

Mishlei 14-18

Value

Key Concepts

A person's true character is not always evident, even to himself. However, a good indication can be obtained by looking at what types of activities he values. An intelligent or clever person is quickly bored by inane pastimes that have no depth. In contrast, the simple-minded person is happy to be entertained by activities which the clever person finds a foolish waste of time.

There is also a distinction in the mental energy level a person is willing to invest in what he values. The simple-minded person is quick to indulge in foolish entertainments, but he does so passively. He is waiting to be entertained.

In contrast, the intelligent person realizes that the value he gains from any mental exercise is dependent on the energy he puts into it. As he acquires more knowledge, his vistas of learning and understanding are expanded. The gratifying sense of value that he gains from his knowledge continues to expand.

Exploring Mishlei

(יח) נְחָלוֹ פְּתָאִים אֹלֶת וְעֲרוּמִים יִכְתְּרוּ דַעַת:

(18) *The inheritance of fools is their folly
but the clever crown themselves with knowledge.*

This proverb contrasts the attitudes of people toward the kinds of activities they value. The fool appreciates activities that require a minimum of mental energy. Such activities are described as the fool's inheritance because they came to him naturally, without effort.

The clever person, on the other hand values meaningful knowledge, especially Torah knowledge. Such knowledge enhances his life in the way a crown enhances a royal personage. But such a crown does not come without effort, an effort that the wise person is happy to expend.

Learning Mishlei

(18) **The inheritance of fools — נְחָלוֹ פְּתָאִים**
that comes to them with a minimum of effort

is their folly — **אִוְלָת**.

But clever people — **וְעֲרוּמִים**,

are happy to invest in the rewarding labor of learning.

Thus, they **crow**n themselves **with knowledge** — **יִכְתְּרוּ דָעַת**.

.Additional Insights

(1) The clever man values Torah knowledge. Therefore, it doesn't bother him that simpletons don't recognize the value of what they have achieved. (מצודות)

(2) The fool tends to be gullible and does not make the effort to evaluate or question ideas that are presented to him. (רלביג, מלבי"ם)

(3) The clever person looks at new ideas critically in order to understand their implications. If he engages in an activity, he knows why he is doing it and what he expects to get out of it. (רלביג, מלבי"ם)

(4) The clever person appreciates the value of knowledge. He takes pride in knowing what is important to him. (רבינו יונה)

(5) When a clever person comes into possession of knowledge, his natural reaction is to build on it, to see where it takes him. In contrast, the fool accepts it as a finished product and gives no thought to working further with it. (שבט מיהודה, רשר"ה)