

Mishlei 15-10

Intervention

Key Concepts

Because we have been given free will we are under the illusion that we are in control of our lives. However, we regularly experience unexpected events that may impact us in minor or major ways. These events may cheer us up or sadden us, but their common characteristic is to encourage us to question the choices we have been making and to consider strengthening or changing the behavior we have adopted.

Mishlei advises us to recognize that what is happening to us is a series of customized interventions into our consciousness by Hashem. If we respond as we should, we will find that these interventions lead to continued moral and spiritual growth.

As we have seen, Mishlei uses two terms to address such interventions. The first is *mussar* (moral discipline) and the second is *tochachah* (reproof or rebuke). In general, *mussar* is related to the idea of the correction of past errors. It emphasizes a person's *middos* (moral character) and suggests the deterrent power of punishment either through actual suffering or through self-analysis. In contrast, *tochachah* refers to a gentle admonition or reproof, resulting in a motivation to goodness and spiritual growth.

Exploring Mishlei

(י) מוֹסֵר רָע לְעֵזֵב אֶרֶח שׁוֹנֵא תוֹכַחַת יָמוֹת:

Painful discipline is designated for the one who forsakes the path of Hashem.

The one who hates rebuke will die.

In its most urgent form, a person who forsakes the right path in life may be subject to pain and suffering. If he responds to this challenging experience by reforming his behavior he can hope for relief. However, if someone hates rebuke, there is no way to reach him and he will ultimately die without having changed his ways.

Learning Mishlei

(10) Painful discipline — מוֹסֵר רָע

is designated *for the one who forsakes the path of Hashem* — לְעֵזֵב אֶרֶח.

As for the **one who hates rebuke** — **שׁוֹנֵא תוֹכַחַת**

he will die — **יָמוּת**

without repentance for he has no way of repenting.

Additional Insights

(1) Mishlei distinguishes between good *mussar* and bad *mussar*. Good *mussar* consists of warnings of what may go wrong. Bad *mussar* (**מוֹסָר רָע**) consists of actual pain and suffering. If good *mussar* is not effective, bad *mussar* may be needed to shake the person up and make him realize the seriousness of his spiritual predicament. (מלבי"ם)

(2) A person who forsakes the way of Hashem may be subject to painful *mussar*, but there is still hope that he will change. But if he hates listening to reproof, there is no hope for him and he will die. (רבינו יונה)