

Mishlei 16-24

Wisdom – Sweetness

Key Concepts

Wisdom reaches a fulfilled state when it takes the form of carefully chosen words delivered by a wise teacher to an attentive student. The teacher is motivated not only to guide his listener but also to please him.

To help us visualize the effect of the pleasing words of wisdom, Mishlei compares them to the sweetness of honey upon the tongue. The sweetness of wisdom can be tasted by the soul. It even brings healing and well-being to the body. This is because it teaches self-discipline, which is essential to happiness..

Exploring Mishlei

(כד) צוף דבש אמרי נעם מתוק לנפש ומרפא לעצם:

*Words of pleasantness are a honeycomb,
sweet to the soul and healing to the bone.*

To emphasize the unique sweetness of wisdom, Mishlei compares it not only to honey whose pleasure is momentary, but also to a honeycomb whose pleasure is lasting. Whereas the sweetness of honey can only affect the body, the sweetness of wisdom affects the soul.

To express the effect of wisdom upon the body, Mishlei identifies it as the bone, which is the body's structural core.

Learning Mishlei

(24) Wisdom **words of pleasantness** — אמרי נעם —
have the sweetness of a **honeycomb** — צוף דבש.

They are **sweet to the soul** — מתוק לנפש —
and bring healing to the bone — ומרפא לעצם —

Additional Insight

(1) Words of wisdom are pleasing to the soul because they give the kind of *mussar* guidance that a person appreciates to help him develop his character. They are also pleasing to the body because they help him manage the ordinary challenges of life.

(מצודות)

(2) The honeycomb represents a quality of sweetness that is better than honey. Likewise, the words of wisdom are better than honey because a person has only a limited capacity to absorb honey, whereas there is no limit to his ability to absorb wisdom. (המאירי)

(3) Wisdom is described as healing because it helps the person recover from all kinds of bad character traits. (המאירי)