

Mishlei 18-24

Friends

Key Concepts

Human beings are naturally drawn to form friendships and so most people agree that having friends is important to a person's well-being.

However, people have very different ideas about the role of friendship in a person's life. According to one view, the number of friends a person has is a measure of how well liked he is. Being popular enhances a person's self-esteem and ensures that he will not lack for companionship as he goes through life.

Unfortunately, this view overlooks the potential depth one can find in having a close friendship. A close friend spends enough time with a person to really get to know him. That knowledge enables the friend to provide the individual with a mirror into his character, giving him insight into his strengths and his weaknesses. This kind of knowledge is essential if the individual is to grow as a person.

Although a person may think he will be better off with an ever-expanding circle of friends, he runs the risk of being left with only superficial relationships. He may end up not giving any one friend the opportunity to really get to know him. As a result, he may face a hollow gap in his self-knowledge.

Exploring Mishlei

(כד) אִישׁ רְעִים לְהִתְרַעֵעַ וְיִשׁ אֱהָב דָּבָק מֵאָח:

(24) *A man has friends to socialize with;*

but a beloved friend is even closer than a brother.

The proverb compares the two basic types of friendship by distinguishing between friendship in general and the kind of friendship associated with brotherhood. Brothers often get to know each other well because they have spent so much time together in their formative years. That mutual knowledge and the sense of a common family root creates a feeling of closeness, which we call brotherly love.

The first part of the proverb speaks of the benefit of a wide circle friends. The more friends a man has (אִישׁ רְעִים), the more opportunities there are to socialize (לְהִתְרַעֵעַ) and enjoy the pleasures of companionship. But he is missing out in a

critical component of friendship. That is the quality of love (וַיֵּשׁ אֱהָב) based on closeness. With such a bond he can even connect to a friend who is closer than a brother (דָּבֵק מֵאָח)

Learning Mishlei

(24) **A man may have many friends — אִישׁ רַעִים —
to socialize with — לְהִתְרַעֵעַ;
but there is to be found a beloved friend — וַיֵּשׁ אֱהָב —
even closer than a brother — דָּבֵק מֵאָח.**

Additional Insights

[1] There is a potential benefit in having a wide circle of friends if the person looks for the opportunity to make contact with those select individuals among them who have the qualities to be true friends. (מצודות)

[2] We can have many companions, but only few friends. (רשר"ה)

[3] Someone who surrounds himself with many friends is really alone. (מלב"ים)

[4] The proverb can be interpreted as teaching that if one considers all people as his friends, he will end up a broken man (לְהִתְרַעֵעַ). He should be careful in choosing his friends and allow himself to become friends with only those few who are worthy of being closer than a brother. (ילקוט מעם לועז)