

Mishlei 13-13

Scorn

Key Concepts

There is an instinctive mechanism in human nature for a person to protect his high opinion of himself by disdaining anything or anybody that places a demand upon him, either directly or indirectly. If he is warned to avoid a danger, he may be inclined to minimize the danger and scoff at the advice he is being given.

If he is burdened by the responsibility of taking care of an object or a person, he excuses his neglect by minimizing the importance of that thing or person.

If he feels constrained by the requirements of a *mitzvah*, he is tempted to minimize the importance of that particular *mitzvah* or even its authenticity.

If he is admonished to refrain from committing a sin, he is tempted to scoff at the source of the admonition so that he can feel justified in his own eyes for continuing to do what pleases him at the moment.

Mishlei teaches that a person should behave with the opposite of scorn. That means he should show respect to every person and every teaching of the Torah. In fact he should act with conscientious fear of not having done his duty in every situation.

Exploring Mishlei

(יג) בַּז לְדַבֵּר יַחְבֵּל לוֹ וַיִּרֵא מִצְוָה הוּא יִשְׁלָם :

**(13) *He who scorns a thing will harm himself
but he who reveres a mitzvah will be rewarded.***

This proverb contrasts the scorn that people are tempted to display in various situations with the reverence they should have toward even the least demanding of the *mitzvos* of Hashem. Mishlei assures his audience that the scorner is only harming himself and the one who acts with reverence will surely be rewarded.

Learning Mishlei

(13) **He who scorns a thing** — **בָּז לְדָבָר**
 to excuse his neglecting it,
will only harm himself — **יִחָבֵל לוֹ**
 because he will find that it will end up
 being important to him. In contrast,
he who reveres a *mitzvah* — **וִירָא מִצְוָה**
will be rewarded — **הוּא יִשְׁלָם**
 because every mitzvah is essential.

Additional Insights

Wisdom in Words

- (1) The word **בָּז** (scorn) is the utter dismissal of something that is perceived as being unimportant and unworthy of attention. (דעת סופרים)
- (2) The *Chazal* teach: “Do not be scornful of any person and do not be disdainful of any thing, for there is no person without his moment and there is no thing without its place” (Avos 4, 3). Even a pin should not be disdained; some day you might miss it. Neither should you consider any duty too insignificant for you to fulfill. (רשר"ה, משנת ר' אהרן)
- (3) The term mitzvah (**מִצְוָה**) in this context may be understood as referring to every word of admonition or counsel from a teacher or parent. A person who scoffs at it, or even consciously neglects to obey to it, will be harmed as a result. (המאירי)
- (4) But a person who is anxious about missing any requirement of a *mitzvah* will be rewarded with serenity and tranquility. This is inherent in the word **יִשְׁלָם**. (המאירי)

Other Insights

- (5) The motivating force behind the scorner and the scoffer is the tendency of a person to think of himself as being wise. (שערי תשובה, מוסר אביד)
- (6) One who scoffs at a danger or threat and does not take steps to protect himself will be harmed as a result. (רלביג, חנוך לנער)

(7) A person cannot gain a benefit from something if he does not value it.
(משנת ר' אהרן, מוסר אביד)

(8) A person who intentionally scorns even one *mitzvah* is guilty of violating the admonition of the Torah: **כִּי דָבַר ה' בְּזָה**, "for he scorned the word of Hashem" (*Bamidbar* 15:31). But if a person sincerely wants to fulfill the entire Torah but is able to perform only one *mitzvah*, it is as if he observed every *mitzvah*. This is because we know that if he would have the opportunity to perform another *mitzvah*, he would surely do it. (מלבי"ם)

(9) A person should be afraid of committing a minor sin as much as he fears doing a major sin. (שערי תשובה, מוסר אביד)

(10) If a person has the opportunity to learn Torah, but neglects it, it is as though he is putting the Torah to scorn. (גמרא סנהדרין צט, משנת ר' אהרן)

(11) A person who has the opportunity to commit a sin or to not adequately perform a *mitzvah* and restrains himself out of fear of Hashem, has fulfilled the important positive *mitzvah* of fearing Hashem. (*Devarim* 6:13). (משנת ר' אהרן)