

Mishlei 15-32

Soul at Risk

Key Concepts

As we have seen (Mishlei 15-10), Hashem reminds us of our moral failings by means of customized interventions into the routine of our life. Some of these interventions are in the form of mussar and others are in the form of tochachah. In general, mussar is related to the idea of the correction of past errors. It emphasizes the correction of a person's middos (moral character) and suggests the deterrent power of punishment, either through actual suffering or through self-analysis. In contrast, when Mishlei speaks of tochachah it is a gentle admonition, motivating the individual to goodness and spiritual growth.

The punishment implied by mussar is intended to shake a person up and thereby it threatens his very soul, the immortal component of his being. Thus, a person who rejects mussar puts his future life in the World to Come at risk.

In contrast, the gentle admonition of tochachah is intended promote the development of a person's moral character so that he disciplines himself to overcome the temptations that might lead him astray.

Exploring Mishlei

(לב) פֹרֵעַ מוֹסֵר מוֹאֵס נַפְשׁוֹ וְשׁוֹמֵעַ תּוֹכַחַת קוֹנֶה לֵב:

The one who rejects moral discipline despises his soul, but the one who listens to admonition acquires a [self-disciplining] heart.

This proverb first speaks of the incorrigible person who resists the lessons of life that are implied by harsh discipline. The consequence of such a negative attitude include the risk of his very own soul.

Such an individual is contrasted with the responsive person who can take a hint and who reacts positively to the light touch of gentle admonition. By listening attentively and internalizing what is suggested to him the responsive individual is readily able to recognize his failings. He works on the development of his character, referred to as his heart, so that he is able to discipline himself and experience spiritual growth.

Learning Mishlei

(לב) פוֹרֵעַ מוֹסֵר מוֹאֵס נַפְשׁוֹ
וְשׁוֹמֵעַ תּוֹכַחַת קוֹנֶה לֵב:

A person **who rejects** — פוֹרֵעַ the firm lessons of **moral discipline** — מוֹסֵר **despises his own soul** — מוֹאֵס נַפְשׁוֹ for he is putting his future life at risk, **but** the person **who listens** responsively to gentle **admonition acquires a self-disciplining heart** — וְשׁוֹמֵעַ תּוֹכַחַת קוֹנֶה לֵב.

Sources

The primary source used for this segment is the commentary of the Malbim.