

Mishlei 18-10

Strength

Key Concepts

Why do we need strength? We turn to Hashem to grant us the strength to withstand threats to our safety and well-being. These threats include sickness, poverty, and people who seek to do us harm. We also need strength to overcome our internal weaknesses, such as jealousy and irrational hate.

Mishlei symbolizes strength as a tower, referred to as **מגדל עז**, a tower of strength. The tower is a metaphor for strength because we can readily visualize climbing a sturdy tower from which we can defend ourselves in times of danger. From the top of the tower we have a commanding view of the enemy, who finds it more difficult to strike us with his weapons. In military terms, the tower is a position of strength.

Another metaphor for strength is a walled city. The high fortified walls serve the same purpose as a tower and offer more space to shelter the people of a community and their possessions.

To whom do we turn to for strength? The righteous man calls upon the Name of Hashem for protection. The wealthy man looks to his accumulated wealth to insulate him from unexpected expenses and changing economic conditions. But how much of a cushion is enough? Is it ever enough?

Exploring Mishlei

(י) **מגדל עז שם ה' בו ירוץ צדיק ונשגב:**

*The Name of Hashem is a tower of strength;
the righteous person runs into it and is secure .*

(יא) **הון עשיר קרית עזו וכחומה נשגבה במשכיתו:**

*The treasure of a wealthy person is his city of strength,
and like a high wall in his imagination.*

Mishlei examines the concept of strength in two related proverbs. The first proverb looks at it from the point of view of the **צדיק** (righteous man) who trusts in Hashem to grant him security. That security is symbolized by the **מגדל עז**. The **צדיק** knows

that when a threat appears there is a tower of strength waiting to offer him refuge. Because of his trust in Hashem the righteous man does not feel the need to make extraordinary efforts to prepare for his defense in case of danger. If danger should appear he is confident of having sufficient time to avail himself of the **מגדל עז** and he will be secure. The elevating aspect of the tower is suggested by the word **ונשגב**, which means both elevated and strengthened. The combination provides him with security, which is his purpose in asking for strength.

The second proverb looks at the situation from the perspective of the rich man (**עשיר**) who prioritizes his wealth. He has made great efforts to prepare himself for possible threats and has built up his accumulated wealth so that it looks to him like a fortified city with a high wall (**חומה נשגבה**). This imagined fortress is large enough to encompass all of his possessions and so he feels secure. But security is in his imagination (**במשכיתו**). When an unknown threat appears, will it be enough? Will it ever be enough?

Learning Mishlei

(10) **A tower of strength** – **מגדל עז**
 is **the Name of Hashem** – **שם ה'**.
Into it the tzadik will run – **בו ירוץ צדיק**
 when he is in danger,
and he is secure – **ונשגב**

(11) The **wealth** of a **rich man** – **הון עשיר**
is his city of strength – **קרית עזו**.
and it protects him like a high wall – **וכחומה נשגבה**
in his imagination – **במשכיתו**.

Additional Insights

(1) The *tzadik* of the first proverb is saved by calling upon the Name of Hashem and praying for His help. Through the power of His Name, the *tzadik* is enabled to run freely (**בו ירוץ**) without worrying about tripping on an obstacle. He is confident that even if he encounters an obstacle he will be saved from harm. Also because he is running under the protection of Hashem he will not grow weary and will be boosted above any challenge. Furthermore, he will be so swift that he will outrun any pursuers. (רבינו יונה)

(2) The Name of Hashem may also be understood as the true Tower Of Strength, which has been established through the devotion of the *tzadik*. The *tzadik* has in

effect created a space where he can safely serve Hashem and in which he is secured from all physical threats.

(3) In the second proverb, the man of wealth thinks of his possessions (הון) as his fortress within whose wall he can rise to great heights (נִשְׁגָּבָה) and be free to fulfill his dreams. But it is only in his imagination. In reality his freedom is curtailed by his possessions. It exists only in his imagination. (מלבים רשר"ה)