

Mishlei 15-15

Envy

Key Concepts

A person's success in life depends not only upon his own initiative, but upon the blessings that were granted to him by his Creator. Those blessings include his physical, intellectual, emotional and financial resources as well as the changing circumstances of his life that are beyond his control. He should therefore not measure his success by that of others and it would be foolish to be disappointed if his personal wealth or achievements don't stand up to his impression of people he knows.

And yet people look at others and are envious of their life and their fortune. Envy is a prescription for unhappiness, which is fed by having expectations that do not conform to the reality of life. Instead of appreciating their own unique blessings, the envious individuals will always be embittered by their self-image of poverty.

In contrast there are good-hearted people who are grateful for their own blessings and put positive energy into making the most of them. Their expectations will match the reality of their lives and they will be gratified whenever they can exceed those expectations, even in small ways. As a result, everything in their lives looks good to them and they are always cheerful. In effect, for them life is a continual party.

Exploring Mishlei

(טו) כָּל יְמֵי עָנִי רָעִים וְטוֹב לֵב מְשֻׁתָּה תָמִיד :

(15) *All the days of a poor man are miserable,*

but for a good-hearted person, his life is a continual party.

At first glance this proverb seems to be an indictment of poverty and a strong motivation to get rich. But if so, why is the poor man being compared to a good-hearted man? Do you have to be rich to be good-hearted? The answer is that the poverty which Mishlei is speaking out is a poverty of character. A person whose character distorts his perception of life will always think of himself as being poor because there will always be someone else who has what he doesn't have.

Mishlei advises him that such an attitude is tragic. Life could be so good if he would only work to change his *middos* and rejoice in the good fortune of others rather than envying it.

Further insight into various aspects of achieving personal happiness and contentment are explored in the next two segments of Mishlei.

Learning Mishlei

(15) **All the days** — **כָּל יָמָיו**
of the person who sees himself as
a poor man — **עָנִי,**
are miserable — **רָעִים**

But for a good-hearted person, — **וְטוֹב לֵב.**
who does not begrudge the good fortune of others,
life is a **continual party** — **מִשְׁתֵּה תָּמִיד .**

Additional Insights

(1) No man should be rated according to the quantity of his material acquisitions or his status in society. We can rate him as "happy" or "unhappy" only by looking into his heart and his domestic life. (רשר"ה)

(2) The opposite of having a good heart is having an "ayin ra" (evil eye) that looks at the good fortune of others with resentment and envy. (מצודות)