

Mishlei 12-14

Speech and Action

Key Concepts

Although the power of speech can be a source of great harm as discussed in the previous segment, it can also be a source of great good. In fact, just as a person can do good through physical action, such as giving charity and helping another, so can he do good through well-chosen words of kindness. In fact, Mishlei teaches us that words can have a greater effect than action.

A good person is like a fruit-bearing tree and his words are the fruit. The fruit of any process refers to the most valuable result from that process. Likewise, the words produced by the mouth of the good person represent his best qualities, his collected wisdom, which he shares with others. But whereas the fruit of the tree feeds other creatures, the good person himself benefits from the fruit of his mouth because it makes him a better person. He is also rewarded by Hashem for the good that he has achieved through learning Torah and inspiring others.

Exploring Mishlei

(יד) מַפְרִי פִי־אִישׁ יִשְׁבַּע־טוֹב וְגִמּוּל יְדֵי־אָדָם יִשְׁיב לוֹ:

(14) *From the fruit of man's mouth, he will be satisfied with good, and the reward of a man's handiwork will be rendered to him.*

The proverb compares the good that a person does using his mouth with the good that he does using his hands. He is rewarded by Hashem for both, but he reaps an extra benefit from the words of his mouth because the more he uses his mouth to express the wisdom of the Torah the better a person he becomes.

Because the good that can be done with a man's words may have a greater effect than that done with the hands, Mishlei refers to the man of words as "ish" (איש) suggesting a man of special nobility. In contrast the ordinary man who does good with his hands is referred as "adam" (אדם).

Similarly, the benefit achieved by the man of words is described with concept of being satisfied, which suggests that he will be blessed with an unlimited flow, as

much as he needs. In contrast, the benefit to the man of physical action is described with the concept of direct payment or recompense (גמול).

Mishlei also provides a number of other proverbs supporting the beneficial use of the power of speech, such as in Segment 10-11, "*The mouth of the tzadik is a wellspring of life.*"

Learning Mishlei

(14) From the fruit of man's mouth — מְפָרֵי פִי־אִישׁ
 he will be satisfied with good — יִשְׂבַּע־טוֹב,
 and the reward of man's handiwork — וְגִמוּל יְדֵי־אָדָם
 will be rendered to him — יִשָּׁיב לּוֹ

Additional Insights

(1) A person should seek to use his power of speech to do *mitzvos* even more than with the power of his hands. Examples are to express the wisdom of the Torah, to advise and counsel, to sanctify the Name of Heaven, to inspire and persuade. (רבינו יונה)

(2) Just as the best powers of a tree are devoted to its fruit, so are the best powers of a good man devoted to the fruit of his mouth. (מלבי"ם)

(3) Just as the fruit of a tree is best when it is fully ripened, so is the fruit of a man's mouth at its best when the wisdom that he expresses has been fully matured and the man has reached the stage of shleimus (wholeness and perfection). (מלבי"ם)

(4) If a person speaks effectively to another and inspires him to do *mitzvos*, he is rewarded for all the good things that other person did because of his encouragement. (הגר"א)

(5) If a *talmid chacham* is learning out loud and another overhears him, the *talmid chacham* is rewarded for all the good deeds that the second person did as a result of what he heard. (אלשיך)

(6) A person who does a *mitzvah* is rewarded in this world and the next. What he receives in this world is like the fruit of an investment (the profit generated by the investment), but the return of capital comes in the next world. (רש"י)