

Mishlei 21-17

Pleasure

Key Concepts

The concept of pleasure can apply to any event or experience which creates a good feeling or mood. It is generally synonymous with the Hebrew word *simchah* (שְׂמֵחָה). The source of the experience that creates *simchah* could be physical, emotional, or spiritual. The characteristic of *simchah* is that it is temporary, but the person experiencing it feels a desire to extend it and repeat it.

A *simchah* is not inherently good or bad. That depends on the nature of that particular *simchah*. Our proverb deals with the kind of *simchah* that is material in nature, which indicates that the hunger for it can cause problems for a person. In contrast, the *simchah* discussed in segment 21-15 (pleasure at the implementation of justice) is a characteristic of a *tzadik*.

Exploring Mishlei

(יז) אִישׁ מְחָסוֹר אֱהָב שְׂמֵחָה אֱהָב יַיִן וְשֶׁמֶן לֹא יַעֲשִׂיר:

(17) *A man who feels the lack of simchah is a lover of simchah;
one who loves wine and oil will not grow wealthy.*

Because *simchah* is temporary by nature, a person who becomes addicted to the *simchah* experience will have a strong desire to extend it and repeat it. Such a person is referred to as an אִישׁ מְחָסוֹר (man who feels a lack). Such a man feels a strong urge to have the next *simchah* experience, and is referred to as an אֱהָב שְׂמֵחָה (lover of *simchah*). If he happens to have a love for wine and oil, he will find that his love for *simchah* is expensive and will prevent from accumulating wealth.

Learning Mishlei

(17) A man who lacks pleasure — אִישׁ מְחָסוֹר
loves pleasure. — אֱהָב שְׂמֵחָה

If he loves wine and oil — אֱהָב יַיִן וְשֶׁמֶן
he will not get rich — לֹא יַעֲשִׂיר

Additional Insights

[1] A person who gets in the habit of eating and drinking to excess in terms of quality or quantity will always be an **אִישׁ מְחָסוֹר**. (רלב"ג)

[2] A person who is accustomed to a variety of external sources of pleasure will be constantly feeling a craving for a fresh pleasure. (מלבי"ם)

[3] Besides the cost factor and health issues, a person should avoid indulgence in material pleasures because (1) they promote a deterioration of the spiritual side of life, (2) an attachment to material possessions may result in unhappiness when they are lost, (3) an attachment to foolish things is damaging to one's spiritual health, and (4) the pursuit of pleasures in an easy life may result in poverty. (רבינו יונה)