

## Mishlei 19-04

# Wealth – Relationships

### Key Concepts

Mishlei teaches that excessive wealth can distort healthy social relationships and the same is true of excessive poverty. As a man's wealth increases, he finds that people are drawn to him and that his circle of friends grows by leaps and bounds. People associate wealth with virtue and success. They are hoping that some of the new wealth will rub off on them. The trouble is that many of these added friends are friends of the man's wealth, rather than friends of the man.

On the other hand, as a man's financial status descends below the poverty level, he is likely to find his circle of friends getting smaller and smaller. People are reluctant to associate with someone who may end up depending on them for support. They are afraid that poverty is contagious and want to avoid getting caught up in it.

### Exploring Mishlei

(ד) הוֹן יִסִּיף יָרְעִים רַבִּים וְדָל מִרְעִהוּ יִפְרֹד

(4) *Wealth brings many new friends,*

*but a pauper becomes alienated even from his friend.*

This proverb compares the effect of excessive wealth and excessive poverty. What effect does money have on personal friendship?

The well-known ability of the wealthy man to attract friends is described by the proverb in terms of his wealth, rather than any other personal quality. This implies that many of the "friends" are actually motivated by self-interest. They are drawn by the opportunity to benefit from the association with a rich person.

In contrast, the effect of extreme poverty in destroying an individual's self-confidence is evident in his dwindling circle of friends. The proverb refers to the pauper as a poor man who may have only one friend left. Due to an over-emphasis on appearances, the pauper sees himself as the kind of person that

others will not want to associate with and so he retreats into isolation, withdrawing from his one good friend.

## Learning Mishlei

Wealth — הוֹן

brings many new friends — יוֹסִיף יָרְעִים רַבִּים,

but a pauper — וְדָל

becomes alienated — יִפְרָד

from even his last good friend — מִרְעֵהוּ.

## Additional Insights

[1] Because people are desperate to gain the good will of a rich man, they often resort to flattery. They may even commit an illegal or sinful act for the rich man's benefit. (חנוך לנער)

[2] Money distorts human relationships; when a wealthy man loses his wealth, he may find that he has lost his friends as well. (מלבי"ם)

[3] A rich man who has become poor may withdraw unilaterally from his friendships because he can no longer provide the occasional gifts and hosting that is customary between friends. (דעת סופרים)

[4] The rich man who has become poor is likely to feel unworthy. He assumes that his well-to-do friend is probably ashamed to associate with someone of a lower class. Furthermore, the poor man's pride puts him in fear being seen as a potential seeker of financial assistance. (אלשיך)

[5] When a poor man encounters a newly rich man, he may react negatively, saying that the rich man is clearly flaunting his wealth. In the poor man's mind the rich man is convinced that success is a reflection of talent and hard work rather than the will of Hashem. (אבן יחיאל)