

Mishlei 11-20

Heart

Key Concepts

The heart represents the part of the human personality that impels a person to action. Without the involvement of the heart his actions lack emotional drive and passion. But if his heart is given free rein, he is at risk of making unwise choices. For a person to consistently do what is right he needs to train his heart to work closely with his intelligence, the seat of his wisdom.

If a person allows his heart to be so influenced by the passions of the moment that he rejects the laws of wisdom, he may choose to think and behave in a perverse way. He is then said to be an *ikesh lev* (perverse heart), who follows a crooked way, as described in Segment 10-09. Such a person is an abomination in Hashem's sight.

At the other extreme is a person whose heart is consistently guided by his wisdom. Thus, he is steadfastly sincere in his road of life and is referred to as a *chacham lev* (wise of heart), as described in Segments 10-08 and 10-09. Such a person pleases Hashem and at all times trusts the good will of Hashem to ensure the best possible outcome.

Between these two extremes is a person who engages in an inner struggle, sometimes following the proper path, but at other times, swerving in response to the passions of the moment. He is then said to lack heart; and is a *chasar lev* (deficient heart), as described in Segment 07-02.

Exploring Mishlei

(כ) תועבת ה' עקשי לב ורצונו תמימי דרך:

(20) The obstinately perverse of heart are an abomination to Hashem, but He is pleased by those whose way is sincere.

Here Mishlei contrasts two extremes of human behavior with the corresponding reaction that they elicit from Hashem. Perversity in mankind is viewed as an abomination, since it is based on a rejection of Hashem's wisdom. Sincerity in following His way is what Hashem expects and that is what pleases Him.

Learning Mishlei

The people considered to be **an abomination** before Hashem — תועבת ה' —
 are the **obstinately perverse of heart**, — עקשי לב —
but pleasing Him — ורצונו —
 are **those whose way through life is sincere** — תמימי דרך —
 for they are the wise of heart (chachmei lev)).

Additional Insights

PERVERSY, OBSTINATE CROOKEDNESS

- (1) The perverse of heart (*ikshei lev*) may be characterized as those of bad *middos* (character traits), since a person's *middos* are said to be directly controlled by the heart. People with bad *middos* signify a failure in using wisdom to train the heart. (רבינו יונה)
- (2) Perversity of heart brings a person to erroneous behavior and thinking. (רלב"ג, חנוך לנער)
- (3) People who are perverse of heart don't admit the error of their ways and therefore don't do *teshuvah*. (הגר"א)
- (4) Since Hashem is revolted by those who follow a perverted way, he hides His face from them and so they will ultimately perish. But He is pleased by those who consistently follow His way of righteousness and justice. (אבן יחיא)

SINCERITY, INTEGRITY

- (5) Those who have naturally well-developed *middos* or have perfected their *middos* in accordance with the dictates of their intellect are considered to be people of integrity. Their way through life is steadfastly sincere (תמימי דרך). (רבינו יונה)
- (6) The heart represents that component of a man's personality that is intended to direct all his faculties in accordance with the laws of wisdom, as motivated by the fear of Hashem. (מלבי"ם)