

Mishlei 18-04

Words

Key Concepts

People often underestimate the significance of the words spoken by a Torah scholar. Mishlei encourages the listener to think carefully into the implications of what such a man is saying. There may be great depth to his words of wisdom and the listener should reflect upon the important lessons that may lie below the surface. Even the choice of words used by a man of wisdom deserve study.

The listener should be aware that the man of wisdom is able to draw upon an unending stream of Torah knowledge and everything he says reflects what he has absorbed and thought about over the years.

Exploring Mishlei

(ד) מִים עֲמֻקִּים דְּבַרֵי פִי אִישׁ נַחַל נֹבֵעַ מְקוֹר חֲכָמָה :

(4) *The words of a man's mouth are deep waters;
the source of wisdom is a flowing stream.*

The proverb compares the flow of words spoken by a wise Torah scholar with the flow of a deep river. The fact that the water is deep suggests that this is a great man of wisdom whose words convey depth of meaning below the surface.

The fact that it is a flowing stream suggests that the wisdom transmitted at any time is not merely a burst of insight, but is part of an unending flow. Also, just as the source of the stream is a deep underground spring, so does the wisdom originate from an authentic Torah source.

Learning Mishlei

(4) Deep waters — מִים עֲמֻקִּים

are the words from the mouth of a wise man — דְּבַרֵי פִי אִישׁ

They are a flowing stream. — נַחַל נֹבֵעַ

from the source of his wisdom — מְקוֹר חֲכָמָה

Additional Insights

[1] The source of Torah wisdom has the purity of an underground stream. Its flow is continuous and eternal. (אבן עזרא)

[2] The two parts of the proverb suggest differences in the ease of access to wisdom. The first part looks at the words of wisdom from the point of view of the listener. Because the waters of wisdom are so deep, he may find difficulty in grasping their meaning. This challenge results from his lack of preparation and his involvement in material things. The second part shows us that the man of wisdom is rewarded for his years of learning with the clarity of thinking and an unending stream of insight. (מלבי"ם)

[3] In another proverb (20-05), Mishlei compares the wise man's store of wisdom to a deep well whose water is made available to people only through great effort.

[4] In an alternative interpretation, some people use words to deceive others about the reasons and purposes of their doings. Those carefully chosen words are compared to deep waters which cannot be fathomed. In contrast, the wise man's words are open and crystal clear. They well up from the depths of his being, like from an underground spring. (רשר"ה)