

Proverbs 15:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.

Analysis

The Hebrew 'rak' (soft, gentle) answer has power to 'turn away' (Hebrew 'shuv'—cause to return, avert) wrath, demonstrating wisdom's transformative effect on conflict. The contrast between soft answers and 'grievous' (Hebrew 'etseb'—painful, hurtful) words shows that tone and manner are as important as content. This proverb reveals that self-control in speech reflects godly wisdom and prevents the escalation of anger.

Historical Context

In honor-shame cultures like ancient Israel, perceived insults demanded response to preserve honor. This proverb offered counter-cultural wisdom: de-escalation through gentle speech rather than escalation through defending honor.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. When facing anger or criticism, is your first instinct to defend yourself or respond gently?

2. How might 'soft answers' transform your most difficult relationships?

Interlinear Text

מַעֲנֶה	רַךְ	יִשׁׁוּב	חַמָּה	וּדְבָר	אָב	עַל־הָ	אָף:
answer	A soft	turneth	away wrath	words	but grievous	stir up	anger
H4617	H7390	H7725	H2534	H1697	H6089	H5927	H639

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 25:15 (Parallel theme): By long forbearing is a prince persuaded, and a soft tongue breaketh the bone.

Proverbs 10:12 (Parallel theme): Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins.

Proverbs 15:18 (Judgment): A wrathful man stirreth up strife: but he that is slow to anger appeaseth strife.

Proverbs 29:22 (Parallel theme): An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression.

Proverbs 28:25 (Parallel theme): He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife: but he that putteth his trust in the LORD shall be made fat.