

Mishlei 13-07

## The Illusion of Wealth

(Pesukim 13:7 and 13:8)

**Key Concepts**

This segment addresses the kind of person who amasses wealth without giving sufficient consideration to the price he may be paying. Will the value that he gains from the possession of wealth justify his sacrifice of energies and principles to this pursuit? He should be conscious of the temptation to neglect his duty to family and *mitzvos*. The individual should realize that in any case life is short and his hold on material wealth will be only temporary. Possession of wealth and of life itself can be justified only if they are used to create lasting value.

In truth the potential value of wealth to help others and to sanctify the Name of Hashem is great. But the challenge remains to convert this potential into reality.

**Exploring Mishlei**

(ז) יֵשׁ מִתְעַשֵּׂר וְאֵין כֹּל מִתְרוֹשֵׁשׁ וְהוֹן רָב:

(ח) כֹּפֵר נַפְשׁוֹ אִישׁ עֲשָׂרוֹ וְרָשׁ לֹא־שָׁמַע גְּעָרָה:

(7) *There is one who thinks of himself as rich but has nothing; another thinks of himself as poor but has great wealth.*

(8) *A man's wealth can become the ransom of his soul, but poor is the one who has listened to no warning.*

The message of the proverb is conveyed in two verses. In the first, the wealthy man is reminded that although he thinks of himself as rich, his assets have no value to him if in acquiring them he has sacrificed the spiritual content of his life. In fact, true wealth can be achieved even in a state of outward poverty.

In the second verse, the wealthy man is reminded that each person needs to justify his existence. The ransom that a person must pay for his eternal soul is the conversion of the world's transitory goods into timeless, spiritual treasures. Having been created in Hashem's image, man should implant on earth the values

of truth and love. In effect, the only way to justify his existence is by the right and proper use of the means and abilities that have been granted to him.

If he fails to interpret the warnings which reach him through the Torah or through his life experiences, he may be the owner of outward wealth, but he remains inwardly poor.

## Learning Mishlei

(7) **There is one who thinks of himself as rich — יֵשׁ מִתְעַשֵּׂר —  
but has nothing — וְאֵין כֹּל**

because his wealth is not being used to create lasting value.

Another person **thinks of himself as poor — מִתְרוֹשֵׁשׁ,**  
**but has great wealth — וְהוֹן רַב**

because he puts his energies into doing *mitzvos* and helping others

(8) **The ransom for a man's life — כֶּפֶר נַפְשׁוֹ אִישׁ —  
is his wealth — עֲשָׂרוֹ**

**Poor is a man — וְרֵשׁ.**

**who has not listened to a warning — לֹא שָׁמַע גְּעָרָה.**

## Additional Insights

### Pasuk 7

(1) A person who thinks of himself as rich wants other people to think of him as being rich even if his wealth is only illusory. (רשי"י)

(2) A person may be financially poor because he distributes his money to the needy but he possesses great wealth in the form of his eternal destiny in the World to Come. (רשי"י)

(3) A person who amasses wealth through dishonest dealings will end up in poverty when the world catches up to his crimes but a person who gives his money to the poor will be rewarded with wealth in this world. (מצודות)

(4) The relationship between an individual and his title to wealth is illusory because it can quickly change. Furthermore, on the surface a man may appear wealthy, but it is only a front, and upon close examination he is seen to have nothing. Similarly, a man keeps a low profile and gives the impression of having

little means. And yet he has great wealth. The only true wealth is a man's reward in the Next World. (רבינו יונה, מלבי"ם, רלב"ג, חנוך לנער)

**Pasuk 8**

(5) This is what **כְּפָר נְפֹשְׁאִישׁ עֲשָׂרוֹ** means: the justification to live in this world and the next is gained by dispensing charity. Whatever you accumulate will be forfeited; whatever you use in accordance with the *mitzvos* will remain your property forever. (רשר"ה)

(6) A person's wealth becomes an atonement for his soul when he uses it give charity to the needy. But this is only if he refrains from speaking harshly to the poor person who asks for his help. Thus, the the rich man has achieved his ransom payment if the poor man has not heard a rebuke from him. (**וְרֹשׁ לֹא־שָׁמַע**) (רש"י, מצודות, חנוך לנער). (**גְּעָרָה**)

(7) A person giving charity should realize that the poor man is giving him an opportunity to redeem his soul for eternity. Therefore, he should never be angry with the one who asks for help. (מלבי"ם)

(8) A person who is blessed with wealth should not rejoice prematurely with his good fortune. It may be part of a test in which he is destined to give up his wealth in order to redeem his soul. In contrast the poor man has no need to worry about such a calamity. The cry of tragedy will not be heard in his house. (שבט מיהודה)