

Mishlei 10-01

Joy and Sorrow

Key Concepts

This segment introduces the central section of the Book of Mishlei. The section consists of a series of thought-provoking proverbs presented over the course of 15 chapters. Whereas the first section of the book taught the value and importance of wisdom (*chochmah*) to each person, this second section teaches you about moral discipline (*mussar*) and the control of human behavior.

In this first segment, Shlomo Hamelech reminds you that through the choices you make in life you have the power to bring joy and sorrow to your parents. Your mother and father are directly impacted by your behavior in different ways and to different degrees, depending on the specific involvement that each had with your upbringing. This power places a great responsibility on you when your parents are alive, and even beyond their lifetime.

Exploring Mishlei

(א) מְשָׁלֵי שְׁלֹמֹה בֶן חָכָם יִשְׂמַח אָב וּבֶן כְּסִיל תּוֹגַת אִמּוֹ:

(1) The allegories of Shlomo: A wise son will make his father happy, but a foolish son is his mother's sorrow.

The segment begins by introducing this section of the Book of Mishlei, which continues the instructive allegories and other wise teachings of Shlomo. Generally, each of the teachings is presented in the form of a proverb in which two thoughts are contrasted. In the first proverb the wise son is contrasted with the foolish son, one having a unique effect on his father and the other having a unique effect on his mother.

Learning Mishlei

The instructive **allegories of Shlomo** – מְשָׁלֵי שְׁלֹמֹה –

“A wise son – בֶּן חָכָם – will make his father happy – יִשְׂמַח אָב, but a foolish son – וּבֶן כְּסִיל – is his mother's sorrow – תּוֹגַת אִמּוֹ.”

Additional Insights

A FATHER'S JOY

(1) Why is it the father who is happy at having a wise son? He has the opportunity to observe his son learning Torah in the *Bais HaMedrash* and is gratified by the son's knowledge and ability. He may also be pleased with his role in teaching the boy. The father shares his joy with the boy's mother and so she is also pleased, but her husband is better able to judge the extent and depth of the son's achievement. (אבן עזרא, הגר"א, רבינו יונה)

(2) Why is the joy of the father described in the future tense? As the years go by and the son continues to develop in wisdom, the gratification of the father continues to grow accordingly. (דעת סופרים)

A MOTHER'S SORROW

(3) Why is the mother the one who experiences sadness? In truth the father is also disappointed at seeing his son neglect his learning. However, since the boy spends so much time at home, his mother is the one who is more aware of his problematic behavior. She naturally spares her husband's feelings and does not report every failing that she witnesses. But Mishlei describes the boy as her sorrow since her motherly pity and concern may have contributed to his lack of discipline. (רש"י, הגר"א, מלבי"ם, דעת סופרים)

(4) Another reason that the disappointment is especially painful to the mother is that she has made a greater commitment to the well-being of her son, devoting years of constant care to his physical, spiritual, and moral growth from infancy. In contrast, the father only begins his investment of time and energy after the first years of development. Therefore, he does not feel the loss as badly. If the child does well, he sees it as the positive result of the training in moral discipline and Torah learning that he has been able to provide. (רש"י, מלבי"ם)

(5) The Gemara (*Berachos 17a*) says that one of the important ways by which women achieve fulfillment in the study of Torah is by bringing their small children to learn. A woman with a foolish son has not seen this fulfillment. (טירת כסף - ר' צדוק הכהן)