

Mishlei 21-13

Compassion

Key Concepts

When you are approached by a needy person, your response may be affected by any number of considerations including your own ability, your estimation of his need, and the prevalence of other needy people in the vicinity. However, one general principle is that every person who asks for help should be treated with compassion. That means you should never refuse to pay attention to him. You should never close your ears to him because if you do that you are treating him as a non-person.

Exploring Mishlei

(יג) אַטֶּם אָזְנוֹ מִזַּעֲקַת דָּל גַּם הוּא יִקְרָא וְלֹא יַעֲנֶה:

**(13) *Whoever closes his ear to the cry of a poor man,
he too will call out and not be answered.***

To drive home the seriousness of the obligation to treat a needy person with compassion, Mishlei puts you in his shoes and forces you to imagine the same thing happening to you.

Learning Mishlei

(13) Whoever closes his ear — אַטֶּם אָזְנוֹ
to the cry of a poor man, — מִזַּעֲקַת דָּל
 the situation will arise that
he too — גַּם הוּא
will cry out — יִקְרָא
and not be answered — וְלֹא יַעֲנֶה..

Additional Insights

[1] The need to provide help to the needy may arise in the case of a judge who is in position to respond to the plight of a person who has been cheated or robbed.
 (מלבי"ם)

[2] The need to provide help to the needy may also arise in the case of a learned person who is in position to help a student who is having difficulty in his learning (הגר"א)

[3] The need to provide help to the needy may also arise in the case of a person who has already distributed money to many paupers. (רבינו יונה)

[4] Even if one cannot help the needy in a meaningful way financially, a sympathetic ear can make a big difference. (מעם לועז)

[5] Even if one cannot provide financial help, any other kind of help that will alleviate a person's suffering is worthwhile. (דעת סופרים)