

KOHELES



MAN'S QUEST *for* HAPPINESS

and its
INEXTRICABLE TIE
with the
INESCAPABLE
FRUSTRATIONS
of AMBITION

Rabbi Israel Chait

STUDENT'S NOTES FROM LECTURES

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INTRODUCTION

“Koheles: Man’s Quest for Happiness” are student’s notes from Rabbi Israel Chait’s lectures on King Solomon’s book covering metaphysics¹, philosophy, psychology, morality and Torah.

In the early 1970s, Rabbi Chait presented a thorough and insightful analysis of Koheles’ first chapter, comprising Part I of this book. In 1986 and 1987, Rabbi Chait gave a series of lectures covering many of Koheles’ remaining chapters, comprising Parts II, III and IV. Not all verses were addressed, therefore there are gaps in the sequence of verses.

Rabbi Chait deciphers King Solomon’s expressions, lessons, metaphors and surface contradictions. He enlightens us to the myriad of conscious fantasies, the unconscious, frustrations, conflicts, values, ambitions and attitudes confronting man in his quest for a fulfilling life.

Using himself as the subject, King Solomon experimented with all possible lifestyles, from indulging in riches and drink, to frivolity and sophistication. At every turn, the King records his reactions and exposes the fallacies behind blind ambitions and ideals. With his keen wisdom, King Solomon unveiled the many recesses of man’s psychological dynamics, hidden

1) Metaphysics (*meta* is Greek for *higher* or *beyond*) refers to a branch of philosophy dealing with matters higher than the physical world. These matters include God (His justice, kindness, role as Creator and other “traits”), angels, wisdom, concepts, knowledge, man’s soul, and natural laws. These matters are not physical—not existing in the physical world. Thus, they are termed metaphysical matters: matters “higher” than the physical.

from most people. What are man's assumptions regarding happiness? What are his psychological faculties, dynamics and their pitfalls? How does man fool himself into chasing fantasies and unattainable goals? Why does he think certain objectives and actions will provide happiness, and why must they fail? And what role does the fantasy of immortality play in human ambition? Koheles is a thorough analysis of these matters, revealing the depth of the human psyche, the beauty of God's human design, and proper instruction based on King Solomon's findings.

To gain the most from Koheles, we must appreciate that God granted unparalleled wisdom to King Solomon at age 12 when his father, King David, died and King Solomon ascended to the throne. God appeared to King Solomon in a prophetic dream saying, *"Ask what I shall give you."*² Solomon responded, *"Give to your servant a hearing heart to judge your people between good and evil..."*³ God granted this to him, saying, *"...as you have requested this matter, and you did not ask for long days, and you did not request riches, and you did not ask for the death of your enemies, and you requested understanding to hear judgement...behold, I do as your words; behold I give to you a heart that is wise and understanding, that like you, there was no one before, and after you, there will not arise anyone like you."*⁴ Leaders from all nations came to hear King Solomon's wisdom⁵ and were astonished at his insights.

2) Kings I, 3:5

3) Kings I, 3:9

4) Kings I, 3:11,12

5) Kings I, 5:14

The reader will be amazed at King Solomon's genius. As a prophet gifted with divine knowledge earning the Rabbis' praise as the wisest man ever next to Moses⁶, we are offered a treasured opportunity of joining King Solomon in witnessing God's wisdom. The King desired to share his wisdom with all others, to help us understand which path and choices will secure true happiness, and avoid grief and misfortune. But as King Solomon wrote in metaphor and in apparent contradictions⁷, his words require the greatest attention, sensitivity, patience and analysis.

In Part 1—the 1970s lectures—Rabbi Chait's analysis of Koheles' first chapter reveals King Solomon's depth of psychological knowledge. This includes explanations of otherwise cryptic metaphors with unique and marvelous insights into the primary components and workings of man's psyche. Perhaps it is no coincidence that in both Genesis' and in Koheles' opening chapters, we find discussions of immortality, sin, fantasy⁸, the instincts, desire, rivers, blame, remorse, and other psychological parallels as prerequisite study for understanding man and how to achieve happiness. Rabbi Chait's lectures on Koheles offer us a unique and valuable opportunity to learn how to guide our lives not only as followers of Torah, but as human beings.

**All footnotes are a student's words.*

6) *Guide for the Perplexed*, book III, chap. LIV

7) This was done to keep wisdom hidden among the wise men, *chochamim*.

8) The snake enticed Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. We then read, "*The woman (Eve) saw the fruit was good to eat...*(*Gen. 3:5,6*)." Eve's "seeing" refers to her fantasy about the fruit's potential benefits.

