

Mishlei 11-23

Generosity and Selfishness

Key Concepts

This segment consists four sequential verses that teach an attitude of generosity towards other people. A person who is concerned about the welfare of others focuses his attention upon those around him and is sensitive to their needs and wishes. His mind is occupied by thinking what can be done to help them. Whenever he is able to do so, he takes action to bring about positive change for other people and society.

In contrast, the selfish person focuses his attention inward. When he thinks of others it is with the idea of gaining advantage over them and using them and their assets as a resource to improve his own well-being.

Mishlei teaches that the attitudes of generosity and selfishness bring about counter-intuitive results. The person who is sincerely concerned about the welfare of others will find that he is the one who profits. He will find happiness and serenity. Everything that is his will be blessed. The selfish person who is concerned mostly about his own well-being will be disappointed by the ill-will he incurs and ultimately Hashem will not reward his efforts with good fortune.

A primary application of these concepts is in regard to the giving of *tzedakah* (charity) to the needy. The generous person maintains an open hand that matches his open heart. The selfish person thinks of every charitable donation as a reduction in his assets and therefore gives as little as he thinks he can get away with.

Another important application of the concepts of generosity and selfishness is in regard to the sharing of Torah knowledge. A *talmid chacham* (Torah scholar) with a selfish attitude will focus all his attention upon his personal acquisition of Torah knowledge. He prides himself in knowing more than others. The generous person will be equally concerned with how well others are learning. He will devote time, effort, and money to help them expand their knowledge. Mishlei advises him that as a result his own progress in Torah will be rewarded.

Exploring Mishlei

PART 1. SCATTERING. The thought of scattering something sounds like losing control. However, when seeds are scattered on the ground the result is the sprouting and growth of life-giving plants. This demonstrates that by giving up

control one can gain much more than one ever had. The same is true of wealth. When a person distributes wealth to the needy, he and his wealth are blessed with increase and growth. On the contrary, the one who skimps on giving *tzedakah* will suffer misfortune and loss.

(כד) יֵשׁ מִפֶּיֶז וְנוֹסֵף עוֹד וְחוֹשֵׁךְ מִיֶּשֶׁר אֶדְ לְמַחְסוֹר:

(24) A person may scatter [his money by giving it away freely] and yet gain more [than he had before]. Another may skimp from [giving even] what is fair, but [ends up] with a loss.

PART 2. BLESSING. Having an attitude of goodwill towards other people means calling down Hashem's blessing upon them. The generous soul is the soul of blessing. The person with such an attitude will himself be blessed. Such a person sees other people's needs and offers them refreshment. He will be refreshed in turn.

(כה) נֶפֶשׁ־בְּרָכָה תִּדְשֶׁן וּמְרֻוּה גַם־הוּא יִרְא:

(25) The generous soul will flourish, and one who refreshes [others] will himself be refreshed.

PART 3. CONTROL. The tight-fisted person feels the need to control events and other people. He thinks this is the only way to gain advantage. But this attitude will surely bring him disappointment because the people he has harmed will curse him. In contrast, having an open and generous hand will call down a blessing upon his head.

(כו) מִנֵּעַ בֶּר יִקְבְּהוּ לְאוֹם וּבְרָכָה לְרֹאשׁ מְשַׁבֵּיר:

(26) One who withholds grain [from the market to drive up prices] will be cursed by people, but blessing will be on the head of the provider.

PART 4. ENVY. The envious person is unhappy when other people achieve success or good fortune. Therefore, he consciously or unconsciously wishes them ill. He will find that he has become a victim of his own bad attitude. The person of good will, on the other hand, seeks good for others and does what he can to help them. He will be rewarded with Hashem's favor.

(כז) שֹׁחַר טוֹב יִבְקֹשׁ רְצוֹן וְדֹרֵשׁ רָעָה תְּבוֹאֲנָה:

(27) One who diligently seeks good [for others] procures [Hashem's] favor, but he who looks for evil [for others], it will easily come upon him .

Learning Mishlei

(כד) יֵשׁ מִפֶּזֶר וְנוֹסֵף עוֹד
וְחוֹשֵׁף מִיֶּשֶׁר אֶךָ לְמַחְסוֹר:

A person may give his money away freely and yet gain more – יֵשׁ מִפֶּזֶר וְנוֹסֵף עוֹד than he had before. **Another skimps from giving even from what is fair, but ends up with a loss – וְחוֹשֵׁף מִיֶּשֶׁר אֶךָ לְמַחְסוֹר.**

(כה) נֶפֶשׁ בְּרָכָה תִּדְשֵׁן
וּמְרוֹה גַם הוּא יוֹרָא:

The generous soul will flourish – נֶפֶשׁ בְּרָכָה תִּדְשֵׁן. And one who refreshes others **will himself be refreshed – וּמְרוֹה גַם הוּא יוֹרָא.**

(כו) מִנֵּעַ בָּר יִקְבְּהוּ לְאוֹם
וּבְרָכָה לְרֹאשׁ מִשְׁבִּיר:

One who withholds produce from the market to drive up prices will be cursed by people – מִנֵּעַ בָּר יִקְבְּהוּ לְאוֹם, but Hashem's **blessing will be on the head of the provider – וּבְרָכָה לְרֹאשׁ מִשְׁבִּיר.**

(כז) שֹׁחַר טוֹב יִבְקֹשׁ רָצוֹן
וְדַרְשׁ רָעָה תְּבוֹאֲנוּ:

One who diligently seeks good for others procures Hashem's favor – שֹׁחַר טוֹב יִבְקֹשׁ רָצוֹן, but he who looks for evil for others, **it will easily come upon him – וְדַרְשׁ רָעָה תְּבוֹאֲנוּ.**

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