

Mishlei 03-03

Mussar, the Key to Wisdom (3:11-12)

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, 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 תִּמְאַס וְאֵל תִּקְוֶץ בְּתוֹכְחָתוֹ: (יב) כִּי אֶת אֲשֶׁר יֵאָהֵב ה' יוֹכִיחַ וְכָאֵב אֶת בֶּן יִרְצָה:

(11) My son, don't resent Hashem's discipline. Don't be dismayed by His rebuke. (12) For Hashem rebukes the one He loves, and like a father,

Hashem will console [His] beloved child.

Learning Mishlei

(יא) מוֹסֵר ה' בְּנֵי אֵל תִּמְאָס

My son – בְּנֵי, don't resent Hashem's discipline – מוֹסֵר ה' אֵל תִּמְאָס, even if it is 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.

וְאַל תִּקְוֶץ בְּתוֹכְחָתוֹ:

Don't be dismayed by His rebuke – אֵל תִּקְוֶץ 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.

(יב) כִּי אֵת אֲשֶׁר יִאָּהֵב ה' יוֹכִיחַ

וּכְאֵב אֵת בֶּן יִרְצֶה:

For Hashem is like a father who **rebukes** only a child **that He loves** – **כִּי אֵת** **אֲשֶׁר יִאָּהֵב 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 אֵת בֶּן יִרְצֶה** as soon as the rebuke has achieved its purpose and is no longer needed.

Sources

יב - רש"י, רלב"ג, הגר"א

יא - רש"י, המאירי, הגר"א, מלבי"ם, חקת יד,
אור פני יצחק

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