

Mishlei 23-01

Aristocracy

[Pesukim 23:1 to 23:3]

Key Concepts

In every community there are influential people whose importance and wealth gives them a higher status. Such people may be tempted to unwittingly use their position to exert power over less important individuals.

Therefore, Mishlei advises ordinary people to avoid being unfairly manipulated when dealing with the aristocrats of the community.

Exploring Mishlei

(א) פִּי יֵשֵׁב לְלֶחֶם אֶת מוֹשֵׁל בֵּין תְּבִין אֶת אֲשֶׁר לְפָנָיִךְ:

(1) If you sit down to dine with an aristocrat, understand what is before you.

Keep in mind that an aristocrat has become accustomed to being treated with special consideration. Thus, he may feel it natural to expect others to readily bend to his wishes. The delicacies that are served at the table of an aristocrat may be far superior to those with which ordinary people are accustomed. Be careful not to feel outclassed by the unique environment.

(ב) וְשִׁמְתָּ שִׁפְיָן בְּלַעַף אִם בַּעַל נֶפֶשׁ אֶתָּה:

(2) If you are a man of appetite, it may seem as though you have put a knife to your throat as a result of the unexpected behavior you are expected to adopt in the strange setting of an aristocratic home.

(ג) אַל תִּתְאָו לְמִטְעַמֹּתָיו וְהוּא לֶחֶם כְּזָבִים:

(3) Do not lust for his delicacies, as his meal may not be meant sincerely.

Be aware that the attitude of the aristocrat towards food may be far different that what you are familiar with. Don't allow the unusual dishes being served in a wealthy environment affect your judgment.

Learning Mishlei

(1) If you sit down — **כִּי תֵשֵׁב**
to dine with an aristocrat, — **לְלַחֹם אֶת מוֹשֵׁל**
understand well — **בֵּין תִּבִּין**
what is before you — **אֶת אֲשֶׁר לְפָנֶיךָ**

(2) you have put a knife to your throat — **וְשִׁמְתָה שִׁכִּין בְּלַעְךָ**
If you are a man of appetite, — **אִם בֶּעַל נֶפֶשׁ אַתָּה**

(3) Do not lust for his delicacies, — **אַל תִּתְאָו לְמִטְעָמוֹתָיו**
as his meal may not be meant sincerely. — **וְהוּא לֶחֶם כְּזָבִים**

Additional Insight

The word מוֹשֵׁל may also be translated as “ruler”, that is, a government official. Such officials may issue invitations in cases when they have ulterior motives, such as the need to extract information. (הגר"א)