

Mishlei 16-12

Power

Key Concepts

People who have power over others have a special responsibility to wield that power wisely. Such people may be kings or nobles. Alternately, they may be employers or supervisors in an enterprise, or they may simply be parents or teachers. The common denominator is that other individuals are subject to their authority and are required to obey their wishes and give them respect.

A person with power should set an example of morality and integrity. To have power and wield it unjustly is an abomination and a contradiction because power ultimately depends on the assent of the governed. A person who violates the social compact that gives him power does not deserve it. Accordingly, such a person is destined to lose his power. The institution of royal kingship or other source of authority that society grants to an individual will dissolve if the authority is not earned.

Exploring Mishlei

(יב) תועבת מלכים עשות רשע כי בצדקה יכון כסא:

Doing evil is an abomination to kings, for a throne is established through righteousness.

This proverb compares the behavior of powerful people with its ultimate effect on their status in society. Virtuous behavior is rewarded by the social compact that grants authority to certain individuals. If such people abuse their power their wicked behavior will lead to their loss of power because their throne, which symbolizes their authority, can only survive if it is based on righteousness.

Learning Mishlei

(יב) תועבת מלכים עשות רשע

כי בצדקה יכון כסא:

Doing evil is an abomination to those who have the power of **kings** — **תועבת**

מלכים עשות רשע, **for** the authority of **a throne is established through**

righteousness — **כִּי בַצְדִיקָה יִפּוֹן כְּסֵא**. Wickedness is self-destructive for a sovereign.

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) Any social institution by which some people are granted power of others can be mutually constructive, but only if all participants behave righteously. If the people serving a king are virtuous, the nation will prosper and the royal authority will be enhanced. (Hagra)

(2) A king who oppresses his subjects and rules them by force of arms is being self-destructive. (Shevet)

Sources

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

(2) - שהט מיהודה

(1) - הגר"א