

Mishlei 11-13

Thinking Ahead

Key Concepts

In every area of life and at every level we are faced with challenges and problems to solve. Even if all the factors are known, the solution that seems most likely to be successful may turn out to be too costly or ineffective. The more we plan and think through our intended course of action, the better are the chances of success.

The possibilities of failure become even more severe if we are in a conflict with a business or military opponent. Since we cannot be sure what steps our adversary will take, we need to expand the scope of our planning accordingly, taking into account as many contingencies as we can.

In this segment Mishlei is advising us to think ahead and make as many plans as seem appropriate based on what is at stake. The metaphor that he uses to illustrate the importance of planning ahead is the metaphor of war, since the potential losses in wartime can be catastrophic in scale. Furthermore since one can never be sure what course the enemy will take, war planning is probably more complex than any other.

On a personal level, the enemies we face are the *yetzer hara* (evil inclination) and the weakness of our own character. We can never be sure how strong the motivation to behave badly will be in any situation, so we should think ahead and prepare ourselves by visualizing what we may be up against in a moment of stress.

Exploring Mishlei

(יד) בְּאֵין תַּחְבֵּלוֹת יִפְּל־עַם וּתְשׁוּעָה בְּרַב יוֹעֵץ:

(14) When there are no strategic plans a nation will fall [to the enemy], but in much counsel there is victory.

Mishlei reminds us that not having adequate planning in wartime is likely to result in defeat, despite all the other qualities an army may have. He does not tell us how to conduct the actual planning process, except for one important point. The leader who has the responsibility to make the decision should seek as much counsel as possible. The more minds he brings to bear on the issue, the more likely it is that he will not miss an important consideration.

Learning Mishlei

(יד) בְּאֵין תַּחְבֵּלוֹת יִפֹּל עַם
וּתְשׁוּעָה בְּרַב יוֹעֵץ:

When there are no strategic plans – בְּאֵין תַּחְבֵּלוֹת a nation will fall to the enemy – **יִפֹּל-עַם**, **but in much counsel** there is the hope of **victory – ותְשׁוּעָה בְּרַב יוֹעֵץ**.

Additional Insights

A series of insights illuminating this proverb are presented below. The numbers identifying the insights refer to the listing of sources at the end of the segment.

(1) In war many plans or stratagems are needed because the enemy is also making his plans. To win, one must have a string of stratagems that are linked together so that he can choose the one that is best in each contingency.

(2) The best plan will be produced when there are more opinions expressed during the planning process.

(3) Besides thinking through every possible contingency one must think through all the possible alternatives for action in order to decide which is best course.

(4) Every person is in a battle to control his physical temptations. His ability to succeed will be enhanced the more he seeks guidance from those who can enlighten him.

(5) Effective conduct of a war war requires a strong leader who is open to many opinions of expert advisers but who then makes the final decision. If there are too many voices directly involved in the decision, there will be no clear resolution since each will find fault with the counsel of the other. Correspondingly, in issues of personal guidance the individual should look to the Torah for the final decision.

Sources

The primary sources used for the additional insights illuminating this segment are listed below.

(4) - רלב"ג

(5) - הגר"א

(1) - רבינו יונה, מלבי"ם

(2) - רבינו יונה

(3) - המאירי

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