

Mishlei 11-15

Honor and Wealth

Key Concepts

Honor and wealth are related qualities which people naturally find desirable, although they are both fraught with risk.

Honor represents the high opinion and respect that people have of you. In contrast, wealth represents the financial assets that enable you to provide material goods for yourself, your family, and others.

If you have wealth, people are inclined to please you so they can benefit from your largesse. If you have honor, people are inclined to emulate you so that they can be more like you.

Although both honor and wealth can be used in fulfilling the will of Hashem, honor is the more desirable quality, because it can only be acquired through admirable behavior.

Thus, although a person might put effort into gaining and keeping both wealth and honor, if he finds it necessary to choose one or the other, it should be honor rather than wealth.

Exploring Mishlei

(טז) אִשֶּׁת חַן וְתִתְמֹךְ כְּבוֹד וְעָרִיצִים יִתְמְכוּ עֵשֶׂר:

(16) *The woman of grace upholds honor but autocrats value wealth.*

Mishlei associates honor with a woman of grace, whose pleasing and charming qualities draw the praise and admiration of her husband and everyone who knows her. In contrast to honor, wealth is associated with an autocrat, such as a domineering husband, who seeks to control others, especially his wife, and who focuses on acquiring and keeping wealth as the means to satisfy his own need for power.

Learning Mishlei

(טז) אִשֶּׁת חַן וְתִתְמֹךְ כְּבוֹד

וְעָרִיצִים יִתְמְכוּ עֵשֶׂר:

The woman of grace upholds and values **honor** and a good name — אִשֶּׁת חַן

תְּתַמְּךָ כְּבוֹד; **but autocrats** who seek to dominate others **uphold** and value **wealth** and power — וְעֲרִיצִים יִתְמְכוּ עִשָּׂר.

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.

HONOR

(1) A woman of grace may be admired for her physical beauty and charm, which are a gift from the Creator. However, she should seek to be admired for her accomplishments and for her noble character traits, such as humility and devotion, all of which require some degree of effort on her part.

(2) A woman of grace especially values her dignity, the consciousness of her own moral value, held up high and unimpaired. She never acts in a way, which might even remotely prejudice her moral dignity. As a result, even the most shameless libertine would not dare permit himself an unseemly expression in her presence.

(3) Whereas men are admired for their nobility and generosity, women are admired for their frugality and order, as well the encouragement and support they give to their husbands.

(4) It is in the nature of a man to spare no expense in showing hospitality to his guests as he values their high opinion of him. A good wife will find ways to subtly moderate this tendency and provide for a balanced and dignified hospitality without going overboard. However, she puts a major emphasis on the cheerful welcome and consideration she shows to her husband and any visitors to her home.

(5) Among the other specific qualities that may cause a woman to be admired depending on the circumstances are the following: she maintains a cheerful attitude even when disappointed; she supports her husband as much when he suffers a loss as when he is successful; she supports him as much when he is old as when he is young; she feels fulfilled when she is busy with her household duties; she avoids the company of contentious women; when she is hungry she tells people that she is satisfied; she honors her husband and is eager to serve him. For a more elaborate discussion of the qualities that make a woman appreciated and treasured, see Segment 31-02 (A Woman of Character).

(6) Autocrats are under the illusion that they can gain honor and respect by acquiring wealth and making people fear them. They think that the bad qualities they love define the essence of honor. But they fail to recognize that honor must be earned through good deeds and a humble spirit. It is through such attributes that a person will be truly loved and respected.

WEALTH

(7) Wealth and honor are both gifts of Hashem. If a person makes use of the gift of wealth to give charity and help others, they will also receive the gift of honor.

(8) Wealth can be gained without honor, but this is characteristic of an autocrat who puts all his energies into gaining wealth. For example, because an autocrat values wealth he grants undeserved favors to those who give him bribes.

(9) Honor can be acquired without wealth, but only through good deeds and good *middos*.

Sources

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

- | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| (6) - רבינו יונה | (1) - אבן עזרא, מצודות, מלבי"ם |
| (7) מלבי"ם | (2) - רש"ה |
| (8) אבן עזרא, מלבי"ם | (3) - המאירי |
| (9) מלבי"ם | (4) - המאירי |
| | (5) - המאירי, חנוך לנער |

© COPYRIGHT NOTICE
All rights to this document are reserved by the author. For further information contact Isaac Kirzner at isaac@kirzner.com