

Mishlei 20-26

Strategy

Key Concepts

In this proverb Mishlei offers strategic advice of the kind that might be suitable for a wise king who is faced with military challenges. Even though the average person studying Mishlei is unlikely to have the need for military expertise, everyone faces problems that call for strategic thinking within the scope of his own responsibilities. The mere fact that such advice appears in the Book of Mishlei suggests that every person should be prepared to look at the big picture from time to time.

Exploring Mishlei

(כו) מְזַרְהָהּ רְשָׁעִים מִלְּךָ חָכָם וַיִּשָּׁב עֲלֵיהֶם אוֹפֵן:

(26) *A wise king scatters the wicked and turns the wheel over them.*

On the surface, it appears that the wise king of this proverb is faced with a wicked enemy who is motivated to cause the king and his people great harm. Mishlei has concluded that an enemy becomes more of a threat if it can operate as a united force, with all its components hoping to achieve a victorious outcome by working together. Therefore, Mishlei advises the king to focus his initial efforts on breaking apart and scattering the forces arrayed against him.

Once the enemy has lost the benefit of a solid core, the wise king can bring to bear a powerful force, symbolized by a crushing wheel, to deal with the opposing troops at their weakest point.

The same strategic approach can also be used in a variety of non-military situations. When faced with a problem of any kind, it is advisable to break up the challenge into its elements, each of which can then be addressed by a concentrated effort.

Learning Mishlei

(26) The wise king — מִלְּךָ חָכָם

who is in command of an army

scatters the wicked enemy — מְזַרְהָהּ רְשָׁעִים

and then turns a wheel over them — וַיִּשָׁב עֲלֵיהֶם אוֹפָן
to win the battle.

Additional Insights

[1] The wise King could also be referring to Hashem, in which case the turning of the wheel signifies just retribution being paid to the wicked. (רבינו יונה)

[2] The word **אוֹפָן** in this context could be translated as “manner” so that the proverb is saying retribution will be in an appropriate manner. (חבל נחלה)