

Mishlei 13-12

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) בָּז לְדָבָר יִחָבֵל לוֹ וַיִּרְא מִצְוָה הוּא יִשְׁלָם:

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

(יג) בָּז לְדָבָר יִחָבֵל לוֹ
וַיִּרְא מִצְוָה הוּא יִשְׁלָם:

He who scorns a thing – בָּז לְדָבָר – to excuse his neglecting it, **will** only **harm**

himself – יִתְבַּל 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

A series of insights illuminating this proverb are presented below. The numbers identifying the insights refer to the listing of sources at the end of the segment.

Wisdom in Words

- (1) The word בָּז (scorn) is the utter dismissal of something that is perceived as being unimportant and unworthy of attention.
- (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.
- (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.
- (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.

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.
- (6) One who scoffs at a danger or threat and does not take steps to protect himself will be harmed as a result.
- (7) A person cannot gain a benefit or from something if he does not value it.
- (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 wants to fulfill the entire Torah but is able to perform only one, it is as if he observed every *mitzvah*. because we know that if he would have the opportunity to perform another

mitzvah, he would surely do it.

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

(10) If a person has the opportunity to learn Torah, but neglects it, it is as though he is putting the Torah to scorn.

(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).

Sources

The primary sources used for the additional insights illuminating this segment are listed below.

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| (7) - משנת ר' אהרן, מוסר אביך | (1) - דעת סופרים |
| (8) - מלבי"ם | (2) - רשר"ה, משנת ר' אהרן |
| (9) - שערי תשובה, מוסר אביך | (3) - המאירי |
| (10) - גמרא סנהדרין צט, משנת ר' אהרן | (4) - המאירי |
| (11) - משנת ר' אהרן | (5) - שערי תשובה, מוסר אביך |
| | (6) - רלב"ג, חנוך לנער |

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