

## Mishlei 15-04

# Empathy

### Key Concepts

When treating an ill person, sympathy and understanding can be more effective than medication. Having empathy means listening to the troubled person and showing him that you really care about what he is going through.

If the person has made some bad choices in life, it is important help him find the way back. To do this the mentor needs to give spiritual guidance (*mussar*) in a non-threatening way that makes the road back a positive and constructive journey.

It is important for the troubled individual to be able share his feelings and problems so that he can see them in perspective. Then the guidance will be able to focus in on what is really troubling him and offer him a way to deal with it. Ultimately it will be up to the listener to heal himself with the aid of Hashem.

Mishlei encourages a person to use his power of speech as an instrument of healing. Thus, it is called **מְרַפֵּא לְשׁוֹן**, a healing tongue. A healing tongue can repair a broken spirit and broken relationships. Its power is so great that it should be guarded carefully and not misused.

### Exploring Mishlei

**(ד) מְרַפֵּא לְשׁוֹן עֵץ חַיִּים וְסֵלָף בָּהּ שָׁבֵר בְּרוּחַ:**

**(4) A healing tongue is a tree of life,  
but perverseness in it is a wound to the spirit.**

This proverb compares the healing tongue to a tree of life. The power of speech can help the listener find new meaning in his life. The decisions the listener makes under the positive influence of gentle guidance from the tongue of a wise person can lead him to eternal life. In contrast, a tongue that utters thoughtless words expressing the perversity and hangups of the speaker can wound the spirit of the troubled listener.

### Learning Mishlei

**(4) A healing tongue — מְרַפָּא לְשׁוֹן**  
expressing spiritual guidance with feeling  
**is a tree of life — עֵץ חַיִּים**  
for it lengthens the days of those who heed it.  
**but perverseness in it — וְסִלְף בָּהּ**  
**is a wound to the spirit — שָׁבַר בְּרוּחַ**

## Additional Insights

- (1) When properly given, *mussar* has the power to heal the damage done by a foolish attitude. The one who gives it is like a tree whose fruit promotes the health of the one who eats it so that he adds years to his life. (אבן עזרא)
- (2) Since *mussar* will surely be effective if properly given to someone who is worthy of receiving it, neither the giver nor receiver should allow themselves to weary of it. (רבינו יונה)
- (3) A thoughtless word can inflict deadening pain; the word of a wise person, however, brings only healing to the spirit. (רשר"ה)
- (4) A healing tongue heals relationships and hard feelings between people. It also heals mankind's estrangement from Hashem. (דעת סופרים)