

Mishlei 13-14

Intelligence and Character

Key Concepts

Every person is created with a degree of intelligence which is necessary 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, characterized 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) שְׁכָל־טוֹב יִתְּנֶהוּ וְדָרְךָ בְּגֹדִים אֵיתָן:

Intelligence with good [character] elicits goodwill, but the way of the ungrateful is harsh.

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 people of ungrateful character whose way of influencing others involves the harshness of forceful manipulation.

Learning Mishlei

(טו) שְׁכָל טוֹב יִתְּנֶהוּ

וְדָרְךָ בְּגֹדִים אֵיתָן:

Intelligence in a person of **good character elicits** the **goodwill – שְׁכָל־טוֹב** **יִתְּנֶהוּ**, of others so that they are naturally drawn to him, **but the way of the ungrateful is harsh – וְדָרְךָ בְּגֹדִים אֵיתָן** and they can influence others only

through force and manipulation.

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.

Wisdom in Words

(1) Intelligence (שִׂכָּל) 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*.

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.

(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.

(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.

(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.

Sources

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

(4) - חנוך לנער, הגר"א

(5) - מצודות

(1) - רבינו יונה, מלב"ם

(2) - אבן עזרא

(3) - רלב"ג, רבינו יונה, שבט מיהודה