

Mishlei 19-26

Parenting – Frustration

Key Concepts

One of the major themes in the Book of Mishlei is the importance of raising good children. This is clearly a time consuming and demanding responsibility. However, if properly carried out, it can be rewarded by the happiness a parent derives from seeing his child grow up to live a worthy and useful life.

Unfortunately, despite the best of intentions there is a downside to parenting. Tragedy can occur as a result of insufficient or misguided attention on the part of the parents. In addition, there may be external factors that the conscientious parent has been unable to overcome.

Mishlei now reminds us of the emotional price in shame and humiliation being paid by parents of a misbehaving child. That price is different for each parent and is affected by the parent's particular role in the family. For the father, who feels the weight of responsibility for supporting his family, the pain brought by a seriously misbehaving son is like having been robbed of all his possessions. For the mother, who is motivated by the need to provide the love and domestic home life that ties the family together, the pain brought by the misbehaving child is like being driven out of her home.

Exploring Mishlei

(כו) מְשַׁדָּד אָב יִבְרִיחַ אִם בֶּן מְבִישׁ וּמְחַפֵּיר:

(26) *He impoverishes his father and drives away his mother,
the son who shames and humiliates.*

This proverb begins with the pain that each parent feels as a result of having a seriously misbehaving child. It ends with what brought it about. The father feels as though all his possessions have been stolen (מְשַׁדָּד אָב). The mother feels as though she has been made to flee from the security of her home (יִבְרִיחַ אִם). The proverb ends by touching on the misbehavior that has brought it about, a son that is shaming and humiliating his parents.

Learning Mishlei

He impoverishes his father — **מְשַׁדֵּד אָב**
and drives away his mother — **וַיְבַרֶיחַ אִם**,
the son who shames — **בֶּן מְבִישׁ**
and humiliates them — **וַיִּמְחָפֵיר**.

Additional Insights

[1] A misbehaving child can strain the relationship between his parents. If this leads to divorce, the father may be impoverished by the resulting financial burden and the mother will lose her cherished place at the center of her family. (מצודות)

[2] Even if a dishonest son does not directly steal from his father, he may be charged by the police for the crime of robbing other people and the father may be forced to cover the loss. As far as the mother is concerned, she may be unable to face the shame and so she hides herself away from her friends and family.

(רבינו יונה)

[3] The misbehaving child frustrates the expectations of his parents and causes them to realize the futility, perhaps even the inadequacy, of their efforts at raising him. (רשר"ה)