

## Mishlei 16-08

# Property

### Key Concepts

Our economic system is based on private ownership of property by individuals or partners. Each person acquires assets of all kinds over the course of his lifetime. However, the owner of any asset needs to bear in mind that he does not have sole ownership. No matter whether the amount involved is large or small, there is always a silent partner and that is Hashem. Hashem monitors the steps we are taking to acquire our property and he will help us preserve it if we are acting with righteousness. However, if we act unjustly, our assets will not endure.

Property can be used to do much good and a person may therefore be motivated to acquire more of it. But, it is also true that the larger the property, the more difficult it is to acquire it in a completely righteous and just way. In effect, Mishlei reminds us to draw the line and limit our acquisition of property to that which we can gain in a completely just manner.

### Exploring Mishlei

(ח) טוב מעט בצדקה מרב תבואות בלא משפט:

*Better a little acquired with righteousness, than great revenues acquired with injustice.*

This proverb compares the methods of acquiring property (justly or unjustly) with the size of the acquisition (great or small). The conclusion is that justice should never be sacrificed in favor of gaining a larger income. Better to severely restrict the size of the acquisition if this is what it takes to preserve honest dealings.

### Learning Mishlei

(ח) טוב מעט בצדקה  
מרב תבואות בלא משפט:

**Better is a little amount – טוב מעט acquired with righteousness – בצדקה  
than great revenues – מרב תבואות acquired with injustice – בלא משפט.**

## 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) The possessions of a righteous person, are under Hashem's protection. Possessions that are acquired unjustly, however, will ultimately be lost.
- (2) If a person deals dishonestly in order to give charity to the poor, he should not expect that the mitzvah of tzedakah will atone for his sin.
- (3) It is better to live frugally with restraint than to live luxuriously with unrestrained spending.
- (4) It is better to have few assets and give a limited measure of tzedakah than to have a great wealth while avoiding a corresponding measure of charity.
- (5) It is better to earn less and be free of the obligation to give large amounts to charity, while having more time to devote to learning Torah, than to have a large income with the corresponding obligations to charity.
- (6) It is better to learn less Torah but have a clear understanding of what one has learned than to learn a great deal with limited knowledge.

## Sources

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

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|--------------------------|--------------|
| (4) - המאירי, שבט מיהודה | (1) - מלבי"ם |
| (5) - הגר"א              | (2) - אלשיך  |
| (6) - הגר"א              | (3) - המאירי |