Mishlei 19-09

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 **שֶׁקֶר**. A person who speaks **שֶׁקֶר** 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.

Having addressed this issue above (Segment 19-05) Mishlei now re-emphasizes the sinfulness of allowing oneself to get into the frame of mind of deceptive talk. Thus, Mishlei repeats the entire verse of 19:5 here, almost word for word, substituting a more specific expression of penalty. Whereas the fate of the offender was previously described as **לֹא יִמָּלֵט** (he will not escape) it is now described as **יֹאבֵד** (he will perish).

Exploring Mishlei

(ט) עֵד שְׁקָרִים לֹא יִנָּקֶה וְיָפִיחַ כְּזָבִים יֹאבֵד׃

(9) ***A false witness will not be exonerated, and the deceptive talker will perish.***

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 (**וְיָפִיחַ כְּזָבִים**) hopes to whitewash his behavior after the fact. Mishlei blasts such wishful thinking. Whereas the false witness was driven to commit a crime by his difficult circumstances, he will not be exonerated (**לֹא יִנָּקֶה**). As for the deceptive talker, who has made a habit out of deception, he has no hope for redemption and will be dealt with even more harshly (**יֹאבֵד**).

Learning Mishlei

(9) **A false witness** — **עֵד שְׁקָרִים**
will not be exonerated — **לֹא יִנָּקֶה**
and if he becomes a **deceptive talker** — **וְיָפִיחַ כְּזָבִים**
he will perish — **יֹאבֵד**.