

## Mishlei 13-15

# Intelligence and Character

### Key Concepts

Every person is created with a degree of intelligence which is needed in solving the problems of everyday life, especially those concerned with human relationships. Intelligence is especially important to a *chacham* (wise man) so that he can be effective in acquiring wisdom and teaching it to others. That ability depends on his developing his character by suppressing his ego and strengthening his humility.

If his intelligence is accompanied by good *middos* (character traits), Hashem blesses the *chacham* and grants him the special quality of *chein* (favor or charisma) that draws people to him and makes them receptive to his teachings.

In contrast, a person of low character, marked by disloyalty, ingratitude and selfishness, will find that people are not readily responsive to his influence. Despite his intelligence, if he tries to teach them, he must use harsh methods, such as force and trickery.

### Exploring Mishlei

(טו) שְׂכָל־טוֹב יִתְרַחֵן וְדָרֶךְ בְּגַדִּים אֵיתָן:

(15) *A good mind wins favor,  
but the way of the treacherous is unbending.*

This proverb identifies the combination of intelligence and good *middos* that are the key to the kind of goodwill that enables someone to readily and gently influence others. In contrast we find treacherous people of crude character who do not respond to gentle influence.

### Learning Mishlei

(15) Intelligence with good character — שְׂכָל־טוֹב —  
elicits goodwill — יִתְרַחֵן

but the way of — וְדָרֶךְ  
treacherous people — בְּגַדִּים.  
is unresponsive to influence — אֵיתָן

## Additional Insights

### Wisdom in Words

(1) Intelligence (שֵׂכֶל) gives a person the ability to intuitively grasp abstract concepts. The addition of “good” (טוֹב) denotes an additional dimension of Divine inspiration that is granted to someone who has developed his good *middos*.  
(רבינו יונה, מלבי"ם)

### Other Insights

(2) A person who uses his intelligence for “good” will find that his intelligence is appreciated and admired, resulting in goodwill from those who come in contact with him. (אבן עזרא)

(3) The person of “good” intelligence persuades others to follow his way by living it and showing them its sweetness. The people of opposite character must use underhanded methods because their way is a way of visible harshness. They have to resort to their wealth and power to get cooperation. (רלב"ג, רבינו יונה, שבט מיהודה)

(4) The guidance that a chacham of “good” character gives is enabled by the purity of his intelligence which makes his words appealing to those who hear him. In contrast the people of ungrateful character use their Torah knowledge to dominate others. (חנוך לנער, הגר"א)

(5) The harshness of those of ungrateful character causes them to refuse guidance. They resist the charm of the *chacham* and his attempts to draw them away from their misguided ways. (מצודות)