

Mishlei 15-05

Disrespect

Key Concepts

In Segments 10-17 and 12-01 we have seen how Hashem intervenes in the smooth flow of events and introduces customized lessons into a person's life. These serve to remind him of his failings and encourage him to elevate himself to the next stage of spiritual growth.

People have a natural tendency to resist change and so they indulge in a defense mechanism to invalidate the sources of guidance. Through skepticism and disrespect of traditional authority they try to free themselves of the need for compliance with the lessons that Hashem provides.

As previously noted, Mishlei uses two terms to address such lessons. 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 painful self-analysis. In contrast, *tochachah* refers to a gentle admonition or reproof, resulting in a motivation to goodness and spiritual growth.

The traditional source of authority in a family is the father and thus he is especially identified with *mussar*. A foolish son rejects the guidance of *mussar* by showing disrespect to his father and to any other authority figure in his life.

Exploring Mishlei

(ה) אָוִיל יִנְאֵץ מוֹסֵר אָבִיו וְשֹׁמֵר תּוֹכַחַת יַעֲרֹם:

**(5) The fool disrespects his father's mussar,
but he who pays attention to criticism will become wise.**

This proverb calls attention to the foolish attitude of the skeptic who rejects and scorns the *mussar* of his father. This is compared with the constructive attitude of a right-thinking person at the other extreme. In contrast to the skeptic, the positive thinker appreciates criticism and pays careful attention to it, so that there is no need for the harsher approach of moral discipline.

As noted in segment 15-04 Mishlei encourages a parent or teacher to use his power of speech as an instrument of healing. Thus, when the "healing tongue" provides gentle guidance, a more permanent effect is achieved in the teaching of wisdom.

Learning Mishlei

(5) Because of his negative attitude to received wisdom

the fool disrespects — אָוִיל יִנְאֵץ

his father's mussar — מוֹסֵר אָבִיו

and as a result he will never acquire knowledge.

But he who pays attention — וְשָׁמַר

to gentle criticism — תּוֹכַחַת

will become wise — יֵעָרֵם

without the need for harsher measures.

Additional Insights

(1) *Mussar* achieves its disciplinary effect by reminding the listener of the negative consequences of his moral failings. There is a danger that the listener will react with skepticism to invalidate the authenticity of the message. In contrast, gentle criticism can achieve its effect by showing the value of knowledge. (מלבי"ם)

(2) the person who pays attention to the constructive criticism can learn a lot from it. Through his failings he becomes stronger and the lessons he has learned will last for years. By keeping this wisdom in his heart, he can draw upon it whenever it is needed. (רבינו יונה)