Part I: The Psyche and Man's Quest
WHO WAS KING SOLOMON?

דְּבַרֵי קֹהֵלֶת בֶּן־דָּוִד מֶלֶךְ בִּירוּשָׁלַם

"The words of Kobeles, the son of David, King in Jerusalem (I.I)."

What is the meaning of "Kobeles?" Why did King Solomon identify himself as the "son of David" and as "King?" Why is it crucial that we know that he reigned "in Jerusalem?"

The name of a wise author prods the reader to apply extensive thought. For if one were to pick up a book written by a writer of average caliber, he would not carefully analyze the ideas, if there were any.

But if one were about to read a book authored by Albert Einstein, he would certainly approach such a book with the care required to fully grasp and understand Einstein's message. An intellect as great as Einstein certainly wrote matters of great worth. Therefore, King Solomon identified himself to alert the reader that his teachings cannot simply be read, but require careful thought.

Koheles means "to gather," as in *kehila*, a gathering of congregants. Applied to King Solomon, the "gathering" to which he referred was his wisdom, which the King possessed in abundance. The King wished to share with his readers that since Koheles is a work on metaphysics, which requires knowledge from all areas, "Koheles" conveys this idea. In other words, the King wished to say, "*I gathered much knowledge and therefore I have authority to write this book.*" King Solomon also wrote Proverbs. But as Proverbs addresses ethics alone, the only knowledge required is ethical knowledge.

Another explanation why the name Koheles was used is due to the fact that King Solomon always spoke in large gatherings comprised of wise men, the *Chochmei Yisrael*. Why was the King concerned to share that he spoke to large groups of wise men? King Solomon's conclusions benefited from other wise men, to whose scrutiny he subjected his thoughts. A person who learns alone tends to think that his ideas are correct. Having contrasted his ideas with men of wisdom, King Solomon

eliminated personal error. The reason for stating Koheles here and not in Proverbs, is because Proverbs is relatively simple: it was not that necessary to tell us that he studied with others.

Why “*son of David?*” Since one’s teacher impacts his knowledge, King Solomon shared that his teacher was his father, King David. Again, to urge the reader to pay careful attention to the lessons of Koheles, the King reiterated that he was trained by one of the greatest minds.

King Solomon also states he was “*King in Jerusalem.*” This was to convey that he lived in a rich environment, which also contributes to one’s knowledge. As King of Jerusalem, he was the one person in the choice societal role to take full advantage of all which that environment offered.

Why in Proverbs does King Solomon refer to himself as “*King of Israel?*” Proverbs addresses ethical matters, which is knowledge pertaining to people. Therefore, he uses the term Israel to indicate the nation. Meaning, he is intelligent politically; he knows how to relate to the people of Israel.

FANTASY & REALITY

הַבֵּל הַבְּלִים אָמַר קֹהֵלֶת הַבֵּל הַבְּלִים
הַכֹּל הַבֵּל

*“Futility of futilities, said Koheles, futility of futilities;
all is futile.” (1:2)*

As this verse mentions the term futile seven times¹, the Rabbis teach it references the seven days of Creation. What do the Rabbis’ mean? This means to say that King Solomon identified the physical world as futile, explaining why he repeated “*futile*” seven times. The universe—not the metaphysical world—was created during the seven days. The physical alone is futile.

The Written Law—*Torah She’bicsav*—contains allusions to the Oral Law—*Torah She’baal peh*. But the Rabbis didn’t figure out from the Written Law what the Oral Law is. The Oral Law too was received at Sinai, as was the Written Law. The Rabbis knew the Written Law alludes to that which was already known through the Oral Law. Here, the Rabbis did not merely deduce from Koheles that the physical world is futile. They knew this from a careful analysis of the King’s works. The Sages are merely using King Solomon’s seven mentions of “*futile*” as an allusion to an idea already known.

What is meant by the word “*futile?*” And what is meant by

1) “Futile” in the singular is mentioned three times, and twice in the plural (meaning at least two) totaling 7 mentions, correlating to the seven days of Creation.

the additional word “*all*” in the phrase, “*all is futile?*” This indicates that more than the physical world is futile. What is that additional thing? Furthermore, why did King Solomon need to write “*said Kabeles?*” He already identified himself in the first verse. And a powerful question is, how could King Solomon say that physical creation is futile, while God called creation “good?”²

To answer this, we must make a crucial distinction. King Solomon meant that the physical universe is futile, but only when used as an ends. In contrast, God said that it is good when utilized as a means for man to perfect his soul. To be clear, King Solomon identifies creation as futile, only when it is sought for itself as an ends, such as eating for pleasure alone, and not as a means to strengthen one’s self to follow God’s Torah. God called creation “*good*” inasmuch as man harnesses the physical world to perfect his soul.

