

Mishlei 14-04

Tolerance

Key Concepts

A person who wishes to accomplish anything in life must be prepared to tolerate nuisances and annoyances. He must manage his priorities and overlook inconveniences because being too fastidious and demanding may distract him from what is important.

If he is a farmer he must be prepared to accept the dirt and mess that exists in the barnyard. The feeding trough is messy because animals are sloppy. But he counts on his oxen to pull the plough, so if his concern for neatness were to cause him to get rid of them he would have no harvest and his family would go hungry.

If he is a *talmid chacham* (scholar), he may prefer not to bother himself with the trouble of *talmidim* (students) who know far less than he does. But if he turns away from them, he will lose the opportunity to grow intellectually through responding to provocative questions and through visualizing concepts through the eyes of others.

If he has small children he needs to learn to have patience with them and deal with their childishness and tantrums. But he can console himself with the opportunity to fulfill his mission in life by raising good, productive youngsters.

As we have said, a person must be prepared to overlook faults in his children, his students, and his animals. However, there is a limit to tolerance. He needs to be exacting and meticulous when it comes to *mitzvah* observance. It all depends on the context and on setting the right priorities.

Exploring Mishlei

(ד) בְּאֵין אֱלֵפִים אֲבוֹס בָּר וְרַב תְּבוּאוֹת בְּכַח שׁוֹר:

Where there are no oxen, the feeding trough is clean but abundant harvest comes from the strength of an ox.

This proverb is presented as an answer to the frustrated farmer who is bothered by the annoyance of keeping his oxen fed. If he gets rid of his oxen, his feeding trough will be clean but he will not be able to draw the strength of his oxen to plough his fields and produce his harvest.

Learning Mishlei

(ד) בְּאֵין אֶלְפִים אֲבוּס בָּר
וְרַב תְּבוּאוֹת בְּכַח שׁוֹר:

Where there are no oxen – בְּאֵין אֶלְפִים, the feeding trough remains clean – אֲבוּס בָּר; but where an ox is available to pull the plough, there will be abundant harvest, which comes from the strength of the ox – וְרַב תְּבוּאוֹת בְּכַח שׁוֹר.

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.

Wisdom in Words

- (1) The word אֲבוּס may be translated as a feeding trough or grain storage barn. An empty trough will result in an empty barn at the end of his harvest season.
- (2) The word בָּר may be translated as clean, but also as empty. When there are no oxen, the farmer does not have to be concerned with cleaning up the mess left by the oxen, but the emptiness of the trough will be reflected in less food in the house as well.
- (3) The word אֶלְפִים refers to oxen, but also to the practice teaching or training, alluding to students and teachers.

Other Insights

- (4) The agricultural life teaches the importance of investing effort to gain a useful result. If the farmer does not arrange for oxen to plough his field, his granary will remain empty.
- (5) Whoever wants results of value must be willing to put up with inconvenience. The ox may make the barn filthy, but his produce makes up for it. The learned must devote time to elevating the people so that the masses will be motivated to support Torah learning.
- (6) Just as oxen are needed on a farm to pull the plough, learned men are needed in a community to interpret and teach the *halachah*.

(7) The oxen also correspond to students. When there are no students, the Rav is made empty of wisdom because they are the source of his wisdom as he rav works through the subject matter with them.

(8) When the strength of the ox is applied to the yoke it yields bountiful harvests. Correspondingly, when the student takes upon himself the yoke of Torah, he can expect to become learned.

Sources

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

(5) - רבינו יונה, דעת סופרים

(6) - רש"י, מצודות

(7) - המאירי, הגר"א

(8) - מצודות

(1) - רש"י, מצודות

(2) - רש"י, מצודות

(3) - מלבי"ם, הגר"א

(4) - המאירי

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