

Mishlei 17-10

Intervention – Verbal

Key Concepts

There are times when person needs to be reminded that the path he is following will lead to tragedy. The responsiveness of the person being corrected depends on the nature of the rebuke and on his character. If he is an intelligent and conscientious person, a carefully chosen turn of phrase on the part of a parent or teacher can have a powerful effect.

But if he is a foolish, irresponsible individual he is likely to disregard a verbal rebuke. For a person who is unreceptive to guidance, mere words will simply slide away. A physical event in the form of a sudden accident, illness, or even an actual blow is needed to shake up his complacent, self-satisfied attitude.

Exploring Mishlei

(י) יַחַת גְּעָרָה בְּמִבִּין מִהַכּוֹת כְּסִיל מֵאָה :

(10) **A verbal rebuke affects a person of understanding more than striking a fool a hundred times.**

This proverb compares the effect of discipline on two types of people. One is a person of understanding (מִבִּין). When an unexpected event happens, he stops to reflect on its significance. Could it have been avoided? Where did he go wrong? Will a minor change in his behavior correct the problem or does he need to make a major course correction?

For such a person, the effect of a verbal rebuke (גְּעָרָה) can be very powerful, and the mentor who applies it should be judicious in how he applies it.

But if the misguided individual is a fool (כְּסִיל) he treats even harsh blows as bad luck, something that will pass if he just waits them out. Depending on how far gone he is, he may need a painful lesson, described metaphorically as 100 blows to shake him up.

Learning Mishlei

(10) The effect of a verbal rebuke — תַּחַת גְּעָרָה —
on a person of understanding — בְּמַבִּין —

can be very powerful,

even greater than striking — מִהַכּוֹת —

a fool — כֶּסֶּיל —

a hundred times — מֵאָה —

Additional Insights

[1] To be affected by a verbal rebuke a person needs to be open to criticism and needs to understand the significance of what is being said, even if the meaning is subtle. He also needs to have the heart to accept and act on it. (רבינו יונה).

[2] The word used to describe the effect of a rebuke is תַּחַת. This can be understood as a form of subtle humiliation by which the self-image of the offender is diminished. (רש"י)

[3] Another meaning of תַּחַת is to cause the offender to experience emotional fear by calling attention to the risks inherent in his behavior. (מצודות)

[4] Another meaning of תַּחַת is to shake up the offender with a deeply penetrating thought. (רבינו יונה)