

Mishlei 20-01

Intoxication

Key Concepts

What drives a person to drink? Perhaps he is unconsciously seeking the reward of an elevated state of mind. In this state he has the impression that he is thinking more clearly with greater insight. The drink seems to free him from worries and concerns so that he can focus on more gratifying thoughts.

Because some of these benefits do in fact appear at first, a person can be easily misled into relying on the artificial promise of mood elevation. Unfortunately, this is only an illusion. After a time the drink enthusiast loses entirely the clarity of responsible thought.

The addictive nature of alcohol has a subtle effect on the mind which the drinker is not even aware of. Not only does it distort his thinking, it ultimately distorts his behavior and he is no longer able to manage his life in his own self-interest.

A hidden effect of intoxication is the ultimate inability to take anything seriously.

This is the characteristic mindset of the יָלֵךְ, the scoffer. He no longer accepts the seriousness of the moral and ethical principles that are inherent in the creation of the world. He no longer feels the need to acknowledge his obligation to his Creator.

Exploring Mishlei

(ד) לֹץ הַיַּיִן הֵמָּה שֹׁכֵר וְכָל שֹׁגֶה בּוֹ לֹא יִחְכֹּם:

The scoffer is a man of wine but he calls out for even stronger drink; and whoever revels in it will not grow wise.

This proverb begins by identifying the ultimate effect of wine on a person. The wine becomes an essential part of his character, *a man of wine*, and so he becomes a scoffer, who ridicules every serious idea.

The proverb reveals the addictive quality of wine by the fact that after a time the alcoholic is no longer satisfied with ordinary wine. He has become numb and now seeks the stimulation to be found in drink that is stronger and more intoxicating.

The proverb concludes by referring to the way the drinker fools himself. He may think of wine as a means for raising consciousness and thereby promoting perceptiveness. Mishlei advises that he is making a big mistake and the effect is the opposite of what he thinks. If he continues along the path that the wine is leading him, he will not grow wise.

Learning Mishlei

The scoffer — לֵץ

is a man **of wine** — הַיַּיִן

but **he calls out** — הֶמָּה

for even **stronger drink** — שֶׁכָּר

and whoever revels in it — וְכֹל שֶׁגָּה בּוֹ

will not grow wise - לֹא יִחְכֵּם.

Additional Insights

(1) The harmful effects of wine are multiplied when the drinking is done in a social setting of mockery that leads to further intoxication. — שִׁבְט מִיְהוּדָה

(2) An alternate interpretation of לֵץ הַיַּיִן is that “wine is a mocker” since it tricks him into revealing secrets and causing misery. — דַּעַת סוֹפְרִים

(3) Wine has the effect of easing a person’s sense of responsibility and duty. It puts him in a frame of mind in which he finds humor in every situation and is tempted to mock serious people and their concerns. — רַבִּינוּ יוֹנָה

(4) Wine leads a person into stronger drinks, which ultimately can reduce him to animalistic behavior. — מַלְבִּים