

Mishlei 21-20

Wisdom and Wealth

Key Concepts

There is a relationship between wisdom and wealth. You don't necessarily have to be wise in order to get rich, because you can have a stroke of good fortune. But you will need wisdom to help you retain your wealth, spending only what you need and saving the rest. However, the fortune in the hands of a fool doesn't last long, because he squanders it.

Exploring Mishlei

The first part of the proverb identifies the precious treasure and oil that have been accumulated in the home of a wise man. Because he is wise this fortune will have staying power. But once they come under control of a foolish person, they will be squandered.

(כ) אוֹצֵר נְחָמֵד וְשֶׁמֶן בְּנֵיה חָכָם וְכֶסֶל אָדָם יִבְלַעֵנּוּ:
 (20) *Precious treasure and oil are in the home of the wise man,
 but foolish is the person who swallows them up.*

Learning Mishlei

(20) Precious treasure — אוֹצֵר נְחָמֵד
 and oil, — וְשֶׁמֶן
 are in the home, — בְּנֵיה
 of the wise man. — חָכָם.

But foolish is the person — וְכֶסֶל אָדָם
 who swallows them up. — יִבְלַעֵנּוּ

Additional Insights

[1] If the wise man gives funds to charity, the treasure remains stored for him in the World to Come. However, a fool consumes his wealth by spending it on luxuries and thereby makes it vanish. (מלבי"ם)

[2] Olive oil is an expensive commodity and is commonly stored for long periods.
(אבן עזרא)