

## Mishlei 13-11

# Wealth and Wisdom

### Key Concepts

Mishlei teaches us to engage in constructive habits and lifestyles. We are reminded that through methodical and steady work habits a person can build up his material wealth. However, this is not to suggest that acquiring such wealth should be a person's goal in life. On the contrary, although wealth enables a person to perform *mitzvos*, Mishlei has emphasized the overriding importance of a life oriented around wisdom, that is to say, the wisdom of the Torah.

As it happens, wisdom is a perfect metaphor for wealth. Thus, many of the proverbs, while appearing to offer guidance on how to get rich, are also teaching us the practices and attitudes we should be following to acquire wisdom and retain it.

Good work habits on a steady and consistent basis are known to assure a gradual buildup of financial assets. The same is true of learning Torah. The important thing is perseverance and a willingness to focus one's efforts on an ongoing basis. A person who fritters away his time on trivial distractions will end up losing whatever wealth he may happen to possess. The same is true of his Torah wisdom. He will lose it if he fails to constantly review and work with it in his mind.

### Exploring Mishlei

(יא) הוֹן מִהֶבֶל יִמְעָט וְקִבֹּץ עַל יָד יִרְבֶּה :

(11) ***Wealth is diminished through wasteful trivialities,  
but it is increased by steady and careful gathering.***

This proverb contrasts the challenge of preserving wealth with that of building wealth. A person's wealth (and his Torah knowledge) can be dissipated if he allows himself to waste his time on trivialities. Correspondingly, a person who seeks to build his wealth (or Torah knowledge) must apply himself in a steady manner, working in small increments.

## Learning Mishlei

(11) Wealth — הון  
 is diminished — ימעט  
 from wasteful trivialities — מהבל.  
 But steady gathering — וקבץ  
 in small amounts with care — עליז  
 will increase it — ירבה.

## Additional Insights

### Wisdom in Words

(1) The word **הבל** is a variant of **חבל**, bundle. This teaches that if a person accumulates Torah knowledge in large bundles, his actual learning is diminished. Thus, if he studies a great deal at a time without reviewing the material, he will forget it. (רש"י, גמרא ערובין נ"ד)

(2) The word **הבל** can be translated as futility, referring to practices such as theft and deception which have no constructive value. When such practices are used in acquiring wealth, the wealth will not endure, but will gradually dwindle away. (אבן עזרא, מצודות)

(3) The phrase **עליז** (by hand) implies that Torah should be studied in small bites, such as individual *pesukim* or paragraphs. These will gradually accumulate over time to build a large body of knowledge. (חנוך לנער)

(4) However, the learning should not be made too easy. Some degree of effort should be called for. If it comes too easy it will also dissipate. The phrase **עליז** implies that the person's "hand" must be applied energetically. (הגר"א)

### Other Insights

(5) Wealth will deteriorate and be diminished without constant attention and effort. This applies to wisdom as well. Torah should be studied in small segments, which should be reviewed. (מלבי"ם)

(6) Torah should be studied in an orderly fashion, beginning with basic knowledge, and expanding it over time. Complex and highly challenging material

should be put off until later so that the student does not become discouraged.  
(המאירי)