

## Mishlei 11-21

# Hands

### Key Concepts

The human hand is a powerful metaphor, for it symbolizes the ability to take action, whether by man or Hashem. When two hands are involved, we can visualize an agreement between two parties, a handshake to confirm a deal. Thus, the covenant between Hashem and Yisrael can be understood as a commitment by the two parties.

The idea of two hands also suggests the interaction of two individuals, one giving and the other receiving. The hand that is giving can then be understood as the hand of Hashem meting out justice to Yisrael, as a consequence of their failure to keep their commitment in full. The other hand then symbolizes Yisrael receiving its judgment.

### Exploring Mishlei

(כא) יָד לְיָד לֹא יִנָּקֶה רָע וְזָרַע צְדִיקִים נִמְלֵט:

(21) Justice will meted out *from hand to hand*. *Evil will not be exonerated.*

*But the offspring of the righteous may escape.*

Here Mishlei contrasts the basic concept of Hashem's consistent application of justice with the possibility of tempering that justice in consideration of the merit of our forefathers.

### Learning Mishlei

Strict justice will meted out directly

from the **hand** of Hashem **to** the **hand** of Yisrael. — יָד לְיָד

**evil will not be exonerated.** — לֹא יִנָּקֶה רָע

**But the offspring of the righteous** — זָרַע צְדִיקִים

**may be allowed to escape** — נִמְלֵט

in the merit of the righteousness of their ancestors.

## Additional Insights

### WHEN PUNISHMENT IS DIRECT

- (1) The expression “hand to hand” indicates that punishment is applied in proportion to the severity of the sin, measure for measure. (הגר"א)
- (2) The expression “hand to hand” indicates that a punishment from the hand of Hashem may be direct as well as immediate, so that the *rasha* is not even given time to regret his crime and do teshuvah. (רש"י, המאירי, רלב"ג, מצודות, מלבי"ם)
- (3) The expression “hand to hand” suggests the possibility of a person committing a serious sin but hoping to evade punishment by also doing a *mitzvah* (with the other hand, as it were). However, he will not be exonerated. (מדרש משלי, שבט (מיהודה))
- (4) The expression “hand to hand” suggests the possibility of a *rasha* seeking to evade the harshness of justice by moving from place to place. But this won't save him either. (חנוך לנער)

### WHEN PUNISHMENT IS TEMPERED

- (5) Under certain circumstances the offspring of tzadikim will be able to avoid a calamity because of the merit of their fathers. Hashem's appreciation for the devotion of *tzadikim* is so great that he may go beyond the strict requirements of the law, sparing not only the *tzadik*, but his descendants as well. (אבן עזרא, רבינו (יונה, הגר"א))
- (6) The merit of ancestors may be sufficient to gain their descendant extra time to do *teshuvah* and avoid punishment. (המאירי)