

Mishlei 22-01

Wealth

Key Concepts

The measure of a man can best be judged by those qualities that are achieved through his efforts. These are a good name and a pleasing personality. Both are a reflection of his personal integrity and his respect for other people. Neither is a reflection of his wealth, since his wealth is determined by Hashem.

Exploring Mishlei

(א) נְבָחַר שֵׁם מֵעֶשֶׂר רַב מִכֶּסֶף וּמִזָּהָב חֵן טוֹב:

(1) *Better a good name than a great fortune,
a pleasing demeanor than silver and gold.*

The first part of the proverb is concerned with the qualities that are public knowledge and the second part is concerned with qualities that are apparent only after getting to know the person. However, both parts of the proverb suggest that the best qualities are not those that are associated with wealth. A person's wealth is ultimately determined by Hashem, either as a reward or as a test. In contrast, his good name is something that he has built up over the years through honest and reliable dealings. His pleasant demeanor is also a result of maintaining a positive attitude towards people in general.

Learning Mishlei

(1) It is preferable — נְבָחַר
to have a good name, — שֵׁם
than a great fortune — רַב מִכֶּסֶף

Better than silver and gold — מִכֶּסֶף וּמִזָּהָב
it is preferable to present a pleasing demeanor — חֵן טוֹב.

Additional Insights

[1] Wealth is not a secure quality, because it can be suddenly lost. In contrast, a good name is an inherent treasure, determined by a person's good deeds. (מלבי"ם)

[2] Silver and gold have no inherent value. It all depends on how people rate them. In contrast, a pleasing demeanor is an innate characteristic of the individual. (מלבי"ם)