

Mishlei 12-12

Greed

Key Concepts

The character of an individual determines his approach to earning his livelihood. The wicked person (*rasha*) is greedy by nature and so he focuses his attention on attaining the object of his desire in the quickest way possible, without regard to the cost. Since his mind is clouded by visions of wealth and easy money, he yearns to participate in the schemes of evildoers so that he can share in their ill-gotten gains.

On the other hand, the righteous person (*tzadik*) is not focused on money. He does not sacrifice his principles in the pursuit of material gains but earns his livelihood in an honorable, productive way that does not depend on the harm being done to others.

Exploring Mishlei

(יב) חָמַד רָשָׁע מְצוֹד רְעִים וְשָׂרֵשׁ צַדִּיקִים יִתֵּן:

*The rasha craves the spoils of evildoers,
but the root of the tzadikim will provide their livelihood.*

The proverb expresses the greed of the *rasha* in terms of his craving. He sees the ill-gotten gains of evildoers and thinks only in terms of gaining access to their treasures. He is contrasted with the *tzadikim* who are concerned with establishing a meaningful relationship to the world around them. They are confident that if they put down roots and learn an honest way of making a living, they will be able to support their families.

The analogy of a *tzadik* to a tree with deep roots recalls the first *mizmor* of *Tehillim*: “He is like a tree that has been planted beside streams of water, which yields its fruit in due season” (1:3).

Learning Mishlei

(12) The *rasha* craves his share in — חָמַד רָשָׁע
the spoils of evildoers — מְצוֹד רְעִים
because he thinks that is the
fastest way to riches,

but the firmly planted **root of the *tzadikim*** — **וְשָׂרֵשׁ צְדִיקִים**
will provide — **יִתֵּן**

their livelihood in an honest way through productive labor.

Additional Insights

(1) The *tzadikim* are compared to trees that put down deep roots in the environment. As the trees yield fruit, so do the *tzadikim* produce what they need to sustain life. (רש"י)

(2) The *tzadikim* are like trees that are able to withstand stormy winds because of their deep roots. Therefore, the fruit that they provide can be depended upon. In contrast the get-rich-schemes of the *rasha* are inherently uncertain, and likely to fail. (חנוך לנער)

(3) The fruit produced by the *tzadikim* takes time to sprout and mature but the passage of time enhances its quality. The schemes of the *rasha* are designed to yield instant results, but they don't offer the assurance of permanence.

(ר' חיים עוזר הלוי ליוואוויץ)

(4) The *rasha* is drawn to the company of evildoers because they seem to offer the fastest and easiest road to riches. But the *tzadikim* are dependent only on Ha-shem's help. They rely on their own efforts and concentrate on productive labor.

(רבינו יונה, מצודות)