

Mishlei 19-05**Speech – Falsehood****Key Concepts**

When Hashem created the world, He chose the power of words as His instrument. The Creator then entrusted the privilege of speech to mankind, and it is up to us to respect this great gift by cherishing it and avoiding any form of falsehood. The Torah emphasizes this responsibility in the command: “*Distance yourself from a false word*” (*Shemos 23:7*).

Mishlei reminds us in a number of places that subjecting human speech to the desecration of falsehood is a great sin, one for which the sinner is held accountable. To help us appreciate the seriousness of this violation Mishlei points out that falsehood takes many forms, some more onerous than others, but every form of falsehood is a sin with which the sinner is stoking the anger of his Creator.

The more obvious form of falsehood in human speech is false testimony in a court of law. The Torah calls attention to the severity of this sin by including it as one of the Ten Commandments (*Shemos 20:13*) given at Sinai. Such outright falsity is characterized by the word **שָׁקֵר**. A person who speaks **שָׁקֵר** knows he is lying, but he does it anyway thinking it will be to his advantage.

Another form of falsehood is characterized by the word **כָּזָב**, which is translated as deception. A person speaking **כָּזָב**, may be referring to an action that he half-heartedly intends to do, such as paying a sum of money that he owes. His failure to follow through on that commitment demonstrates the falsehood inherent in his statement.

Exploring Mishlei

(ה) עֵד שְׁקָרִים לֹא יִנָּקֶה וְיִפְיֵחַ כְּזָבִים לֹא יִמְלִיט :

(5) *A false witness will not be exonerated, but neither will the deceptive talker escape.*

This proverb compares the person who distorts the truth for personal advantage with the individual who gives false testimony in a court of law. It is obvious that

the false witness (עֵד שְׁקָרִים) is committing a sinful act by perjuring himself. However, the individual who misleads his listener with deceptive statements (וַיְפִיחַ כְּזָבִים) hopes to whitewash his behavior after the fact. Mishlei blasts such wishful thinking. Just as the false witness will not be exonerated (לֹא יִנָּקֶה), so will the deceptive speaker be unable to escape (לֹא יִמָּלֵט) the consequences of his behavior. He will have to face Divine judgment and his excuses will not be accepted.

Learning Mishlei

(5) A false witness — עֵד שְׁקָרִים —
 will not be exonerated — לֹא יִנָּקֶה —
 but even if he is only a deceptive talker — וַיְפִיחַ כְּזָבִים —
 he will also not escape accountability — לֹא יִמָּלֵט.

Additional Insights

[1] A false witness is subject to the firmness of Divine judgment even if there are no other witnesses who can invalidate his testimony. Thus, no matter what happens he will not be exonerated. (מצודות)

[2] In contrast to שְׁקָר, where the lie is blatant, כְּזָב has the illusion of truth. The deception is only evident later. (מלבי"ם)