King Solomon’s repetition of “*futile*” was not to allude to the seven days of Creation. That, as we said, was known from Tradition, the *Mesora*. Just as the Torah repeats topics many times with the objective of emphasis (viz., the Love of God, the Exodus, idolatry, etc.), so too, the King’s repetition was for emphasis. However, wherein lies the importance in his second sentence? What precisely is he emphasizing? Just as the Torah repeats only those matters that are foundations to Judaism,

2) Many times in Genesis (chap. 1) God says Creation was “good.”

King Solomon too must be repeating only that which he feels is crucial. What is it?

Additionally, the reason why the King states “*said Koheles*” is because he is again stressing how important this idea is. This first statement is so important, that without knowing its meaning, you can’t go any further in this work. Therefore, we must understand the meaning of “*futility of futilities.*” What kind of formulation is this? King Solomon is describing the phenomenon of fantasy.³ These are the “*futility of futilities.*” One futility is seeking the physical world as an ends. The second is the fantasy man creates connected to his physical desires. But how do fantasies work? How do they fool us to believe that if we possessed or experienced “X”, we would be happy forever? What provides this conviction?

There are two factors: 1) the quality of the fantasy, i.e., the new car, and 2) the quantity of time we will enjoy the car. This quantity is somehow left out of the picture. That’s why one feels that the enjoyment will never cease. But it does cease and that’s when one creates a new fantasy. A person projects the imagined enjoyment into the future, indefinitely. The conviction of pure pleasure and no pain emanates from the false notion that enjoyments are endless. And since one feels that the imagined plea-

3) An example will illustrate this point. A man will open a magazine and see an advertised new sports car. The red metallic shine, the advertised acceleration speed, and the luxurious leather interior all contribute to the creation of something other than the car...what we term the “fantasy.” This fantasy is the imagined happiness one believes he will experience with his new acquisition...a failed attempt to secure happiness.

sure will not end, he chases the fantasy. In his work, *Guide for the Perplexed*, Maimonides teaches that in order to have pleasure, one must have 1) the desired object, and 2) novelty. If there is no novelty, there won't be pleasure. Thus, when one fantasizes, he projects his initial relationship of novelty into the future. He assumes the novelty will endure without end. In a fantasy, the initial excitement that always fades in reality, is not recognized. However, fantasy cannot satisfy as reality. For if it did, one would not need reality. The fantasy would be as good as reality.

"Futility of futilities" means there exists a twofold emptiness. One emptiness is reality: the car cannot provide indefinite happiness. The other emptiness is the fantasy. Emptiness finds two expressions: 1) physical pleasures as an ends, and 2) the imagination or fantasy of that assumed pleasure.

The one phenomenon which diminishes the fantasy is mortality. When one realizes that his life is going to end, his fantasies end as well. This applies to those of old age or those subject to terminal disease. The reality of death terminates fantasies because it eliminates the backdrop essential for projecting *endless* fantasy.

"Futility of futilities" requires one to abandon fantasy life. Koheles is an attempt to go beyond the fantasies, to see life as it truly is. Additionally, fantasy does not exist regarding spiritual matters. Explaining why *"futility of futilities"* applies to the physical alone.

ACCOMPLISHMENT & BENEFIT

מה־יִתְרוֹן לְאָדָם בְּכָל־עֲמָלוֹ שִׁיעֲמֹל
תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ

“What addition is there to man in all his labor at which he labors under the sun?” (1:3)

There exists only reality. In contrast, fantasy is non-existent. There are no *“additions”* (benefits) to man’s imaginations. For example, man imagines he benefits from leaving over an empire to his children, or he fantasizes of the prestige from a high office. However, these are all empty and there is no benefit to them: they are fleeting fantasies. What is real, is man’s labor⁴. What is unreal is the imagined legacy or how man thinks others might view him as he attains a higher office.

What is meant by *“under the sun”*? This refers to the physical world: that which is literally under the sun. As stated, the physical world is futile if it is used as an end and not as a means to study God, Torah and creation to arrive at a love of God and to perfect ourselves.

