

Mishlei 17-01**Wealth – Greed****Key Concepts**

Some people see life as a game that they urgently want to win. They measure their success by the extent to which they acquire more possessions, privileges, or power, especially in comparison to others. If they inherit property, they will go to great lengths to get the largest and finest piece, even if it means bitter enmity with the other heirs. If they buy or sell property, they will risk resentment and hatred to get the better of their negotiating partner. They foolishly think that if they succeed in the competitive “game” they will achieve happiness.

Mishlei warns such people that their perspective is warped. True happiness depends upon living in peace and tranquility with others. This should be seen as a person’s primary goal and he should be ready to forego his selfish objectives and arguments in the pursuit of goodwill.

Exploring Mishlei

(א) טוֹב פֶּת חֲרִיבָה וְשֵׁלוֹה בָּה מִבֵּית מְלֵא זְבָחֵי רִיב:

(1) *It is better to live on dry bread in tranquility than in a house of strife-filled barbecues .*

This proverb compares the rewards of financial success with the benefits of tranquility, that is, a peaceful life. Tranquility is so essential that a truly wise person will be ready to give up all the benefits of material wealth and even be ready to subsist on dry bread if that is what it takes to achieve a tranquil life.

This means that true success is not measured by luxuries and expensive foods as many people think. Material success often comes at the expense of bitter strife, especially within families. The barbecued meats of the “good life” may seem attractive but are not worthwhile in comparison to the unhappiness which often accompany them.

Mishlei also explores the value of material possessions in comparison to what is truly important in Segment 15-16 (Wealth-Value).

Learning Mishlei

(1) It is **better** to live on **dry bread** – טוב פת חרבה –
as long as there is **tranquility** – ושלום בה.
rather than live in a **house** – מבית
of strife-filled barbecues – מלא זבחי ריב-

Additional Insights

[1] In this proverb Mishlei uses the word **פת** to refer to bread instead of the more common word **לחם**. This is because **פת** suggests a broken piece of bread rather than a whole loaf. Thus, a person should satisfy himself with bread in minimal form if that is the price of tranquility. (מלב"ם, מצודות)

[2] Imagined success is not true success. True success is that which brings happiness, that is, inner peace. (מלב"ם)

[3] If a person can have possessions that are not in contention he should seek to satisfy himself with them and forego possessions upon which others have a claim. (רבינו יונה)

[4] A person's desire to enlarge his possessions can even extend to his learning, and there can be a downside here. It would be a mistake to cover more ground in his learning just to be able to boast about how many pages he has covered. Instead, he should make sure to review and understand what he has learned before moving on to new material. (הגר"א)