

Mishlei 12-24

Diligence (Zerizus)

Key Concepts

Each person has been given the physical and spiritual powers he needs to overcome the challenges of his life so that he can fulfill his mission in this world. However, it is up to the individual to develop and make use of those powers. This is not necessarily easy to do. It requires a degree of focused energy and diligence (*zerizus*). Mishlei suggests that if he applies himself with conscientious diligence he can expect to overcome his challenges and live a good and productive life.

But if he fails to apply himself with diligence and looks for an easy and deceitful way to bypass his challenges he is effectively betraying his Maker, and he is betraying the people which his actions should benefit.

Exploring Mishlei

(כד) יַד־חַרוּצִים תִּמְשׁוּל וְרַמְיָה תִּהְיֶה לְמַסִּי:

(24) The diligent hand will master [the challenges of life,] but the deceitful [hand] will be subservient.

This proverb compares the destiny of the person who practices diligence with that of the one who is neglectfully lax about his responsibilities. The person who lacks diligence is described as deceitful, because he is betraying his mission in life. The diligent person can expect to master his challenges whereas the deceitful person will ultimately be at the mercy of forces he cannot control.

The language of this proverb is similar to that of the proverb in Segment 10-04 (Deceit and Integrity). In that case we have interpreted the proverb as contrasting deceitfulness in commerce with the integrity of honest dealings, whereas in our case the emphasis is on conscientiousness in workmanship and personal development. Both proverbs use the phrase יַד־חַרוּצִים. In our case that phrase refers to a diligent hand, whereas in that case it refers to a hand of integrity.

Learning Mishlei

(כד) יַד חַרוּצִים תִּמְשׁוּל

וְרַמְיָה תִּהְיֶה לְמַסִּי:

The diligent hand will master — יָד־תְּרוּצִים תִּמְשֹׁל the challenges of life, but the **deceitful hand will be subservient** — וּרְמִיָּה תִּהְיֶה לְמַס.

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) The person who does not utilize his spiritual and physical powers to fulfill his mission in life commits deceit. He betrays his Maker by failing in the duty which is expected from him in return for the gift of life. Consequently, the very air that a lazy person breathes can be considered theft.
- (2) The phrase יָד־תְּרוּצִים has many valid translations, all of which lead refer to conscientious behavior. The phrase may refer to a person who is righteous, honest, diligent, or a combination of all three.
- (3) The parallel proverb in Segment 10-04 refers to financial enrichment as a reward for integrity. Instead of enrichment our proverb refers to mastery as a reward. These are similar concepts because financial wherewithal enables a person to have control over his environment and thereby meet his challenges.
- (4) Our proverb uses the phrase תִּהְיֶה לְמַס as the destiny for deceit. This phrase is literally translated as being required to pay tribute, which means subservient. A subservient person is a way of referring to a person whose poverty causes him to lose control of his life.
- (5) Mastery as the ultimate reward of the diligent person may actually be a reference to a reward in the World to Come. In contrast, the deceitful person may appear to have success and mastery in this world through his smooth talk but he will have to face justice in the World to Come.

Sources

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

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| (4) - מלבי"ם | (1) - רשר"ה |
| (5) - הגר"א | (2) - רש"י, מצודות, מלבי"ם |
| | (3) - מלבי"ם, רבינו יונה, אבן יחייא |