

Mishlei 13-21

Inheritance

Key Concepts

Being able to pass on a legacy to one's children and their children after them is a form of immortality than can even be achieved in this world. By means of that legacy a person can make a positive difference in the lives of his descendants.

The basic terminology of inheritance relates to material wealth. However, there are spiritual forms of wealth which are even more significant and lasting. These include traditions of moral and ethical behavior, a good name, and even the merit of one's good deeds, such as the merit (*zechus*) which we Jews have inherited from our patriarchs Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov.

Hashem grants the privilege of creating a meaningful legacy to people who have lived their lives in a way that pleases their Creator. As for the wicked, their only legacy is the material wealth that they have accumulated. Mishlei teaches that this wealth is quickly dissipated and is of little real value to descendants. In fact, others who are more worthy will ultimately be awarded those treasures for they are better placed to make proper use of them.

Exploring Mishlei

(כב) טוב ינחיל בְּנֵי-בָנִים וְצָפוֹן לְצַדִּיק חֵיל חוֹטֵא:

A good person bequeaths wealth to his children's children but the wealth of a sinner is concealed for [ultimate transmission to] a righteous person.

This proverb contrasts the legacy that a good person leaves behind with that bequeathed by the sinner. The text does not identify the nature of the good person's legacy because it may be in a variety of material and spiritual forms.

As for the legacy of the sinner, it is likely to be in material form only. Whereas the legacy of the good person is associated with that person through at least two generations, the legacy of the sinner ultimately disappears from view and reappears in the possession of someone who can use it to better effect.

Learning Mishlei

(כב) טוֹב יִנְחִיל בְּנֵי בָנִים
וְצָפוֹן לְצַדִּיק חֵיל חוֹטֵא:

A good person bequeaths a legacy even **to** his **children's children** – **טוֹב יִנְחִיל בְּנֵי בָנִים**, **but the wealth of a sinner is concealed** and will ultimately reach the hands of **a righteous person** – **וְצָפוֹן לְצַדִּיק חֵיל חוֹטֵא**.

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) A good person is permitted to pass on his spiritual merit (*zechus*) to enrich the lives of his descendants if they are worthy.
- (2) Another form of spiritual wealth is the Torah wisdom and Torah attitudes that the father passes on to his children. As a result, future generations model themselves on his life. The same holds true for the wisdom that the teacher passes on to his students.
- (3) When a righteous person endures suffering in this world, it is an indication that the spiritual value he has built up will be bequeathed to his descendants. Our Patriarchs were denied the full measure of reward that they might have received in this world because of their virtuous lives. This allowed their descendants to be granted the privilege of drawing on the *zechus* of their noble ancestors when they desperately needed it.
- (4) The good person lives not only for himself. The positive example gained from his life will surely remain an everlasting heritage bequeathed to his children and grandchildren.
- (5) Ill-gotten money will not last. In a concealed way, it will ultimately reach the hands of those who will use it to do good.

Sources

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

רשר"ה - (4)

רשר"ה - (5)

רש"י - (1)

המאירי - (2)

מלבי"ם - (3)

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