

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.

NOTE: It should be understood that the proverbs of Mishlei are intended to open the mind of the student to the possibilities and concepts of living a meaningful Torah life. Applying these proverbs to specific situations requires great wisdom and experience because of the unlimited variations in particular circumstances.

Exploring Mishlei

At this point in our study of Mishlei it is useful to look back over many of the proverbs that have addressed the challenges presented to us by the interventions we are experiencing.

Mishlei 10-17 — Moral Discipline Keeps You on the Path to Life

אִרְחַ לְחַיִּים שׁוֹמֵר מוֹסֵר וְעוֹזֵב תּוֹכַחַת מִתְּעָה:

He who holds on to moral discipline is on the path to life but he who forsakes reproof goes astray.

Mishlei 12-01 — Moral Discipline Enables You to acquire Daas

אָהב מוסר אָהב דָּעַת וְשֵׂנֵא תוֹכַחַת בְּעֵר:

He who loves moral discipline loves knowledge [for it is acquired with the aid of discipline], but he who hates criticism [even though it is well-reasoned] is a boor, who will never achieve knowledge.

Mishlei 13-01 — Wisdom Enables You Respond to Moral Discipline

(א) בֶּן חָכָם מוֹסֵר אָב וְלֹץ לֹא-שָׁמַע גְּעָרָה:

A wise son [is the product of] a father's discipline, but a scoffer has not heard rebuke.

Mishlei 13-17 — Consequences of Rejecting Moral Discipline (v. 18)

רֵישׁ וְקֵלוֹן פּוֹרֵעַ מוֹסֵר וְשׂוֹמֵר תוֹכַחַת יִכְבֹּד:

Poverty and shame come to him who rejects mussar but the one who responds to admonition will be honored.

Mishlei 15-05 — The Foolishness of Rejecting Moral Discipline

(ה) אָוִיל יִנְאָץ מוֹסֵר אָבִיו וְשֹׁמֵר תוֹכַחַת יֵעָרֵם:

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

Mishlei 15-10 — The Seriousness of Rejecting Moral Discipline

(י) מוֹסֵר רָע לְעֵזֵב אֶרֶח שׂוֹנֵא תוֹכַחַת יָמוֹת:

Painful discipline is designated for the one who forsakes the path of Hashem. The one who hates reproof will die.

In this latest segment, Mishlei emphasizes the seriousness of moral discipline. 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, but if he is stubborn and refuses to listen to the message he is being given, there is no hope but death.

Learning Mishlei

(י) מוֹסֵר רָע לְעֵזֵב אֶרֶח

שׁוֹנֵא תוֹכַחַת יָמוּת:

Painful discipline — מוֹסֵר רָע may be necessary **to** shake up the person **who forsakes the path** of Hashem — לְעֹזֵב אֶרֶח. If he responds to the lesson he will live, but as for the **one who hates reproof** — שׁוֹנֵא תוֹכַחַת and refuses to change his behavior **he will die** — יָמוּת without redemption.

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.

(1) Mishlei distinguishes between good mussar and bad mussar. Good mussar consists of warnings of what may go wrong. Bad mussar (מוֹסֵר 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.

(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.

Sources

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

(2) - רבינו יונה

(1) - מלבי"ם