

Mishlei 13-02

The Fruit of Wisdom

Key Concepts

Wisdom (*chochmah*) is the knowledge that guides a person in making good choices in life. Because such wisdom often runs counter to the person's instinctive nature, it cannot be derived from human experience and must be acquired through Divinely inspired teachings.

Wisdom is referred to as the fruit of the mouth because it is essential that wisdom be communicated from parents to children and from teachers to their students. Because it is described as fruit, the receiving of wisdom is associated with eating the fruit as well as eating all the benefits that wisdom brings to mankind.

A person who rejects wisdom will be inclined to make the wrong choices in life. This will be reflected in actions which harm others, and which exhibit bad character traits (*middos*). Such wrong choices are referred to as a betrayal since the individual violates the faculties and qualities entrusted to him when He was created.

Exploring Mishlei

(ב) מִפְּרִי פִי־אִישׁ יֹאכַל טוֹב וְנַפְשׁוֹ בְּגֵדִים חָמָס:

(2) From the fruit of a man's mouth he will eat what is good, but the soul of the betrayers will eat the fruit of their betrayal.

This proverb compares the benefits and rewards granted to one who follows the teachings of wisdom (the fruit of man's mouth) with one who betrays those teachings.

Similar phrasing is found in Segment 12-14 (Speech and Action). However, the emphasis is different. The proverb in that segment compares the good that a person does using his mouth with the good that he does using his hands.

Learning Mishlei

(1) A wise son — בֶּן חָכָם

is the product of a father's discipline — מוֹסֵר אָב .

but a scoffer — וְלֹץ

has not heard rebuke — לֹא־שָׁמַע גְּעֵרָה .

Additional Insights

(1) One of the benefits of wisdom is that it makes a person receptive to receiving more wisdom. Therefore, if a child is started on the right path, it will be easier as he gets older. But if that opportunity is missed, the parent will find it more and more difficult to gain influence upon the child. There is then the danger that he will abandon the effort. (המאירי, חנוך לנער, הגר"א)

(2) Wisdom runs against nature because it requires a child to restrict his behavior and his natural instincts. (מלבי"ם)

(3) Moral wisdom cannot exist without the element of fear, including fear of punishment by the parent, by society, and ultimately by Hashem. (מלבי"ם)

(4) Moral discipline must be applied at an early age when the child is most receptive. The methods that work with a young child will be ineffective when the child is older. (רבינו יונה)

(5) A child that has developed into a wise son is a testimony to the efforts exerted by his parents and teachers. A child that has developed into a scoffer is a testimony to the failure of those efforts. (רלב"ג)

(6) When a child begins to show signs of developing into a scoffer it becomes more and more difficult to give him guidance because he begins to mock authority. This discourages the parent from exerting the needed discipline, thereby reinforcing the condition. (אבן עזרא)

(2) - מלבי"ם