Rashi says the word *“under”* (tachas) means *“instead.”* Mean-

4) Man provides for himself through labor. But the imagined satisfaction of leaving an inheritance is diminished by the worry if it reaches his children, or if they will use it wisely. And the prestige of high office exists only in the imagination: it is not real. That is, the identical labor performed by an official, is performed by blue-collar workers. This work is reality, but the official’s reality does not differ from the lower-class worker. When the official is in front of cameras or sees himself in newspapers, he then imagines a sense of prestige. But this feeling fades when he is off-camera and not in the spotlight. He then strives to make headlines once again. It is a vicious cycle met with frustration more than with honor.

ing, there is no benefit for that which is instead of the sun, i.e., instead of Torah, referred to as *light*. Thus, the use of the physical world for Torah purposes is not futile, but is man's true goal.

IMMORTALITY

דֹּר הַלֵּךְ וְדֹר בָּא וְהָאָרֶץ לְעוֹלָם עֹמֶדֶת

*"One generation passes, and another generation comes;
but the Earth abides for ever." (1:4)*

The Rabbis teach, *"A person does not die with half of his desires in hand. For he who has a hundred, desires to make of it two hundred."*⁵ This means that the fantasy exceeds reality. King Solomon addresses one of the two fantasies that drive people. One fantasy is regarding objects or possessions. The second fantasy deals with man's feeling of permanence. Man's fantasies make sense, but only if he lives eternally. An idea has two parts: 1) the idea itself, and 2) the emotional effect of the idea. Every person is aware of the idea that he or she will die. But the emotional effect is usually denied. This enables man to believe his fantasy is achievable. It is impossible to live without the fantasy of immortality. It expresses itself one way or another.

5) Koheles Rabbah, 1:13

The meaning behind this verse is that the average person looks at life as the only reality. He cannot perceive himself as a single speck in a chain of billions of people and events, where he plays but a minuscule role, and passes on. Any feeling man has of greatness comes from the feeling of immortality. Immortality never reaches into lusts; only ego.

Here, the King places the correct perspective before us. We look at the world as starting with our birth, and as ending with our death. Our previous verse dealt with the fantasy of pleasures. This verse deals with the fantasy of immortality. But there is also a connection between the two fantasies. As soon as one sees that his life is nearing its end, he cannot enjoy life anymore. Physical enjoyments are tied to the belief in an eternity in which to enjoy them.

Man's attention is directed primarily toward his well-being. If a life-threatening situation faces man, this is the most devastating experience; everything else doesn't make that much difference to him. Once a person faces death, all fantasies of pleasures don't carry much weight.

Rashi says on this verse, *"Who are those that exist forever? They are the humble ones that bow down to the ground."* Rashi means there is in fact an eternity: this is for righteous people—*tzaddikim*—expressed as those who humble themselves, *"bowing to the ground."* The soul of the Tzaddik will endure forever.

LUSTS

זָרַח הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וּבָא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וְאֶל־מְקוֹמוֹ
שׁוֹאֵף זֹרֵחַ הוּא שָׁם

“The sun also rises, and the sun sets, and hastens to its place where it rises again.” (1:5)

King Solomon continues his illustration of man’s psyche, now engaging metaphor. The metaphor of the sun describes man’s search for *taiva*, lusts. Man obtains the object of his desires, “*the sun rises.*” But then the experience passes, “*the sun sets.*” Man then chases the desire again, “*and hastens to its place where it rises again.*”

PROGRESS

הוֹלֵךְ אֶל־דָּרוֹם וְסוֹבֵב אֶל־צָפוֹן סוֹבֵב סָבִיב
הוֹלֵךְ הָרוֹחַ וְעַל־סְבִיבָתוֹ שָׁב הָרוֹחַ

“[The wind] goes toward the south, and circles around towards the north; encircling, encircling the wind travels and on its circuits the wind returns.” (1:6)

The King is not teaching patterns of weather. This book is about man’s quest for happiness. Therefore, this verse must

be considered in that light. Here, the King addresses the perspective of the *Rasha* (wind is a metaphor for the Rasha). The Rasha feels as though he's succeeding, or going places in life, viz., north, south, etc. But in reality, he goes nowhere: "*and the wind returns again according to its circuits.*" The wind repeats the same path.

Verse 1:5 deals with how reality operates: man chases a desire, the experience or brief satisfaction expires, and he repeats his chase. While verse 1:6 deals with the subjective perspective of the Rasha: he attributes a value to his actions, as if "going places." But why is the word "*encircling*"—סִבֵּב—repeated?

