

Mishlei 14-31

Interdependence

Key Concepts

Hashem did not create man to be self-sufficient. In fact, the first woman was created because Hashem determined that man could not live alone. From an economics point of view every man must look to others to provide resources and services that he is unable to provide for himself for one reason or another.

Husbands and wives are fulfilled when they support each other. Parents must help their children and children must help their parents. By the same token employees depend upon employers to organize and lead the enterprises in which they can be effective. And employers depend upon employees to provide their contracted services in a loyal and honest manner.

Thus, the contractual arrangement that exists between employers and employees is actually part of the grand design of Hashem's world, which is a design of peaceful and interdependent social groupings.

In Hashem's wondrous scheme, individuals are blessed with varying degrees of wealth and ability. Nevertheless, He loves all his children, and He expects them to help each other overcome the challenges He has set for them.

Thus, the wealth of the rich was given to them partly in order to help the poor, and if the rich neglect this duty, they are effectively questioning the justice and wisdom of Creation. Similarly, an employer who withholds the wages of his employees or pays them less than fair value is dishonoring his Creator.

A person in a position of power is naturally tempted to behave as though he has a natural right to that power. He may think that his Divinely given power gives him the right to take advantage of those with less power, but in doing so he is dishonoring his Creator.

Exploring Mishlei

(לא) עֲשֵׂק דָּל חֵרֵף עֲשֵׂהוּ וּמִכְבָּדוֹ חֵינֵן אָבִיוֹן :

(31) ***One who exploits the poor man dishonors his Maker,
but he who is gracious to the destitute honors Him.***

This proverb addresses the phenomenon of exploitation by those who are blessed with power, such as employers who withhold the fairly earned wages of their employees. Such employers are dishonoring their Maker and are contrasted with those who generously help the destitute. By offering unstinting help to the needy, the philanthropists are honoring their Maker and fulfilling His design for Creation.

Learning Mishlei

(31) **One who exploits a poor man — עֹשֶׂק דָּל**

by holding back his wages or underpaying him

dishonors his Maker — חִרַף עֲשֵׂהוּ

because he implies that Hashem is unable

or unwilling to defend helpless victims.

But he Honors Him — וּמְכַבְּדוֹ

by being gracious to the destitute, — חֵן אֶבְיֹון

because he fulfills Hashem's plan that

people should help each other.

Additional Insights

(1) When a man needs repairs on his house, but does not have the necessary skills, he hires the services of a qualified craftsman. In doing so, he is fulfilling Hashem's plan. But if he delays paying the bill he is dishonoring his Maker. (מלבניים)

(2) If a wealthy person treats poor people as though they deserve their poverty, he is implying that Hashem wants the poor to suffer or is unable to prevent their suffering. (אבן עזרא, מצודות)

(3) A person who helps the needy is honoring his Maker because he knows that the needy person will be unable to repay him. Correspondingly, the powerless man presents no risk to the powerful person who exploits him. The only reward or retribution that can be expected is in the hands of Hashem. If the powerful man continues his exploitation, he is dishonoring Hashem. (רלב"ג, חנוך לנער)

(4) When a wealthy person exploits a poor person, the poor person is tempted to curse his fate and to question the wisdom of the Creator. Thus, the wealthy per-

son is held accountable for the resulting dishonor being done to the Creator.
(הגר"א)

(5) Another implication of this proverb is the general character defect of laziness, discussed frequently in Mishlei (e.g. segment 10-26). Just as the employer who fails to pay his worker is dishonoring Hashem, the worker who neglects *hishtadlus* (reasonable effort) may be seen as undermining Hashem's plan for the world.