

Mishlei 11-25

Responsibility and Neglect

Key Concepts

The man who is privileged to become the head of a household is given the opportunity to build a Jewish family and to live on in their hearts after he is gone. However, these responsibilities call for energy and initiative. The head of a household must see to the material and spiritual needs of his family. He must be constantly alert to the changing emotional and moral state of each person in the household and must do what he can to guide and enable that individual to develop his or her full potential.

If the head of a household is stingy, lazy, or foolish he may be tempted to neglect or distort his responsibilities. He may question whether he really needs to do all that is required of him, preferring to follow his personal whims. Mishlei warns such a person that this attitude can be disastrous to his family and to his own future.

Exploring Mishlei

(כט) עוֹכֵר בֵּיתוֹ יִנְחַל רוּחַ וְעָבַד אֲוִיל לַחֲכָם לֵב:

(29) [The fool who] ruins his household [by neglecting his responsibilities] will inherit the wind. And [in the end, that] fool will become a servant to the wise of heart.

The head of a household who fails in his responsibilities is said to be ruining his household. Instead of building a family he will end up with nothing, that is, he will inherit the wind. Mishlei calls him a skeptical fool (אֲוִיל) because he doubts the extent of his responsibilities. He is contrasted with someone who is wise of heart (חֲכָם לֵב), a person with the wisdom to appreciate and fulfill his duty. The irresponsible fool who neglects his duty is warned that he will end up in poverty so that he will be forced to go to work as a servant of the wise of heart.

Learning Mishlei

(כט) עוֹכֵר בֵּיתוֹ יִנְחַל רוּחַ
וְעֶבֶד אֱוִיל לַחֲכָם לֵב:

The fool who **ruins his household** – עוֹכֵר בֵּיתוֹ by casting doubt on his responsibilities **will inherit the wind** – יִנְחַל רוּחַ. He will be left with nothing of substance. That **skeptical fool** – אֱוִיל **will then** have no choice but to **become a servant** – וְעֶבֶד **to the wise of heart** – לַחֲכָם לֵב, who takes his responsibilities seriously and acts on them.

Additional Insights

A series of insights illuminating this proverb are presented below. The numbers identifying the insights refer to the listing of sources at the end of the segment.

- (1) The lazy person neglects his responsibilities to learn Torah and engage in productive work. His family will end up in poverty.
- (2) The stingy person ruins his family by denying them the necessities of life. He fails to pay for the education of his children and so they end up without Torah and without a livelihood. All the wealth that he has accumulated will have no value, like the wind. And that is what he will be left with.
- (3) The neglectful person does not make the effort to provide for the support and education of his family. When he is gone, he will leave nothing behind and no one will remember him.
- (4) The foolish person who wastes his money, spending more than he can afford, will leave his family in need.
- (5) The tyrannical person who is overly strict in disciplining his family, thinking that by denying their basic needs he will strengthen their character, will find that they react with anger and rebellion, so he will have achieved nothing.

Sources

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

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| (4) - מלבי"ם | (1) - רש"י |
| (5) - דעת סופרים | (2) - רבינו יונה |
| | (3) - המאירי, הגר"א |

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