

Mishlei 03-11

Wisdom and Mussar

[Pesukim 3:11 and 3:12]

Key Concepts

It is man's mission in life to perfect his moral character and acquire the wisdom he needs to choose good over evil. To this end he needs to overcome the bad *middos* such as pride and greed, which lead him in the wrong direction.

To help him do this, Hashem has provided him with the powerful tool of *mussar*. *Mussar* is a broad term, which includes self-correction through reflection and meditation. It also includes the direct and indirect guidance offered by parents and teachers. When these subtle measures prove insufficient, *mussar* can include physical changes to a person's condition in life, such as illness, loss of wealth, and loss of stature.

When *mussar* is applied by external forces such as the power of Hashem, the words of His *neviim* (prophets), or the actions of people in authority. There is a natural tendency to resist it and even to resent anyone attempting to interfere with a person's "freedom" to do as he pleases and think as he pleases. Thus, the individual may react with denial or anger.

But Mishlei tells him that such a response is badly mistaken. A person needs to recognize that *mussar* is really happening to him and is happening to him in different ways throughout his life. Then he can accept it graciously.

Exploring Mishlei

To help a person appreciate the positive purpose behind *mussar*, Mishlei gives us the analogy of a father disciplining a child. The greater the father's love for his child the more devoted he will be in persevering with wise discipline. Even if the discipline seems harsh at the time it is applied, the child should realize that the father's love has never faltered and that it will be openly revealed as soon as the opportunity arises.

(יא) מוֹסֵר ה' בְּנֵי אֵל תִּמְאָס וְאֵל תִּקְוָה בְּתוֹכְחָתוֹ:

(יב) כִּי אֶת אֲשֶׁר יֶאֱהָב ה' יוֹכִיחַ וּכְאֵב אֶת בֶּן יִרְצֶה:

(11) My son, don't resent Hashem's discipline. Don't be dismayed by His rebuke.

(12) For Hashem admonishes the one He loves, and like a father, Hashem will console His beloved child.

Learning Mishlei

11. My son— בְּנֵי.

Don't resent Hashem's discipline, — מוֹסֵר ה' אֵל תִּמְאָס

even if it seems harsh, and even if it involves pain. You may not like it and you may not think you deserve it, but the discipline should be dear to you. You need that *mussar* if you are to acquire wisdom and become a better person. With *mussar* you will gain humility, which is an antidote to the pride that prevents moral development.

Don't be dismayed by His admonishment — **אֵל תִּקְוָה בְּתוֹכְחָתוֹ**

and don't shut your mind to it. It is for your benefit, so humbly pay attention to the admonishment you are being given and work on changing your life.

12. For Hashem is like a father

who **rebukes** only a child **that He loves** — **כִּי אֶת אֲשֶׁר יֶאֱהָב ה' יוֹכִיחַ**.

The father persists in his rebuke even when the child rebels. This is because he cares for the child and sincerely hopes the child will take the lesson to heart.

And like a father, Hashem will console His beloved **child** — **וּכְאֵב אֶת בֶּן יִרְצֶה**

as soon as the rebuke has achieved its purpose and is no longer needed.