The first instance of סִבֵּב refers to man's error in following his emotions in the first place. The second סִבֵּב refers to the fact that man continues on his foolish path. Why does this occur? The first סִבֵּב (man's error) is committed due to man's lack of reason. The second סִבֵּב refers to the error in not heeding experience, which should teach man that he was initially in error.⁶

6) Man's failed attempts at obtaining happiness by chasing his lusts are ignored. For we see man repeating fruitless behaviors time and again. This is the second סִבֵּב, or error where man repeats his error as if "going in circles" as the saying goes.

PSYCHOLOGICAL ENERGY

כָּל־הַנְּחָלִים הַלְכִים אֶל־הַיָּם וְהַיָּם אֵינָנו מָלֵא
אֶל־מְקוֹם שֶׁהַנְּחָלִים הַלְכִים
שָׁם הֵם שׁוֹבִים לָלֶכֶת

“All the rivers flow to the sea; but the sea is not full; towards the place where the rivers flow, there they return again to flow.” (1:7)

Verse 1:5 teaches the cycle that man takes with his emotions. Verse 1:6 tells us that this cycle cannot operate without a bit of reality: that man feels he is getting somewhere, i.e., north, south. However, this is a delusion. There are two causes for man following this foolish cycle. One cause is what King Solomon stated in verse 1:6: man thinks he’s getting somewhere. But this is only a secondary cause. The primary cause is based on a need. That need is man’s great reservoir of psychological energy, depicted as a river; a relentless force. *“The sea is not full”* means that man’s desires are never quenched. Man is never satisfied because his energies (rivers) are great: *“To the place where the rivers flow, there they return again to flow.”*⁷

Man’s sense of progress is a rationalization. But this drive is not the primary cause for man’s actions. Rather, it is man’s

7) It is noteworthy that Genesis (2:10-14) also discusses rivers. There too, rivers are interspersed in a description of man. It is possible that King Solomon understood those rivers in Genesis to depict man’s inner workings, and he follows suit here by using the identical phenomenon of flowing water to describe some element of man. If this is true, then a study of the rivers in Genesis will yield additional insights into man’s psychological nature.

great amount of energy which is relentless in its search for satisfaction. Psychological energy is the cause which underlies the rationalization: man's intense energy drives him into a situation where he finds himself rationalizing his progress.

This verse is an exact analogy to the workings of the psyche. The rivers flowing to the sea are the emotions flowing to the desired object. "*Yet the sea is not full,*" i.e., man is not satisfied. This is because the desire is only as enjoyable as its novelty. Once novelty fades, so does the desire for the object. This is what is meant by "*there they return again to flow.*" Since novelty fades away, the waters (man's energies) gather to flow towards yet another desired object.

Furthermore, when one fantasizes about a desired object, he must incorporate into his fantasy the illusion that his satisfaction will be endless. As stated, fantasy requires the desired object, and the feeling that the enjoyment is endless.

FRUSTRATION & SATISFACTION

כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים יִגְעִים לֹא־יִוָּכַל אִישׁ לְדַבֵּר לֹא־
תִּשְׂבַּע עֵין לְרֵאוֹת וְלֹא־תִמְלֵא אָזֶן מִשְׁמָע

“All things are wearisome; man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled from hearing.” (1:8)

Only these two senses—sight and sound—are used because they are the main senses of desire; they arouse lust more than other senses. Weariness is felt since the amount of energy seeking satisfaction is far greater than what reality offers. Man’s design is such, that his desire for satisfaction cannot find satisfaction through physical pleasures. The Rabbis state, “*A person does not die with half of his desires in hand. For he who has a hundred, desires to make of it two hundred.*”⁸ The Rabbis teach that man will never find satisfaction in physical pleasures. The only way man can satisfy his energies is through intellectual inquiry; through the pursuit of wisdom.

An example will illustrate why the physical world cannot offer the amount of satisfaction needed. While a person is planning a trip, he experiences pent-up energy due to anticipation that doesn’t reach satisfaction until the trip. During his planning stages, he is frustrated. If one spent two months of planning, during which time his energies are frustrated and not yet

8) Koheles Rabbah, 1:13

satisfied, and he experiences just two weeks of actual satisfaction, the person was unsatisfied for two months and satisfied for only two weeks. That's not a good trade-off.⁹ We would not say that overall, the person was experiencing a satisfying lifestyle.

