

Mishlei 21-06

Wealth – Dishonesty

Key Concepts

There are foolish people who are prepared to do what it takes to get rich, even if that involves dishonesty and falsehood. They are so enthusiastic about the prospect of accumulating treasures, that they disregard the harm being done to their victims. They even close their eyes to the deathly risk they are taking.

The dishonest people who have their eye on acquiring treasures, think of their target as a solid possession that will guarantee lifelong security and happiness. They fail to realize that wealth can dissipate like a mist that vanishes in the wind. And they don't appreciate the personal danger that a life of crime can invite.

Exploring Mishlei

(ו) פֶּעַל אוֹצְרוֹת בְּלִשׁוֹן שָׁקֵר הֶבֶל נִדָּף מִבְּקֵשֵׁי מוֹת:
(6) *The acquisition of treasures by a lying tongue,*
is like an elusive mist, an invitation to death.

There are many kinds of criminal activity, but Mishlei is especially concerned with offenses committed through falsehood and deception, such as false testimony, accepting bribes, and fraudulent commerce. Such crimes depend on a lying tongue to mislead unwary customers and suppliers.

Mishlei assures the foolish criminal that the profits of criminal ventures are insubstantial, even though they seem life changing. In fact, the anticipated change to a foolish person's life, can easily end up as an invitation to death.

Learning Mishlei

(6) The acquisition of treasures — פֶּעַל אוֹצְרוֹת
by a lying tongue, — בְּלִשׁוֹן שָׁקֵר
 is like buying an elusive mist — הֶבֶל נִדָּף
 that is dispersed by the wind,
 answering an invitation to death — מִבְּקֵשֵׁי מוֹת.

Additional Insight

[1] The expression **מְבַקְשֵׁי מוֹת** may be understood as “seekers of death”. Those who seek to acquire treasures by dishonest means are literally “seekers of death”. Although they don’t realize it, that will be their fate. (מוסר אביד, ילקוט מעם לועז)

[2] People who seek treasures, think of them as valuables that they can rely on in hard times. But Mishlei is saying that the reverse is true. These “treasures” which were acquired dishonestly behave like the mist which is blown away in the opposite direction by the wind and the collectors become seekers of death.
(חניוד לנער)