

Mishlei 13-24

Parental Love

Key Concepts

The duties that come with being a parent are awesome. To raise a child properly requires an outpouring of continuous love. One of the reasons this can be so difficult is that it calls for a measured application of discipline. A child will not grow up as a responsible Jew unless he learns self-control and humility. That can only happen in a framework of consistent love and discipline, especially in the early years.

To discipline a child means to improve his behavior by causing him discomfort. This need not necessarily be physical pain. Even minor emotional pain can teach the child that there are limits to acceptable behavior.

However, a loving parent will naturally find it difficult to be the cause of his child's pain, especially when it induces resentment.

To emphasize the importance of meeting this challenge, *Mishlei* succinctly reminds the parent that imposing discipline in a sensitive and enlightened manner is an essential sign of true love. On the other hand, a failure to impose the necessary degree of discipline may result in the opposite. Tragically, the child may even come to hate the parent who has neglected his duty.

Exploring Mishlei

(כד) חוֹשֵׁךְ שֶׁבָטוּ שׁוֹנֵא בְנוֹ וְאֵהָבוּ שְׁחָרוּ מוֹסֵר :

(24) The father *who refrains from chastising his son effectively hates him, but he who loves him disciplines him early.*

This proverb analyzes the motivation of the parent who cannot bring himself to punish his son. Whereas the parent fools himself into thinking he is acting out of love, the proverb is telling us that he is building a relationship of enmity and hatred. In contrast, it is the parent that applies disciplinary measures tempered with wisdom, who truly loves his child.

Learning Mishlei

(24) **He who spares the rod** — **חֹשֶׁדׁ שְׁבִטוֹ**

out of misplaced pity

hates his son — **שׂוֹנֵא בְּנוֹ**

because he denies the child the

benefit of corrective discipline.

But if he loves him—**וְאָהָבוּ** .

he applies discipline early — **שְׁחָרוּ מוֹסֵר**

while the boy is in his youth.

Additional Insights

(1) Mishlei refers to the act of chastisement as **שְׁבִטוֹ** (“his rod”). Thus, the parent who refrains from chastisement may be described as “sparing the rod.” However, **שְׁבִטוֹ** does not always have to refer to a physical rod. It may designate any influence which makes the child painfully aware of his misbehavior, such as the denial of a pleasure, the denial of a friendly look, or even a show of sorrow about the child's naughtiness. (רשרייה)

(2) The word **חֹשֶׁדׁ** refers to the omission of something which is required — in this context, the omission of a corrective influence where it is needed for the education of the child. (רשרייה)

(3) The word **שְׁחָרוּ** relates to an act performed in the early morning. Thus, it suggests the importance of regular and consistent application of discipline. It also suggests the importance of discipline early in the life of the child, when he is responsive to character-building. (המאירי, רשרייה)

Other Insights

(4) The parent who cannot bear to discipline his son actually cares more for himself—his own tender feelings — than for his son's ultimate good. (מלבי"ם)

(5) When a parent fails to discipline his child, he is doing something that only an enemy would ever do, and if the son does turn out bad, the parent may indeed hate him as an enemy. (רש"י, מצודות, דעת סופרים)

(6) A parent who loves his son will rebuke him from an early age. This will develop the son's own conscience, so that the parent will never have to resort to physical chastisement. (מצודות, שבט מיהודה, דעת סופרים)

(7) When a loving parent applies physical punishment, he does so with great restraint, so that the son realizes his parent is acting out of love and concern for his welfare. (דעת סופרים)

(8) A classic example of hatred towards a parent is Avshalom who sought to kill his father David. The Midrash explains this behavior as being the result of a failure of the needed discipline in Avshalom's youth. (דעת סופרים)