

Mishlei 10-15

Wealth and Poverty

Key Concepts

Foolish people look at wealth as a guarantee of security. They rely on their riches to protect them from misfortune. However, wealth can easily be lost and when the rich lose their wealth they have nothing to fall back on. A man's true value does not lie in the sum of his possessions, but in his ability to fulfill his mission in life and serve Hashem.

Exploring Mishlei

(יד) הוֹן עֲשִׂיר קִרְיַת עֹזוֹ מְחַתַּת דְּלִים רִישָׁם:

(14) The wealth of a rich man is his citadel of strength. The ruin of the destitute is their poverty.

The rich man foolishly sees his wealth as a fortress. He arrogantly thinks it will protect him from any eventuality. When he loses his wealth and becomes destitute he becomes despondent because he sees his world in ruins.

Learning Mishlei

(טו) הוֹן עֲשִׂיר קִרְיַת עֹזוֹ
מְחַתַּת דְּלִים רִישָׁם:

The wealth of a rich man – הוֹן עֲשִׂיר is foolishly imagined to be **the citadel of his strength – קִרְיַת עֹזוֹ**. But its true value lies in how it was acquired and the purposes to which it is being used. **The ruin of the destitute – מְחַתַּת דְּלִים** is foolishly imagined to be **their poverty – רִישָׁם** and so they are despondent. But if they take a positive attitude and trust in Hashem they can regain their positive view of life.

Additional Insights

THE RICH FOOL

(1) The rich man foolishly thinks that his wealth alone will save him from

disaster. He fails to realize that true wealth is wisdom and Torah knowledge. Far more valuable than riches are the good name and kind nature of a person, attainable only by leading a good life.

(2) The rich man foolishly trusts in his wealth even though it can be lost. He thinks that life and happiness are the result of wealth. He fails to realize that the value of wealth is affected by the means with which it was acquired and how it is used.

(3) Since a man's lot in life is determined by Hashem it is foolish to place his trust in wealth or to fear poverty. If he relies on Hashem, he can be certain of his ultimate well-being no matter what his economic circumstances may be.

(4) The wealth of a rich man is a source of worry, since the riches may be stolen or confiscated, and in this way it is like a fortified city in constant danger of attack.

(5) The very delusion that possessions are a tower of strength lulls their owner into such pride as to endanger the continuance of his wealth. He is bound to become dangerously unscrupulous and thus causes the collapse of his "citadel."

THE POOR FOOL

(6) Someone who was in possession of wealth but lost it feels despondent . It is though his enemies have conquered his fortress of strength. But his true strength lies in the wisdom he has acquired and his true enemies are his *yetzer hara* and his uncontrolled desires.

(7) True poverty is the depression suffered by the destitute. They fail to realize that the poor can survive without wealth, because poverty is in fact only a psychological state of depression and despondency caused by a lack of money rather than the lack of money itself. Since poverty can be neutralized with a positive attitude a poor man is better off than rich man who lives in fear of losing his wealth

Sources

The primary sources used for the insights illuminating this segment are listed below.

(5) - רשר"ה

(6) - מלבי"ם

(7) - אלשיך

(1) - רש"י, אבן עזרא, רשר"ה

(2) - רבינו יונה

(3) - המאירי

(4) - אלשיך

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