

Mishlei 20-19

Confidentiality

Key Concepts

As we have seen in Mishlei 11-13, information can cause great harm if disclosed recklessly. For this reason, Mishlei encourages us to avoid contact with people who are careless about how they use information that comes to their attention.

Mishlei identifies three types of people who fit in this general category: (1) people who are known to reveal confidential information, (2) people who like to spread gossip, and (3) people who are known to be talkative. Any of these people who become aware of potentially harmful information cannot be trusted to restrain themselves from sharing it when the opportunity arises.

Exploring Mishlei

(יט) גֹּזֵל סוֹד הוֹלֵךְ רְכִיל וּלְפִתֵּה שְׁפָתָיו לֹא תִתְעָרֵב:

(19) Do not mix with a person who reveals secrets, spreads gossip, or is generally talkative

In this proverb, Mishlei identifies three types of people who are liable to disclose information that should be kept private: (1) people who are known to reveal confidential information, (2) people who like to spread gossip and in the course of doing so, they reveal critical secrets, and (3) loose talkers (people who are known to be talkative) and because they talk so much, important secrets are likely to leak out.. Any of these people who become aware of potentially harmful information cannot be trusted to restrain themselves from sharing it when the opportunity arises.

Learning Mishlei

(19) A revealer of secrets — גֹּזֵל סוֹד

a gossip monger, — הוֹלֵךְ רְכִיל

or a loose talker — וּלְפִתֵּה שְׁפָתָיו

Don't mix with these people. — לֹא תִתְעָרֵב.

to avoid losing critical information at their hands.

Additional Insights

[1] Ultimately any of the three types of suspect people are likely to reveal important secrets and this may give away strategic plans, especially those provided by counsel. (מלבי"ם)

[2] The revealer of secrets (גולה סוד) has such a tremendous urge to tell what he knows that he cannot restrain himself. (מצודות)

[3] The tale bearer may be revealing secrets which he includes in his string of tales intentionally (מצודות)

[4] A simpleton may reveal secrets in innocence because he doesn't realize their significance. (מצודות)

[5] The loose talker is a person who has a habit of not thinking before he speaks (רבינו יונה)