MODERNITY

מִה־שִׁיָּהִיָּה הוּא שִׁיָּהִיָּה וּמִה־שֶׁנֶּעֱשֶׂה הוּא
שֶׁיֵּעָשֶׂה וְאִין כָּל־חֲדָשׁ תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ

“That which was, it will be; and that which was performed will be performed, and there is nothing new under the sun.” (1:9)

This verse cannot refer to the physical world. For if it were, suggesting “whatever is going to happen already happened” would exclude the possibility of a “first thing.” For according to this reasoning, it should have already happened! That is,

9) Due to man's great energies, the need to plan, and the additional stress due to anticipation, man's energies remain frustrated for an extended period of time. This sustained frustration is not worth the brief satisfaction. Other pleasures too are short-lived, accompanied by impossible fantasies and hopes for endless satisfaction, which never occur. All pleasures are quite temporary, and when they suddenly pass, man is left dissatisfied. Wisdom, on the other hand, experiences no delay. One may engage thought—anytime and anywhere. But primarily, wisdom is the only pursuit that engages all of man's energies, resulting in no frustration and complete satisfaction. This experience of studying God's creations and His Torah is how God designed man to achieve happiness. It is impossible that man can satisfy his abundant energies completely in any pursuit other than using his mind.

the suggestion that there cannot possibly be something new, discounts a first thing, because first things are in fact new. But, as reason dictates, that the universe [or anything] cannot exist if it never had a beginning (a creation), what King Solomon refers to here must be a non-physical topic. In this verse, the King describes the emotion of “modernity”—the desire for newness.

The motivation behind this desire is that man’s pride and contentment are derived from viewing his generation as “the” generation. Man wants to feel secure and does so by viewing prior generations as archaic, outdated, and that we today have more knowledge. “We’re at the forefront” man imagines. He finds support in the beliefs that today’s fashions are more stylish, cars are most advanced, and people live more “modern” lifestyles. We often hear a scornful tone in that saying, “You’re old-fashioned.” The latest generation views itself as reaching man’s potential, while former generations fell short.

The basis for this emotion is that a person can’t face the fact of “*Dor holeich v’dor bah; A generation passes and a generation comes*” (1:4). A person feels insecure thinking that he’s only one in billions of people who come and go on this planet. To compensate, man attempts to elevate himself from past generations. He needs to create a new reality to secure his wishes, denying the truth that he too will soon pass, like all other generations, and that the next generation will view him as antiquated. Man

attempts to placate his fear by fabricating a feeling of modernity: “Our generation is *the* generation,” man feels. King Solomon responds to this illusion by breaking down this emotion of modernity: “*there is nothing new under the sun.*”

Rashi cites how Rebbe Eliezer ben Rav Hurkonus found a new idea regarding metaphysics—*Maaseh Merkava*. Rashi distinguishes the metaphysical from the physical world. When man feels a new physical enjoyment surpasses the last one, this imagined escalation in satisfaction is only relative to one’s last enjoyment. Additionally, it is merely a quantitative difference. However, regarding wisdom and metaphysical matters, when one learns a new idea that unifies or explains various areas of study, this is not a quantitative change from a small idea to a large one. Rather, the first idea was enjoyable, for one perceived wisdom and enjoyed the concept independently. Now, when that individual learns a new idea that helps him to see how many ideas are related, he senses greater enjoyment. This is because wisdom is a knowledge of unification of matters. And when a newly learned concept explains many areas, one unifies more matters with this new idea, and this offers man great pleasure.¹⁰

We cannot suggest the pleasure derived from wisdom is relative, like one who buys a new car and then his enjoyment fades.

10) Imagine a scientist seeking to explain why objects fall when dropped, why the planets continually revolve around the sun, and why larger planets have more intense effects on matter and light, than do smaller planets. Then, the scientist discovers a new thing called “gravity,” explaining all three areas of his inquiry. You can readily appreciate the satisfaction he will experience as he unifies all three phenomena with one newly-discovered law.

Such pleasures are relative to the person's mindset, they vary from person to person, and are relative to other competing pleasures, like newer cars.

But wisdom is absolute. It does not depend on the individual for its capability to provide enjoyment. Wisdom is new and enjoyable. That is Rashi's message.

Another reason why the verse states the language of "was" and "performed" is because this emotion of modernity expresses itself in two forms: 1) modernity of objects, and 2) of actions, or accomplishments.

