

Mishlei 16-33

Luck

Key Concepts

People buy lottery tickets on the off-chance that they might win a fortune. If they win they think it is their good luck. But statistics show that most people who win a large sum of money in a lottery end up worse off than they were before they bought the ticket.

Similarly, people who draw lots in the process of dividing an inheritance may have their eye on a particular share and are then disappointed that they don't get what they hoped.

What people fail to realize is that there is no such thing as blind chance. Ultimately everything that happens to a person is the will of Hashem and is likely to be a test of his character. The way he handles his "good" or "bad" luck will give him an opportunity to develop his character or the opposite.

When people find it difficult to peacefully resolve the division of property such as in the case of an inheritance, they may use a form of **גורל** (lottery or "game of chance") to avoid conflict. Generally, the process should be supervised by a respected talmid chacham to ensure that the participants have committed themselves to agree in advance with the outcome and that nobody feels he has been cheated.

Exploring Mishlei

(לג) בַּחֵיק יוּטַל אֶת הַגּוֹרֵל וַיִּמָּה' כָּל מִשְׁפָּטוֹ:

[When] the lot is placed in the lap [where it is hidden before being cast], its entire judgment has [already] been decided by Hashem.

This proverb analyzes chance in terms of casting a lot. This may be thought of as placing tokens into a hidden place on a person's lap or bosom and drawing out one or more at random. A token is then cast down and studied to see how it has landed. This may provide an indication of what will happen in the future or what people should do about it. But the casting of lots does not determine anyone's fate. If correctly interpreted it merely reveals what was previously decreed by Hashem.

Mishlei tells us that since everything that happens is the will of Hashem, even

before the lot has been put into its hidden place, the result of the process has already been determined by the will of Hashem.

Learning Mishlei

(לג) בַּחִיק יוֹטֵל אֶת הַגּוֹרֵל
וַיִּמָּה' כָּל מִשְׁפָּטוֹ:

When **the lot is cast in the lap** – בַּחִיק יוֹטֵל אֶת הַגּוֹרֵל, **its entire judgment has already been decided by Hashem** – וַיִּמָּה' כָּל מִשְׁפָּטוֹ.

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) A lot can't influence the will of Hashem or reveal that which He wants concealed, unless there are explicit instructions to use the lot to reveal that will. Such was the lot cast in Yehoshua's time to divide the Land among the Shevatim. Otherwise, lacking such instruction, a lot is merely a gentleman's agreement between two disputing sides.

(2) One should not approach the casting or drawing of a lot with the intention of "revealing His Will," since the result of the lot can leave the loser with a feeling of injustice.

(3) This proverb is advice to heirs of property. One shouldn't think that because fate may cause the lot to fall to one's disadvantage, it is preferable to divide the inheritance with quarrels and court action. The lot is cast according to Hashem's will and each will receive his destined inheritance.

Sources

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

(3) - אלשיך

(1) - דעת סופרים

(2) - דעת סופרים