THE RICHEST MAN IN BABYLON

The Success Secrets of the Ancients

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BOOK SUMMARY

Pay Yourself First: The Foundation of Wealth

Keep a tenth of everything you earn. The story opens with two friends, a chariot maker and a musician, who work hard yet always find their purses empty and ask Arkad, the richest man in Babylon, how he escaped the same fate. Arkad explains that he began as a poor scribe until Algamish, a money lender, taught him the first secret: a part of all you earn must be kept for yourself. Before paying the merchant, the landlord, or anyone else, Arkad set aside at least one-tenth of every coin that came into his hands and treated it as an obligation that could not be skipped. That savings was not meant to be spent; it was the seed of an estate. The point is that wealth begins with a habit rather than a windfall. Anyone, at any income, can put by a tenth, and the discipline of doing it consistently matters far more than the size of the first amounts. Once the habit is set, the purse begins to fatten, and every later step in the book builds on that foundation.

> *"A part of all you earn is yours to keep."*
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> *"Wealth, like a tree, grows from a tiny seed. The first copper you save is the seed from which your tree of wealth shall grow."*
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> *"Money is plentiful for those who understand the simple laws which govern its acquisition."*

Control Your Expenditures: Necessities Versus Desires

Live on nine-tenths, and never let expenses swallow your income. Arkad's second cure for a lean purse is to budget spending so that necessities, enjoyments, and worthwhile desires are all paid for without touching the tenth that is being saved. He warns that what people call their necessary expenses will always grow to match their incomes unless they push back deliberately, and that the cure is to separate real needs from passing wants and to weigh each against the value of the gold it would consume. This is not a call for misery: Arkad insists that life be enjoyed and that saving must not become an obsession. The same principle appears in the tale of Dabasir, the former slave who returned to Babylon determined

to repay his debts. He divided his earnings so that most went to living, a tenth went to savings, and a share went steadily to his creditors, and by keeping to that plan he cleared what he owed while still building a reserve. Discipline over spending, paired with honoring obligations, is what keeps a growing income from disappearing.

> *"What each of us calls our 'necessary expenses' will always grow to equal our incomes unless we protest to the contrary."*
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> *"Confuse not your necessary expenses with your desires."*
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> *"Enjoy life while you are here. Do not overstrain or try to save too much."*

Make Your Gold Multiply: Put Savings to Work

Savings alone are not enough; they must earn. Saving a tenth builds a base, but Arkad teaches that gold sitting idle in a purse does nothing for its owner. The third cure is to make each coin work, so that it earns more coins and those in turn earn still more, much like a flock that multiplies in the field. Arkad describes lending his early savings to a shield maker who used the money to buy bronze in quantity and shared the resulting profits, and he explains how each earning was then reinvested so that his estate grew faster and faster. This is the first of the Five Laws of Gold as taught by Mathon, the gold lender: gold comes gladly and in increasing quantity to the man who saves a tenth of his earnings, and it labors diligently for the wise owner who finds it profitable employment. The lesson is that income from wages is limited by hours in a day, while income from invested capital keeps arriving without additional labor. The fifth law adds a boundary: gold flees the person who demands impossible returns or trusts schemers and his own romantic hopes, so the aim is steady, realistic growth rather than a fast fortune.

> *"Gold cometh gladly and in increasing quantity to any man who will put by not less than one-tenth of his earnings to create an estate for his future and that of his family."*
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> *"Gold laboreth diligently and contentedly for the wise owner who finds for it profitable employment."*
>
> *"Gold flees the man who would force it to impossible earnings or who followeth the alluring advice of tricksters and schemers."*

Guard Your Treasure from Loss

Protect what you have built by investing only where safety is real. Building wealth is pointless if it can be lost, so Arkad's fourth cure is to guard the treasure. He speaks from painful experience: his first year of savings vanished when he lent it to a brick maker who bought a bad stock of jewels from traders who cheated him. From that loss Arkad learned to seek counsel before parting with his gold, and this becomes the Third and Fourth Laws of Gold that Mathon explains to the borrower who comes to him. Gold stays with the cautious owner who invests under the advice of people wise in handling money, and it slips away from the person who puts it into ventures he does not understand or that skilled people have not approved. Before any investment, the questions to ask are how secure the principal is, whether the person seeking it can repay, and whether the owner truly understands the business. A

modest, safe return with the principal intact is preferred to a large promised return with a real chance of losing everything. Caution is presented as the discipline that makes long-term compounding possible.

> *"Gold clingeth to the protection of the cautious owner who invests it under the advice of men wise in its handling."*
>
> *"Gold slippeth away from the man who invests it in businesses with which he is not familiar or which are not approved by those skilled in its keep."*
>
> *"Better a little caution than a great regret."*

Secure Your Home, Family, and Future

Own your dwelling and provide in advance for old age and your family. Two of Arkad's cures deal with stability. The fifth urges every man to make his dwelling a profitable investment by owning the home he lives in instead of renting indefinitely, since the money paid toward a home builds a possession for the family rather than disappearing into another person's hands, and the family is freed from paying for the privilege of shelter. The sixth cure is to insure a future income: a person will not always be young or able to earn, and a man's death should not leave his family destitute. Arkad urges everyone to make certain, while earning strongly, that there will be sufficient income for the years when earning slows, and that a family is protected in the event of the unexpected. Small, regular sums put aside for these purposes are far less burdensome than the hardship of having no provision at all. Together these two cures move wealth-building from a pursuit of personal gain to the responsibility of protecting the people who depend on you.

> *"Make of thy dwelling a profitable investment."*
>
> *"Provide in advance for the needs of thy growing age and the protection of thy family."*

Cultivate Skill, Definite Desire, and Determination

Increase your ability to earn, and pursue clear goals with persistence. The seventh cure is to increase your ability to earn, and Arkad ties it to a simple truth: the more a person learns and the more skillful he becomes at his craft, the more his services are worth. Those who grow in wisdom and ability are rewarded, and stagnation keeps income small no matter how frugal the person is. Arkad connects this to desire. Wants must be simple and clear; when they are too many, too confusing, or beyond a man's training to achieve, they become a hindrance instead of a driving force. A definite goal, such as saving a specific sum or acquiring a particular skill, gives effort a direction and makes it possible to measure progress. Then comes determination, which Arkad demonstrates through his own life and through the lesson he shares with his students: when a person is truly resolved, the way to accomplish the goal can be found. Skill, focus, and persistence together turn the earlier disciplines of saving, spending wisely, and investing into a lasting rise in prosperity.

> *“The more of wisdom we know, the more we shall earn.”*

> *“Desires must be simple and definite. When they are too many, too confusing, or beyond a man’s training to accomplish, they are but a hindrance.”*

> *“Where the determination is, the way can be found.”*

Act on Opportunity: Meet the Goddess of Good Luck

Luck favors those who take action and are prepared when opportunity appears. In the chapters on good luck, the book argues that fortune is not a random gift handed to a few but a result of readiness and action. Opportunity comes to everyone, yet it does not linger for those who hesitate, who are afraid to begin, or who have not prepared themselves to use it. Those who move promptly, who are willing to take a reasoned risk, and who have already built habits of saving and learning are the ones who find that good luck seems to follow them. Procrastination is treated as the enemy of progress, because each postponed decision is an opportunity forgone, while acting on a sound plan in the present compounds over time in the same way as gold that has been put to work. The Goddess of Good Luck rewards initiative, and the person who prepares and then acts makes his own good fortune far more often than the person who waits to be discovered.

> *“Men of action are favored by the Goddess of Good Luck.”*

> *“Opportunity is a haughty goddess who wastes no time with those who are unprepared.”*