MODERNITY IN ACTION

יֵשׁ דָּבָר שֶׁיֹּאמַר רְאֵה־זֶה חֲדָשׁ הוּא פֶּבֶר הִיָּה
לְעֵלְמִים אֲשֶׁר הִיָּה מִלְּפָנָיו

"There is a thing that one says, 'See this, it is new,' it already existed in ancient times that preceded us." (I:10)

How does one express his beliefs of modernity? He seeks support from his environment, saying, "Here is a new thing." This is his attempt to substantiate his philosophy of modernity. But King Solomon tells us that in truth, there is nothing that does not have its origins in ancient times.¹¹

11) Yes, we will certainly find more modern cars, but carriages always existed. We can in-

LEGACY

אֵין זְכוֹרֹן לְרֵאשִׁימֹנִים וְגַם לְאַחֲרֵימֹנִים שִׁיְהִיו
 לְאִיְהִיָּה לָהֶם זְכוֹרֹן עִם שִׁיְהִיו לְאַחֲרֵיָּהּ

“There is no remembrance to the first generations, and also to the latter ones there will be no remembrance with those who will be at the end.” (1:11)

One might think this verse addresses ordinary recorded history. But this cannot be, for we see that there are records of prior generations. What this verse describes is the way one thinks he’s going to be remembered, and that is as one who lived during the generation of modernity. Since people imagine that their generation is experiencing the frontier of all preceding generations, they feel their remembrance will be great; as one who partook in breakthroughs, having lived during that era.

This, however, falls short of reality just like the emotion of modernity itself. King Solomon says the first generations harbored this feeling of importance, but they were wrong. We too will think it, yet we will not be remembered this way.

Verse 1:9 is the rule set down which breaks the emotion of modernity: *“That which was, it will be; and that which was performed, will be performed, and there is nothing new under the sun.”*

Verse 1:10 is showing us how the fantasy is expressed, and

vent computers, but ancient forms of computation existed such as the abacus. And although fashion changes, clothing was always a means of demonstrating status. The message is not to seek pleasure or satisfaction by fabricating greater worth via a sense of advancement for one’s era.

King Solomon's breakdown: people say, "*See this, it is new.*" [*How-ever*] *it already existed in ancient times that preceded us.*"

And verse 1:11 addresses the delusion of making a mark in history, striving for the last vestige of modernity. That is, a person might think, "*It's true that past generations weren't truly modern because they didn't have what it takes...but we hit upon it!*" The breakdown of this misconception is "*and also to the latter ones there will be no remembrance.*" This tells us that if you make this assumption, you're fooling yourself.

MODERNITY: SELF-APPLIED

אָנִי קֹהֵלֶת הָיִיתִי מֶלֶךְ עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל בִּירוּשָׁלַם

*"I am Kōheles, I was King over Israel in Jerusalem."
(1:12)*

The message here is told through the phrase "*I was.*" King Solomon tells us that he was King and that he wasn't overcome with the emotion of modernity. He tells us this so we should heed his words. This verse qualifies him, and he in turn qualifies his teachings.

PLEASURE UNMASKED

וְנִתְּתִי אֶת־לְבִי לְדְרוֹשׁ וְלִתּוֹר בְּחִכְמָה עַל כָּל־
 אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם הוּא | עֲנִין רָע נָתַן
 אֱלֹהִים לְבְנֵי הָאָדָם לְעֲנוֹת בּוֹ

“And I applied my heart to inquire and search with wisdom on all that is performed under the heaven; it is an evil matter God gave to the sons of man to afflict him.” (1:13)

If one searches all physical pleasures (“*under the heaven*”) wisdom unveils how dissatisfying¹² these things are. That is one¹³ reason it is an evil matter. As King Solomon used his keen intelligence to examine the phenomenon of man engaging assumed pleasures, he exposed the fallacies with which typical men delude themselves as valuable and pleasurable, bringing about the *affliction* described in this verse.

12) Pleasures are dissatisfying when sought as an ends, as King Solomon states herein. But when engaged as part of the Torah lifestyle, in proper measure and at proper times, the physical world does offer pleasure and satisfaction. These are the real pleasures, in contrast to man’s many fantasies that lead to frustration.

13) Another “affliction” is mentioned in the chapter entitled *Wisdom* (p 68): “Man’s task to search out a philosophy is something which is an evil matter because man has no natural means which tell him how to live.”

KNOWLEDGE IS PAIN

כִּי בְרַב חִכְמָה רַב־כָּעַס
וְיִוְסִיף דַּעַת יוְסִיף מְכָאוֹב

“For in much wisdom there is much anger; and he that increases knowledge, increases sorrow.” (1:18)

When man gains knowledge, he realizes that which he considered as enjoyable, truly provides no pleasure. Thereby, he loses those enjoyments.

