

## Mishlei 10-17

# Intervention

### Key Concepts

Over a period of time it is natural for a person to fall into a comfortable pattern of behavior in which he resists change. However, in doing so he is neglecting his mission in life, which is to perfect his moral character and acquire wisdom.

Accordingly, from time to time Hashem intervenes in the smooth flow of events and injects customized lessons to remind a person of his failings and to encourage him to elevate himself to the next stage of spiritual growth.

Such a lesson may be in the form of an experience of pain or discomfort. It may also involve witnessing an unusual event or being exposed to an enlightening teaching.

Mishlei uses two terms to address such interventions. The first is *mussar* (moral discipline) and the second is *tochachah* (reproof or rebuke). In general, *mussar* is related to the idea of the correction past errors. It emphasizes a person's *middos* (moral character) and suggests the deterrent power of punishment either through actual suffering or through self-analysis. In contrast, *tochachah* refers to a gentle admonition or reproof, resulting in a motivation to goodness and spiritual growth.

### Exploring Mishlei

(יז) אֶרַח לְחַיִּים שׁוֹמֵר מוֹסֵר וְעוֹזֵב תּוֹכַחַת מִתְּעָה:

*(14) He who holds on to moral discipline is on the path to life but he who forsakes reproof goes astray.*

The interventions of *mussar* (moral discipline) and *tochachah* (reproof) are contrasted with respect to their effect on a person's trajectory through life. If a person holds on to *mussar* and overcomes his instinctive resistance to being corrected, he puts himself solidly on the path to life. If a person resists the opportunity to grow spiritually by reacting positively to the reproof of a parent or teacher, he is effectively going astray and forsaking the path to life.

What type of person resists *mussar*? We have seen this in verse 1:7 (Mishlei Segment 01-02) which states that skeptics scorn both wisdom and *mussar*. However, Mishlei is directing his attention to the basically good person when he tells him lovingly in verse 3:11 (Segment 03-03) to respond positively to both

*mussar* and *tochachah*. Further on, in verse 6:23 (Segment 06-05) Mishlei relates these concepts to the persons's way of life. Only through energetic self-control of *middos* will a person be able to properly implement Torah and *mitzvos*.

## Learning Mishlei

(יז) אִרְח לְחַיִּים שׁוֹמֵר מוֹסֵר  
וְעוֹזֵב תּוֹכַחַת מִתְּעָה:

The person that **holds on to** the lessons of **mussar** with a constructive attitude will be rewarded in two ways. He will not only be kept from the path of self-destruction but will be placed **on the path to life** – אִרְח לְחַיִּים שׁוֹמֵר מוֹסֵר. **But** the person **who** rejects *mussar* and even **forsakes** gentle **reproof** will lose the opportunity of entering on the path to life and **will even go astray** – וְעוֹזֵב תּוֹכַחַת מִתְּעָה: on the path to destruction.

## Additional Insights

### THE PATH TO LIFE

- (1) The lessons of *mussar* are directed to the improvement of *middos*. The person who who takes these lessons to heart walks on the road to eternal life. He is enabled to achieve fulfillment in his *mitzvos* and he becomes beloved by other human beings.
- (2) Priority should be given to perfecting one's *middos*. (See Mishlei 1:7) This lesson puts one on the right road to learning Torah. But if he learns Torah first, without the foundation of good *middos*, he will go astray.
- (3) The term *mussar* refers to self-discipline and restraint from violating strict boundaries, having in mind the fear of punishment.
- (4) The term *mussar* can also refer to physical discomfort which a person can impose upon himself through self-discipline or that others can impose upon him. In either case, such suffering purifies a person and elevates him.

### GOING ASTRAY

- (5) The person who turns away from the lessons of *mussar* leads his teachers astray because they get discouraged and as a result they neglect their duty of giving him guidance.

(6) The person who rejects *mussar* will surely go astray because he hates being told what to do and so he ends up following the whims of his heart.

(7) To avoid going astray a person should readily accept reproof based on the enlightenment of reason. In this mode of guidance, a person's mentor shows him the benefits of choosing the right way in life.

## Sources

The primary sources used for the insights illuminating this segment are listed below.

(5) - המאירי

(6) - הגר"א

(7) - מלבי"ם

(1) - המאירי, רלב"ג

(2) - חנוך לנער

(3) - מלבי"ם

(4) - הגר"א

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