

Mishlei 16-18

Majestic Pride

Key Concepts

Majestic pride is the emotion of self-satisfaction that is associated with royalty and the trappings of power. In our society it may be displayed by very wealthy people or by those with political power. A person who has such wealth or power is in a precarious position. He may easily fall prey to the belief that he deserves to have it because he is better than other people. As a result, he fools himself into thinking that he can do no wrong and that whatever he does is inevitably right.

As we have seen in Segment 16-05, such an arrogant attitude goes directly counter to Hashem's plan for mankind. It can spawn a variety of destructive character traits, including selfishness, greed, dishonesty, and cruelty. Any person who is infected by arrogance finds himself unable to humble himself and be a servant to his Creator.

Ultimately Hashem will not tolerate these qualities and so the arrogant person is warned that the trappings of power which have tricked him into his conceit will be source of his undoing. When he is struck by a personal disaster, he needs to know that he himself has brought it about.

Even if he doesn't have the trappings of power, he may be infected by a spirit of self-conceit. And so, he may think that he can afford to take dangerous risks under the illusion that he surely deserves to be successful. Mishlei warns him that he is only human, and his plans can easily fail. The first thing he needs to do is to overcome his illusions about himself and develop humility.

Exploring Mishlei

(יח) לַפְּנֵי שֹׁפָר גָּאוֹן וְלַפְּנֵי כְשָׁלוֹן גְּבוּהַ רוּחַ:
 (18) *Majestic pride goes before disaster,
 and a proud spirit goes before failure.*

The first part of this proverb introduces us to the consequences of a majestic pride that has not been tempered by humility. Those consequences are characterized by the inevitable disaster that will come in its train, bringing a dramatic end to his majestic illusions.

The second part of the proverb speaks of the person with the proud spirit of conceit, even if not accompanied by actual power. He is warned that his conceit will not protect him from stumbling and falling. Failure can come at any time, and so he needs to work on his humility.

Learning Mishlei

(18) **Before disaster** — **לפני שֶׁבֶר**
there is **majestic pride** — **גָּאוֹן**

And **before failure** — **ולפני כִּשְׁלוֹן**
there is the arrogance of a **proud spirit** — **גְּבַה רִיחַ**.

.Additional Insights

(1) The text speaks of two kinds of calamity. One is **שֶׁבֶר**, which refers to a disaster that is brought about by external circumstances. The other is **כִּשְׁלוֹן**, which refers to a failure brought about by the person himself, stumbling and falling because of his own weakness. (הגר"א)

(2) Pride can also be the result of a conceit that a person may have when he believes himself to be more righteous than other people and therefore more deserving. The Gemara (Avodah Zara 18b) says that such a person's pride can be shattered by a temptation that results in his committing the sin of adultery. (שבט מיהודה)

(3) The twinned phenomenon of disaster preceded by great wealth is sometimes the means for punishing a wicked person. His well-being is raised up only in order to make the subsequent downfall more painful. (מצודות)