

Mishlei 13-22

Law and Prosperity

Key Concepts

To earn an honest living a person does not have to be rich. But it is important that he be law-abiding and live in a law-abiding society. The blessing of Hashem can bring prosperity even to a poor man's small landholding. However, Hashem expects people to observe the rule of law.

Hashem rejects disorder and demands that people observe the rule of law in every aspect of life, whether it be the laws of the Torah or the laws of nature, because they are all laws of the universe that Hashem created.

Hashem expects a person to follow the natural laws of his profession. If he is a farmer, he must be familiar with the natural requirements of agriculture. Thus, he must plow and sow at the right time of year depending on the crops he is growing the climate in which he lives.

Exploring Mishlei

(כג) רב אכל ניר ראשים ויש נספה בלא משפט:

[Even] the furrows of the poor yield plenty of food, but there is ruination in the absence of law.

This proverb looks at prosperity in an agricultural economy. It contrasts the success that even the poor farmer can achieve in a just society with the ruination that people should expect if they fail to observe the rule of law, neglecting the right way of agriculture and the right way of life.

Learning Mishlei

(כג) רב אכל ניר ראשים

ויש נספה בלא משפט:

Even **the furrows of the poor** can **yield plenty of food**— **רב־אכל ניר ראשים** if they are honest and hard-working. **But there is ruination in the absence of law** — **ויש נספה בלא משפט**, whether it be the rules of agriculture or fair dealings between men.

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) Even if a poor farmer has the potential to see bountiful harvests, he cannot expect to do so unless he knows the rules of agriculture and practices them energetically.
- (2) Even a rich farmer can anticipate crop failure if he neglects to give the *halachically* required *maasros* (tithes), especially the required donations to the poor.
- (3) Rich people of the world should realize that they are dependent on lower-paid people to do the menial labor that is essential to maintain their standard of living. Failure to ensure that poor people have enough to live will result in ruination for the entire society.
- (4) The crops mentioned in the proverb may also be an allegorical reference to Torah learning. The *talmidim* (students) are considered poor because of their limited Torah knowledge. Yet they produce bountiful harvests because their teachers learn from them through the give and take of Torah discussions.

Sources

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

(3) - מצודות, הגר"א, שבט מיהודה

(4) - רש"י

(1) - אבן עזרא, המאירי, רשר"ה

(2) - רש"י

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