

Mishlei 19-28

Speech – Disingenuous

Key Concepts

A disingenuous speaker is one who seems believable and honest although he is intentionally deceiving his listeners. He uses tricks of the language to introduce selected ambiguities into his conversation. In this way he reveals only that which supports his narrative.

Using such techniques, he may give the false impression that innocent behavior is criminal or create the illusion that sinful behavior is fully justified.

Accordingly, if we have reason to be skeptical of the integrity of the speaker, we need to listen to his words skeptically to spot the subterfuge. Otherwise, an unscrupulous talebearer may cause us to believe misleading gossip about an innocent person or may leave us ignorant about people or situations that can cause us harm.

Exploring Mishlei

עַד בְּלִיעַל יִלְיֹץ מִשְׁפָּט וּפִי רְשָׁעִים יִבְלַע אָוֶן:
(28) *An unethical witness may distort judgment,*
and the mouth of the wicked may swallow iniquity.

This proverb calls attention to two forms of verbal communication that are intentionally misleading. In the first part of the proverb an unethical witness (**עַד בְּלִיעַל**) expresses himself with artful figures of speech (**יִלְיֹץ**) that create ambiguity in the mind of the listener so that he errs in his judgment.

In the second part of the proverb, wicked speakers leave out critical facts of the story, leading the listeners to draw mistaken conclusions about sinful behavior (**אָוֶן**) that did not actually occur. In effect, the speaker swallows the sin because he does not describe it in so many words.

Learning Mishlei

(28) An unethical witness — עֵד בְּלִיעַל
may distort the judgment — יְלִיץ מְשַׁפֵּט
of the listener using artful figures of speech.

The mouth of the wicked — וּפִי רְשָׁעִים
may swallow iniquity — יִבְלַע אֲוֶן
by leaving out critical words in the stories they are telling.

Additional Insights

[1] An unethical busybody may use rhetorical techniques to mislead the listener into thinking that certain Torah laws need not be taken literally. (הגר"א)

[2] The word יְלִיץ may also be understood to mean mockery. By making fun of serious concepts, such as justice, the wicked person diminishes their value in the mind of the listener. (רשר"ה)