

## Mishlei 12-15

# Wisdom and Humility

### Key Concepts

It is a sign of wisdom to question your own thinking and consult with someone else who is even wiser. It is also a sign of humility because your instinctive pride causes you to assume you are right and there is no need to consult with anyone. A person who lets his pride or his desires prevent him from seeking advice is a fool.

A wise person is also receptive to criticism because he knows that there is a real possibility that his judgment has been clouded by his eagerness to obtain a desired result.

### Exploring Mishlei

(טו) דָּרֶךְ אֱוִיל יֵשֶׁר בְּעֵינָיו וְשֹׁמֵעַ לְעֵצָה חָכָם :

*(15) The way of a fool is good in his own eyes,  
but the one who listens to advice is a wise man.*

The proverb contrasts the attitude of a fool and a wise man regarding seeking and heeding advice. It is exactly the opposite of what one might expect. The person who needs advice the most is the one who is least likely to seek it or to respond to it. This is because the attitude of a fool is characterized by foolish pride and the attitude of a wise man is characterized by his humility.

### Learning Mishlei

(15) The way of a fool — דָּרֶךְ אֱוִיל —  
is good in his own eyes — יֵשֶׁר בְּעֵינָיו ,  
but the one who listens — וְשֹׁמֵעַ —  
to advice — לְעֵצָה —  
is a wise man — חָכָם .

## Additional Insights

(1) A man who considers his own way as good may still be considered wise as long as he seeks the advice of others. He does so because he still considers the possibility that he has overlooked something. (אלשיך)

(2) The fool thinks of himself as wise because he doesn't feel the need to consult with anyone. (מצודות)

(3) The fool is misled by the "good life" of material pleasures. He doesn't listen to the wise counsel that tells him that such temptations will lead him to a tragic result. The wise man rejects them because he pays attention to the wisdom of the Torah. (מלבי"ם, אבן יחיאל)

(4) A person should always suspect his own motivations and consider the possibility that he is being misled by temptation. This means he should consult with another person to get the benefit of an independent perspective. (רבינו יונה)

(5) Even a wise man who guides others in making the right choices should find someone wiser than himself to consult so that he will avoid making a mistake. (רבינו יונה)

(6) The wise man responds positively to criticism because he wants to be told what he is doing wrong. He considers the possibility that he cannot see it himself. (המאירי)

(7) The fool follows an undisciplined, inconsistent pattern of thinking, so he assumes that whatever comes into his mind is the right thing. In contrast the wise man does not do anything without thinking it through and that process involves consulting with someone wiser than he. (הגר"א)

(8) A person who considers his own way infallible is a fool. Someone who has already acquired wisdom, appreciates how much is needed to grasp the truth correctly and to distinguish between right and wrong. (רשר"ה)