

Mishlei 11-17

Sensitivity

Key Concepts

A person who has the habit of being kind to others is sensitive to their feelings. In every interaction with other people, he tries to avoid causing pain. But a callous person is insensitive to the feelings of others and often chooses to act in such a way as to cause them pain or hurt feelings.

These behavioral traits are reflected in the way a person treats himself. If he is a kind person, he seeks to do good in every action, including the way he treats his own body. He values his body as an important instrument that enables him to serve Hashem. If he indulges in practices which cause pain or harm to his body, he is not a kind person, but a callous one.

Exploring Mishlei

(יז) גִּמְלַל נֶפְשׁוֹ אִישׁ חֶסֶד וְעַכְרֵר שְׂאֵרוֹ אֶכְזָרִי:

(17) A kind man treats himself with kindness but a cruel person afflicts his body.

Mishlei contrasts the respectful way a kind man treats his body with the way a callous person behaves. Although some people might think it noble to afflict one's body with pain and discomfort, Mishlei sees it as a reflection of a cruel nature.

Learning Mishlei

(17) One who is sensitive to himself — גִּמְלַל נֶפְשׁוֹ —

is a man of kindness — אִישׁ חֶסֶד —

but one who afflicts his body — וְעַכְרֵר שְׂאֵרוֹ —

is a cruel person. — וְתִמְכֹּן עֵשֶׂר —

Additional Insights

KINDNESS

(1) The kind man balances the body's appetite for pleasure against the needs of good health and well-being. He gives his body that which is most beneficial to it. (רבינו יונה, רלב"ג)

(2) The kind man is generous and giving by nature. He resists the tendency that some people have to be stingy about spending money. As long as there is a valid

purpose to be served, he is pleased to help other people and make them happy.
(רבינו יונה)

(3) A man who shows consideration for himself will also show consideration for another. (מצודות)

(4) If a person dedicates his thoughts to acting kindly to others and doing *mitzvos*, then even his measured actions to benefit himself such as eating and giving pleasure to his body are considered to be a *mitzvah*, because all his intentions are worthy. In fact, the food he eats is equivalent to a sacrificial offering. (הגר"א)

(5) A person who diminishes his material wealth by giving money to the needy is doing a kindness to his spiritual self. (מלבי"ם)

(6) The verb "gomel" (גִּמַּל) is used for actions which reflect one's feelings towards an individual, whether it be love or ill will. In effect, the actions of a kind person reflect his favorable attitude towards the spiritual part of himself, which is the essence of a human being. (מלבי"ם)

(7) A kind person is concerned about benefitting his soul through the food he eats. Therefore, he is especially concerned that the food does not come to him through dishonest means. (אבן יחיאל)

CALLOUSNESS

(8) A person who deprives himself out of stinginess will surely be callous to the needs of others. (מצודות)

(9) The person who deprives himself of the necessities of life is acting against the will of Hashem, because the physical part of himself was given to enable him to serve Hashem and perform *mitzvos* with a clear mind. That function cannot be effectively fulfilled if he is not in a state of health. (רבינו יונה, חנוך לנער)

(10) Some people think that it is an appropriate *avodah* to afflict one's body. But this is contrary to the wishes of Hashem. The Torah has set aside only one day a year in which it is a *mitzvah* to afflict one's physical self. (רלב"ג)

(11) If a person acts against the wishes of his Creator, everything that he does to satisfy his physical desires is considered as being cruel to his body. (הגר"א)