

Mishlei 20-29**Visible Signifiers**

[Pesukim 20:29 and 20:30]

Key Concepts

Mishlei is primarily concerned with personal character traits, which are largely invisible to the eye. However, through careful observation one can find cases in which these internal qualities are related to a person's outward appearance. For example, the physical changes associated with age also affect a person's character. Also, a person who has been involved in violent behavior or dissolute living may reveal corresponding evidence in his appearance. These examples are explored in the last two proverbs of the chapter.

Exploring Mishlei

(כט) תִּפְאֶרֶת בַּחֹרִים כְּחֵם וְהַדָּר זְקֵנִים שִׁיבָה :

**(29) *The glory of young men is their strength;
the majesty of elders is their white hair***

People instinctively admire the virile appearance of a young man. They associate his good looks and energy with the blessings of youth. They are not as ready to admire the weakened appearance of an older person. However, when they see the radiance of his white hair, they recognize it as a sign of the wisdom he has gained through years of experience and learning Torah.

(ל) חֲבֵרוֹת פָּצַע תִּמְרוֹק בָּרַע וּמַכּוֹת חֲדָרֵי בֶטֶן :

**(30) *Bruises and wounds purge evil,
as do blows to one's innermost parts.***

The first part of this proverb refers to visible bruises and wounds, including those that bleed openly and those that indicate internal bleeding by discoloration of the skin. The second part refers to damage done to internal organs that are not externally visible, even though the person's behavior may be affected.

Learning Mishlei

(29) The glory of young men — תְּפִאֲרַת בְּחֹרִים —
 is their strength — כֹּחַם
 the majesty of elders — וְהֵדָר זְקֵנִים —
 is their white hair. — שֵׁיבָה

(30) Bruises and wounds — חֲבֵרוֹת פָּצַע —
 purge evil — תִּמְרוֹק בָּרַע —
 as do blows — וּמַכּוֹת —
 to one's innermost parts. — חֲדָרֵי בֶטֶן

Additional Insights

[1] Suffering is an appropriate measure to cleanse a wicked person of his sin.

(מצודות)

[2] Suffering is an appropriate measure to influence a wicked person to change his ways. (אבן עזרא)

[3] Suffering is an ornament for a sinner just as vigor is an ornament for a young man (רבינו יונה)

[4] The three types of injury described here correspond to three types of sin: The bleeding injury corresponds to sins committed in public and the one under the skin corresponds to those committed in private. Internal disorders correspond to concealed sins of thought. (הגר"א)