

Mishlei 21-11

Deterrence

Key Concepts

As we have seen in Mishlei 19-25, the way to deter a young person from engaging in bad behaviour is to present the negative consequences of that behavior. There are three ways of doing this. The first to apply a physical punishment. The second is to let him watch someone else receiving a physical punishment. The third is to give him a well-reasoned talk.

As we have seen in the previous case, if the youngster is a scoffer (לץ), a physical punishment is the only way to get the message across.

However, if the youngster is a simpleton (פתי), it is worth having him watch the scoffer getting punished. This should do the trick.

If the youngster is reasonably intelligent, no physical demonstration is needed. Instead, he will get the message if you give him a well-reasoned talk.

Exploring Mishlei

Our present proverb differs only slightly from that in Mishlei 19-25. However, the differences are instructive. See Additional Insight below.

19-25

(כה) לץ תכה ופתי יערם והוכיח לנבון יבין דעת:

**(25) Strike the scoffer and the simpleton becomes smarter;
rebuke an intelligent person and he will gain wisdom.**

21-11

(יא) בענש לץ יחכם פתי ובהשכיל לחכם יקח דעת:

**(11) When the scoffer is punished, the simpleton becomes wiser;
when a wise man is instructed, he will gain wisdom.**

Additional Insight

In 19-25 the simpleton sees the scoffer being struck (לץ תכה) and reacts with cleverness (ופתי יערם). He realizes what he must do to avoid the same fate.

In 21-11 the simpleton perceives that what has happened is more than just being struck. He realizes that this is Divine punishment (בַּעֲנֵשׁ לְךָ). Accordingly, he gains a lesson in the principles of Divine reward and punishment (יְחַכֵּם פְּתִי), which is more than the physical discipline administered by his teacher. The principles of Divine reward and punishment have already been accepted on faith by the wise youngster (חָכָם). However, upon getting visual evidence of this in the fate of the scoffer, the wise youngster acquires a more experiential perspective (יִקַּח דָּעַת). (מלבי"ם)