

Mishlei 10-05

Responsibility

Key Concepts

It takes wisdom and character to take responsibility for addressing the challenges of life. Depending on his occupation, a person who fails to take responsibility may find himself unable to earn a living and fulfill his spiritual obligations.

Mishlei illustrates this concept using the example of two brothers who are farmers. Farming is a demanding occupation which involves specific seasons for the work that has to be done (planting, harvesting, etc.). If the work is not done at the proper time, the crops will not be available for the long winter ahead and the whole family will suffer the consequences.

Exploring Mishlei

The two brothers are differentiated by the degree of responsibility each one takes for the running of his farm.

Harvest time starts at the beginning of summer, extending from the middle of Nisan until the end of Sivan. In late summer, from Tammuz until mid-Elul, the farmers gather the harvest and store it away for the winter.

(ה) אִגֵּר בְּקִיץ בֶּן מְשָׁפִיל, נֶרְדָּם בְּקֶצֶר בֶּן מְבִישׁ:

(5) The responsible son gathers his crops, even in the late summer, but the shameful son is already asleep at harvest time in early summer.

Learning Mishlei

The responsible (smart) son — בֶּן מְשָׁפִיל

is dedicated to his mission and is

still actively **gathering** crops **in the late summer** — **אִגֵּר בְּקִיץ**

But **the irresponsible (shameful) son — בֶּן מְבִישׁ**

is already **fast asleep at** the beginning of **the harvest** — **נֶרְדָּם בְּקֶצֶר**

when the crops are plentiful and everyone else is busy doing their job.

Additional Insights

TWO SONS

(1) The two individuals are described as sons because their behavior reflects on their father. The first son is aware of his responsibilities and acts on that awareness because he understands the consequences of neglecting his duty. This behavior is a sign of intelligence and so he brings honor to his father. In contrast the second son does not fully appreciate his responsibilities. This indicates a lack of intelligence and so he shames his father. (רבינו יונה)

(2) The shameful son is not just sleeping. He has allowed himself to fall into a very deep sleep (נרדום) from which he is unlikely to rise when the time comes to work. (מצודות)

RELATED ALLEGORIES

(3) This proverb continues the lesson that Mishlei taught in Segment 06-02, where he advised us to learn from the example of the industrious ant which focuses its energies on doing what is necessary to provide food for the winter. A failure to learn this lesson is an indication of wishful thinking, that is, failing to visualize the reality of a situation. (המאירי)

(4) The example of the two sons engaged in farming may be seen as an allegory for other situations in life, such as learning Torah. The intelligent son puts his energies into learning Torah during his youth and continues learning even into his later years when his mind is not as fresh and creative, but he has the ability to “gather” his knowledge and see things in a broader context. The shameful son is too lethargic to get started, even when his mind is strong. (הגר"א, מלבי"ם)