the truth is described as having a perverse tongue (**נְהַפֵּךְ בְּלִשׁוֹנוֹ**). He speaks in a duplicitous manner and misleads others.

Exploring Mishlei

(כ) עֲקֹשׁ לֵב לֹא יִמְצָא טוֹב וְנִהְפֵּךְ בְּלִשׁוֹנוֹ יִפּוֹל בְּרָעָה:

*The person who is flawed of heart will not find the good way,
and the perverse speaker will fall into evil.*

This proverb describes the flawed thinker (**עקש לב**) as being unable to find the good way through life. In contrast there are people who can think clearly but are tempted to act perversely. These people of a perverse tongue (**נְהַפֵּךְ בְּלִשׁוֹנוֹ**) will favor someone they like even though he is undeserving and they will be biased against someone they don't like even if he deserves to be treated well. Not only will person of perverted tongue fail to find the good way, he will end up doing harm to others (**יפול ברעה**).

Learning Mishlei

(כ) עֵקֶשׁ לֵב לֹא יִמְצָא טוֹב
וְנִהְפֹךְ בְּלִשׁוֹנוֹ יִפּוֹל בְּרָעָה:

The person who is flawed of heart – עֵקֶשׁ לֵב will not find the good way – לֹא יִמְצָא טוֹב, and the man of perverted tongue – וְנִהְפֹךְ בְּלִשׁוֹנוֹ will fall into evil – יִפּוֹל בְּרָעָה.

Additional Insights

- (1) The man of perverted tongue will end up falling into the evil (יִפּוֹל בְּרָעָה). that he intended to impose on his innocent victim. (אבן עזרא)
- (2) The person who cannot find the good way should turn to the wisdom of the Torah for guidance. That wisdom will bring him to clear thinking. (מלבים)