

Mishlei 15-13

Cheerfulness

Key Concepts

When you are in a contented state of mind your heart is likely to feel the joy of life. That means you are happy because you expect good things to happen to you. Why? Because you feel good things have happened to you in the past and you are grateful for them. Your feeling of joy in life energizes you in everything you do and enables you to put your best efforts into anything worthwhile.

Another result of cheerfulness is a friendly smile to everyone you encounter. And so your cheerfulness is a great chesed because it draws others along with you into a feeling of goodwill.

The energy that causes you to do good things for other people is especially important in pleasing your Creator because every mitzvah that you do is then driven by a positive attitude.

The reverse of all these things happens when a person is discontented and focuses his mind on then things that he doesn't have or things that have caused him pain. He walks around with a sad face and a broken spirit. Such a person will not have the energy to put his best efforts into what he does. Other people will find his company depressing and he may inadvertently draw them into behavior that is ultimately destructive.

Exploring Mishlei

(יג) לֵב שְׂמֵחַ יִיטֵב פְּנִים וּבְעֵצָבֶת לֵב רוּחַ נִכְאָה:

A joyful heart cheers the face, but a saddened heart [results in] a broken spirit.

This proverb calls attention to the benefits of a joyful heart by comparing it with a saddened heart. To a large extent both of these attitudes are under the control of the person himself because they result from the thoughts on which he focuses his mind. Does he think of the kindnesses that were done to him by Hashem and by man? Or does he think about what disturbed him and challenged him? We will see more of these issues in other proverbs. However, the current proverb limits itself to the visible impact: a cheerful face or a broken spirit.

Learning Mishlei

(יג) לֵב שְׂמֵחַ יֵיטֵב פְּנִים
וּבְעֵצְבַת לֵב רוּחַ נִכְאָה:

A joyful heart, caused by a contented state of mind **cheers the face** — **לֵב שְׂמֵחַ יֵיטֵב פְּנִים**, **but a saddened heart** reflecting discontent with one's circumstances, results in **a broken spirit** — **וּבְעֵצְבַת לֵב רוּחַ נִכְאָה**.

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.

- (1) A cheerful disposition preserves health and promotes healing. It also helps us cope with adversity.
- (2) An envious person has constant opportunity for dissatisfaction, since most people are bound to possess something he is lacking. If any one of his wishes is denied to him, everything else appears valueless to him.
- (3) There is a down side to contentment, so don't assume that contentment is an end in itself. It depends on the circumstances. A person who is complacent in the face of sin or lack of spiritual achievement may appear contented but his cheerful face is a sign of moral failure. In contrast, the person who is troubled by his spiritual condition will take steps to elevate it.
- (4) Throughout the years that Yaakov Avinu was dejected because of his loss of Yosef, he was denied any visitation by the Shechinah. This shows that Hashem prefers joy and happiness.

Sources

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

(3) - מלבי"ם, שבט מיהודה
(4) - רלב"ג

(1) - רשר"ה
(2) - רשר"ה