

Mishlei 12-01

Intervention and Daas

Key Concepts

In Segment 10-17 we have seen how Hashem intervenes in the smooth flow of events and injects customized lessons into a person's life to remind him of his failings and to encourage him to elevate himself to the next stage of spiritual growth.

Mishlei uses two terms to address such interventions. The first is *mussar* (moral discipline) and the second is *tochachah* (rebuke or criticism). In general, *mussar* is related to the idea of the correction of past errors. It emphasizes a person's *middos* (moral character) and involves 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.

In Segment 03-03 Mishlei introduced these two types of interventions, emphasizing that they are expressions of Hashem's love because Hashem wants each person to develop to his full potential.

In Segment 10-17, Mishlei showed how *mussar* and *tochachah* can be understood 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 he resists the opportunity to grow spiritually by reacting negatively to the reproof of a parent or teacher, he is effectively going astray and forsaking the path to life.

Now Mishlei shows how these concepts are related to a person's development of *daas* (knowledge). This concept was introduced in Segment 01-02. To have *daas* is to know how to go about making the right choices in life. When that knowledge is internalized so that it is as real to a person as something he sees with his own eyes it is called *daas*. A person's access to *daas* is dependent upon his ability to respond to *mussar* and *tochachah*.

Exploring Mishlei

(א) אהב מוסר אהב דעת ושנא תוכחת בער:

(1) *He who loves moral discipline loves knowledge [for it is acquired with the aid of discipline], but he who hates criticism [even though it is well-reasoned] is a boor, who will; never achieve knowledge.*

This proverb explores the relationship between a person's ability to acquire *daas* and his attitude to *mussar* (moral discipline) and *tochachah* (criticism). *Mussar* is the harsher of these two methods of intervention. A positive attitude towards *mussar* ensures access to *daas*. In contrast, a negative attitude towards the milder *tochachah* means that the person will be unresponsive to improvement and is like to go through life without a significant amount of *daas*. Such an ignorant person is called a boor.

Learning Mishlei

(א) אֱהָב מוֹסֵר אֱהָב דָּעַת
וְשִׂינָא תוֹכַחַת בְּעָר:

If a person **loves moral discipline** — אֱהָב מוֹסֵר — and is happy to be disciplined, it is a sign that he **loves knowledge** — אֱהָב דָּעַת — because such a person is happy to endure the discipline that brings him knowledge. **But** a person who **hates** well-reasoned, positive **criticism is a boor** — וְשִׂינָא תוֹכַחַת בְּעָר — because his attitude prevents him from gaining knowledge. A boor in this context is someone who has the qualities of a dumb animal that has no intellectual capacity and therefore cannot comprehend criticism.

Additional Insights

A series of insights illuminating this proverb are presented below. The numbers identifying the insights refer to the listing of sources at the end of the segment.

- (1) If you are reluctant to accept *mussar*, Mishlei tells you to consider whether you love *daas*. If you do, you must love *mussar*.
- (2) If you are favorably inclined towards *mussar*, you will be rewarded with *daas* because *mussar* will teach you things you did not know.
- (3) If you are favorably inclined towards *mussar*, you will be eligible to acquire the knowledge of Torah, for one cannot expect to learn Torah if one is unable to endure some degree of pain and discomfort.
- (4) *Mussar* is primarily oriented to the development of *middos* (good character traits). *Middos*, in turn, are an essential condition to learning Torah.
- (5) If you appreciate positive criticism, you must be the kind of person who loves knowledge since well-reasoned criticism is based on an intellectual analysis. But even if you are receptive to the harsher rebuke of *mussar*, you

probably love *daas* because *mussar* is based on the fear of Hashem and the awareness of His laws of reward and punishment, all of which are clarified through *daas*.

(6) If you see a person who is under the influence of his appetites and desires, but is responsive to *mussar* or positive criticism, you can be sure he is a person of intelligence. His failings are not due to a lack of intelligence but a weak will. Hopefully, the reproof will help him overcome his weakness.

(7) A person who seeks *daas* should be receptive to the lessons he can learn from everything that goes on around him. He should be on the lookout for every opportunity of self-criticism.

(8) If you hate not only *mussar*, but well-reasoned criticism you will be a boor, for you will remain ignorant of your failings and there will be no one who can convince you otherwise.

Sources

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

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| (5) - מלבי"ם | (1) - אבן עזרא, שבט מיהודה |
| (6) - רבינו יונה | (2) - מצודות |
| (7) - באר מחוקק | (3) - הגר"א |
| (8) - מצודות | (4) - חנוך לנער |

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