

Mishlei 22-07

Power

Key Concepts

We are all subject to the power of our Creator. This is a state with which a believing person is comfortable. The person trusts that Hashem uses His absolute power only for the good. However, no one voluntarily chooses to be under the power of another human being unless it is absolutely necessary.

When an individual is under the power of another, his freedom of action is reduced accordingly. This can become a problem if the interests of the two are in conflict. The fact is that an individual can never be sure that the person in a position of power will always act in the interest of the one who is at a disadvantage.

Mishlei expresses this power relationship in the form of a proverb, which advises an individual on circumstances where another person may have power over him. Specifically, if the individual is poor, he needs to be careful in his dealings with a wealthy person because his wealth puts him in a position of power. Likewise, if an individual borrows money, that individual remains at a disadvantage as long as he remains in debt to another.

Exploring Mishlei

(ז) עָשִׂיר בְּרָשִׁים יִמְשׁוֹל וְעֶבֶד לֹהֵ לְאִישׁ מְלֹוּהַ :

(7) *The rich rules over the poor;*

and the borrower becomes a servant to the lender.

This proverb draws attention to the special advantage in the hands of a rich man. In effect, the rich man can exercise a degree of influence over all the poor people with whom he comes into contact. He knows he can lend or give money to any who may need it. They in turn will treat him with respect and deference because they may need his help at some point. This places a special responsibility upon the rich man to avoid abusing the power that Hashem has granted him. Also, he must be careful not to let the deference given by the poor go to his head.

Similarly, a lender has a natural advantage over any individual borrower. The borrower feels bad about not being able to repay his debt, and therefore any time they meet, the borrower fears that he may be asked to make good on his loan. The lender should be aware of this power and should avoid using it to cause the lender unnecessary pain. The implied advice for anyone in need of funds is to avoid borrowing money unless absolutely necessary.

Learning Mishlei

(7) The rich man — עָשִׂיר

effectively **rules over** all **the poor** people in his vicinity, — בְּרָשִׁים יִמְשׁוֹל
and the borrower who owes money is like a **servant**, — וְעֶבֶד לֹהֵה
to the lender, who can recall the loan. — לְאִישׁ מְלוּהָה