

Mishlei 19-15

Inactivity

Key Concepts

Our life consists of alternating periods of activity and inactivity. Of course, we naturally give priority to the periods of activity because that is when we do what is necessary to earn a living and that is when we justify our existence by doing *mitzvos* and learning *Torah*. However, even inactivity is important because it offers the rest and relaxation our bodies need to function effectively.

As it happens, many people find the periods of inactivity so pleasant, they don't want them to come to an end. The downside is that their work doesn't get done, and they are unable to earn a living or fulfill their obligations to the Creator. Even allowing a period of inactivity to last too long is a problem because it becomes more and more difficult to get back to work.

Exploring Mishlei

(טו) עֲצֵלָה תַפְּיֵל תִּרְדָּמָה וְנַפְּשׁ רְמִיָּה תִרְעֵב:
 (15) *Inactivity brings on deep sleep,
 and the deceptive soul will go hungry.*

Mishlei presents two related proverbs to show the importance of keeping inactivity under restraint. The first proverb tells us that there is a high price to be paid for indulging in inactivity, as pleasant as it may be. The longer a person remains inactive, the more difficult it becomes to get back to normal. Why? Inactivity brings on the equivalent of a deep sleep. The deeper the sleep, the longer it takes to wake up.

The sleeping person finds it difficult to return to full consciousness and so he deceives himself into thinking that inactivity is really a good thing. "Just let me sleep." But Mishlei reminds him that he is fooling himself. If he does not rouse himself and get busy, "the deceptive soul will go hungry."

(טז) שֹׁמֵר מִצְוָה שֹׁמֵר נַפְשׁוֹ בְּזֵה דַרְכָּיו יָמוּת
(16) He who actively observes a mitzvah, protects his own soul.
He who neglects Hashem's ways will die.

In the second proverb, Mishlei turns to an even more important consequence of inactivity. As long as he remains inactive, the person is neglecting his responsibility to perform *mitzvos*. In so doing he is jeopardizing the immortality of his own soul. To protect his soul, he needs to be alert and vigilant. He needs to put his mind and his energy into what it takes to protect his own soul. For if he remains in his inactive, lethargic state, he will be neglecting the ways of Hashem, ultimately sacrificing the very life of his soul.

Learning Mishlei

(15) Periods of **inactivity** — **עֲצָלָה**
bring on deep sleep — **תַּפִּיל תַּרְדֵּמָה**
 and the consequence is that
the deceptive soul will go hungry — **וְנַפְשׁוֹ רָמְיָה תִרְעָב**
 (16) He who actively observes a *mitzvah* — **שֹׁמֵר מִצְוָה**
protects his own soul — **שֹׁמֵר נַפְשׁוֹ**
He who neglects Hashem's ways — **בְּזֵה דַרְכָּיו**
will die — **יָמוּת**

Additional Insights

[1] The reference to the deceptive soul may be interpreted as the character of an inactive person. He cannot earn money in the normal way, so he tries to profit by deceiving innocent victims. When his deception is found out he will go hungry.

(מצודות)

[2] A person who learns Torah without energy or enthusiasm sleeps through his lessons. He deceives himself and his teacher and when he needs knowledge, he will remain hungry. (שבט מיהודה)