

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 מִשְׁתָּה תָּמִיד:

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

(טו) כָּל יְמֵי עֲנִי רָעִים
וְטוֹב לֵב מִשְׂתֵּה תָמִיד:

All the days of the person who sees himself as **a poor man are miserable** – כָּל יְמֵי עֲנִי רָעִים because he suffers from envy and disappointment. **But for a good-hearted person,** who does not begrudge the good fortune of others, life is a **continual party** – וְטוֹב לֵב מִשְׂתֵּה תָמִיד.

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) 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.

(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.

Sources

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

(2) - מצודות

(1) - רש"ה