

Mishlei 19-27**Wisdom – Discretion****Key Concepts**

It is important to engage in the study and contemplation of Mussar (lessons in moral discipline) on a regular basis. The time spent in Mussar activities is essential for each person's character development. It enables the person to understand his own behavior and ultimately to do *mitzvos* with greater devotion.

However, it is advisable to use discretion in how you apply the concepts of Mussar. Mussar instructions are broad training guidelines, which cannot cover the unique characteristics of every case. Thus, there may be situations where discretion is called for. For example, it would be a sin for a man to let false modesty prevent him from saving a drowning woman.

Mussar lessons should be understood as a means to help a person understand his own inclinations as he is drawn one way or another by his emotions. That training is very valuable but should not be blindly followed, especially in situations where there are conflicting options. Ultimately, the decision as to what to do in a specific situation is determined by Daas (Torah wisdom).

Exploring Mishlei

(כז) חֲדַל בְּנִי לְשָׁמַעַ מוֹסֵר לְשִׁגוֹת מֵאִמְרֵי דַעַת:

(27) *My son, exercise restraint in arbitrarily obeying the lessons of Mussar, when they cause you to deviate from the words of Torah knowledge .*

This proverb compares two valuable learning activities, Mussar methodologies and Torah wisdom. Although both are important, one should be viewed as laying the groundwork for the other. Since it is ultimately a matter of priorities, the proverb is structured in a provocative way to catch the reader's attention. This is done by downplaying one activity in favor of the other.

Learning Mishlei

(27) Exercise restraint — חָדַל

my son — בְּנִי,

in listening to Mussar teachings — לְשִׁמְעַי מוֹסֵר,

when they cause you to unwittingly stray — לְשָׁגוֹת

from teachings of Daas (Torah knowledge)— מֵאִמְרֵי דַעַת.

Additional Insights

[1] The methods of Mussar address the mechanics of moral self-improvement. These methods may require over-emphasis of one character trait to compensate for a weakness in another character trait. This can lead to obsessiveness in arbitrarily emphasizing one behavioral trait at the expense of another. Thus, a person perfecting the trait of honesty may ignore the allowance that needs to be made to promote peace. (אלשיך)

[2] The study of Mussar makes use of creative thinking to develop understanding of the workings of the person's mind. Such thinking runs the risk of going astray, leading to conclusions that conflict with Torah knowledge and *halachah*. Therefore, the student needs to be on guard to avoid being carried away. (תבונת משלי)