

Mishlei 18-20

Sustenance

Key Concepts

All living creatures share a common need. Without food they cannot exist. In creating the world with all its miraculous diversity Hashem provided the particular type of food that each creature would need. Simple creatures are able to survive on the basic nourishment that is appropriate for each species. But because of man's complexity his needs are correspondingly specialized and refined.

In effect, man requires more than physical food; he needs spiritual sustenance. This was symbolized by the manna (הַמָּן), a miraculously created spiritual food that was fed to our forefathers in the Midbar. And so it says: **לְמַעַן הוֹדַעְךָ כִּי לֹא עַל הַלֶּחֶם לְבַדּוֹ יְחִיָּה הָאָדָם כִּי עַל כָּל מוֹצֵא פִי ה' יְחִיָּה הָאָדָם** – “To let you know that man does not live by bread alone, but by everything that emanates from the mouth of G-d does man live” (*Devarim 8:3*).

Ultimately, all of existence is the product of the mouth of Hashem, for He created the world by speaking the words of Creation. In our daily lives we emulate the process of Creation by the words that we utter when we learn the wisdom of Torah and teach it to our children. That wisdom provides us with a spiritual sustenance to which we ourselves are able contribute.

Exploring Mishlei

(כ) מִפְּרִי פִי אִישׁ תִּשְׂבַּע בִּטְנוֹ תְּבוֹאֶת שְׂפָתָיו יִשְׂבַּע:

***(20) From the fruit of a man's mouth is his belly filled,
and from the produce of his lips is he sated.***

The proverb refers indirectly to wisdom as the fruit of man's mouth. The words of Torah learning that he utters provide him with a necessary spiritual component of his daily sustenance. Symbolically, he can look to these words to fill his belly. In a parallel construction the proverb also refers to these words as the produce of his lips because the clarity of his thoughts depends upon the manner in which they are enunciated by his lips.

Learning Mishlei

From the learning that is **the fruit of a man's mouth** – **מִפְרֵי פִי אִישׁ**
is his belly filled – **תִּשְׂבַּע בְּטֶנּוֹ**
 and from **the produce of his lips** – **תְּבוֹאֵת שְׂפָתָיו**
is he sated – **יִשְׂבַּע**.

Additional Insights

(1) The proverb speaks of both fruit and produce (grain). Whereas grain is a demanding crop that requires hard work, fruit grows naturally, with far less effort. Correspondingly, when a person puts in limited effort into his Torah learning he is rewarded with the blessings of this world, but if he puts in greater effort he is rewarded both in this world and the world to come. (חבל נחלה)

(2) The expression **מִפְרֵי פִי אִישׁ** also appears in the proverb of Segment 12-14. In that case, 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.

(3) The expression **מִפְרֵי פִי אִישׁ** appears again in the proverb of Segment 13-2. That 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. Thus, a person may be rewarded or punished for the words of his mouth.

(4) The idea of being satiated can also be understood as a double-edged sword, corresponding to reward and punishment. Either a person is filled to satiety with blessings as a reward for the good he has spoken or he is filled to satiety in retribution for the evil he has spoken (אבן יחייא). Speech can be compared to a fruit-bearing tree. Its fruit may turn out to be a blessing or curse depending on the words that were spoken (חנוך לנער)