

Mishlei 22-03

Cleverness

Key Concepts

The world offers many temptations, which a good man should avoid. But in order to avoid a temptation, its potential for evil needs to be recognized. Thus, the good man who is passing through a neighborhood where temptations abound, should be alert to the danger and he should be clever enough to identify the presence of evil.

There are many good men who are able to resist temptations, but they are not alert enough or clever enough to identify them. Sadly, such simpletons may succumb to evil and end up being punished for having sinned.

Exploring Mishlei

(ג) עָרוֹם רָאָה רָעָה וְנִסְתָּר וּפְתִיִּים עָבְרוּ וְנִעְנְשׂוּ:

(3) *A clever man saw evil and hid;*

but simpletons passed by without thinking and were punished.

This proverb emphasizes the importance of alertness and cleverness when there is a risk of being tempted by evil. The proverb illustrates this with a typical example of a clever man who saw the presence of evil, recognized it, and hid from it.

In contrast, there were simpletons who did not make the effort to recognize the danger. They passed by and were caught by the temptation. As a result, they were sinned and were punished.

Learning Mishlei

(3) A clever man saw the presence of evil — עָרוֹם רָאָה רָעָה

and hid — וְנִסְתָּר

to avoid the temptation

But simpletons lacking cleverness — וּפְתִיִּים

passed by. — עָבְרוּ

So they sinned and were punished — וְנִעְנְשׂוּ

Additional Insights

[1] The proverb also teaches the importance of avoiding people who are known to be sinners. A simpleton may assume that there is little risk and will pass by the vicinity of evil people. He will end up being caught in the trap. (הגר"א)

[2] The proverb speaks of simpletons in the plural, because they often gather in groups. They are persuaded that there is no danger of evil because so many others are not afraid. (שבט מיהודה)