

Mishlei 17-25

Parenting

Key Concepts

Any person who is working on developing his character and living a worthwhile life, shares that responsibility with the parents who have nurtured and raised him. And so, if he fails to live as he should, he has not only harmed himself, he has harmed his parents. They feel the pain of his failure as their own.

Both parents suffer aggravation from the behavior of an unworthy child, but each is hurt in a different way. A father may be roused to intense anger and resentment, but his focus is more easily diverted by urgent responsibilities outside the family.

On the other hand, a mother, even while attending to most of her work, can give free play to her thoughts. Accordingly, her gloom may be far deeper and more lasting. Because of her more sensitive nature, a mother may feel the bitterness of this failure more intensely and over longer periods of time.

Exploring Mishlei

(כה) כַּעַס לְאָבִיו בֶּן כָּסִיל וּמָמַר לְיוֹלְדָתוֹ:

***The foolish son is an aggravation to his father
and is a bitterness to the one who bore him.***

As in the proverb cited in Mishlei segment 17-21, a child that brings aggravation to his parents is referred to as a **כָּסִיל**, or fool. Typically, a **כָּסִיל** is a person who lacks humility and integrity. Such a person is at the mercy of his selfish instincts.

The aggravation felt by the fool's father is described by the word **כַּעַס**, anger. He is angry at his son, but he is also angry at himself for not doing a better job in raising him.

The aggravation felt by the fool's mother is described by word **מָמַר**, a persistent bitterness of the spirit.

Learning Mishlei

(25) **An aggravation to the father – כָּעַס לְאָבִיו –
is a foolish son – בֶּן כָּסִיל –
and he is a lasting bitterness – וּמָמָר –
to the one who bore him – וְעֵינֵי כָּסִיל –**

Additional Insight

[1] The word כָּסִיל may be understood as an intelligent person who can distinguish right from wrong but his character is weak and so he does whatever is expedient because he gives in to his passions. (מלבי"ם)

[2] The aggravation experienced by a father is tempered by his son's self-restraint in fear of a father's anger. In contrast, the bad son relies on his mother's gentle and forgiving nature, but his selfish behavior leaves a deep scar on her soul. (רבינו יונה)