Man possesses many faculties and attitudes, including wishes and his rational element, his intellect. Once man rationally unveils his wishes as empty pursuits, he becomes depressed. For example, the enjoyment of sports is the measuring of perfection of a useless art. Once man sees this enjoyment is truly foolish, he loses that desire. He realizes these “sport abilities” don’t serve any real purpose in enjoying life. “Ignorance is bliss.” That is, bliss remains until wisdom exposes the pursuit as foolish. Man thereby loses what he felt was pleasurable, resulting in anger and sorrow. Anger is aroused because increased knowledge removes the imagined pleasure, resulting in a desire to change this situation. Anger is the emotional expression of man unsuccessfully attempting to change an intolerable reality.

INTOXICATION

אִמַּרְתִּי אֲנִי בְּלִבִּי לָכֶּה־נָא אֲנִסְכָּה בְּשִׂמְחָה
וְרֵאָה בְּטוֹב וְהִנֵּה גַם־הוּא הַבֶּל

“And I said in my heart, ‘I will go now and gladden myself with wine and experience the good’. And behold, it too is futile.” (2:1)

King Solomon realized the imagined pleasures were not enjoyable. His next attempt to find fulfillment was intoxication. His plan was to escape reality by putting himself in a state where the critical faculty¹⁴ would not function. But this too he calls futile. The next verse explains why.

LAUGHTER & MIRTH

לְשִׁחֹק אִמַּרְתִּי מֵהוֹלֵל וְלְשִׂמְחָה מֵה־זֶה עֲשֵׂה

“I said of laughter, it is mad; and of mirth, what does it achieve?” (2:2)

King Solomon recognized that the need for accomplishment interferes with enjoyments. This explains why people cannot

14) Man’s intellect and conscience impress values on him, which intoxication weakens, causing man to be less critical in his judgments, and actions.

sustain a lifestyle of endless partying; it results in nothing, frustrating man's innate need for accomplishment. The words "*what does it achieve?*" teach that a person has a need for accomplishment and that these attitudes and pursuits don't offer that fulfillment.

Rashi holds that there are three attacks on the life of drinking and laughter: 1) once you block out reality through drunkenness, you harm yourself: "*this too is futile*"; 2) the need for accomplishment forces man to anticipate whether his chosen lifestyle will lead to success, and when man sees no accomplishments due to his drinking, which derails his progress, he despises this life: "*and of mirth, what does it achieve?*"; and 3) "*I said of laughter, it is mad*" is the reaction to an attempt at playing with reality so as not to deal with stark reality. The joke or laughter cannot exist without the pain of reality. A joke will last only as long as the pain in reality lasts. Once the pain is gone, there's nothing to escape from. So the enjoyment of the laughter is not a pure enjoyment. It's only a negation of pain.

COMBINED PURSUITS

תַּרְתִּי בְּלִבִּי לְמִשׁוֹךְ בֵּינָן אֶת־בְּשָׂרִי וְלִבִּי נָהַג
 בְּחִכְמָה וְלֶאֱחֹז בְּסִכְלוֹת עַד אֲשֶׁר־אֶרְאֶה אִי־
 זֶה טוֹב לְבָנֵי הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשׂוּ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם
 מִסְפֵּר יְמֵי חַיֵּיהֶם

“I sought in my heart to give myself to wine, yet guiding my heart with wisdom and to seize folly, until I might see which is good for the sons of men that they should do under the heavens the number of the days of their lives.” (2:3)

The King realized that wisdom and drink were not enjoyable lifestyles. Knowledge fails to offer happiness, for it exposes the enjoyments as unenjoyable. And drinking fails to offer happiness because it denies the satisfaction of one’s desires.¹⁵

So, he now tries to embrace both, adding folly as well. King Solomon concludes to make a compromise. But the compromise isn’t the end of the line, because we see the King says, *“until I might see which is good.”* These words refer to analytical wisdom as opposed to the wisdom where you mainly keep yourself in a state where the emotions won’t take over and subdue one’s self. King Solomon realizes that this path too will yield unhappiness. But there is one more possibility: the life of the instincts in their sophisticated form, i.e., “sophistication.” This was the next trial, *“to seize folly.”*

15) Man is incapacitated while drunk. In that state, he cannot attain desires or basic needs.

SOPHISTICATION

הַגְדִּילְתִּי מַעֲשֵׂי בְנֵיתִי לִי בָתִּים נִטְעַתִּי לִי כָרְ-
מִים עָשִׂיתִי לִי גִנוֹת וּפְרִדִּסִּים וְנִטְעַתִּי בָהֶם
עֵץ כָּל־פְּרִי עָשִׂיתִי לִי בְרִכּוֹת מַיִם לְהַשְׁקוֹת
מֵהֶם יַעַר צוֹמַח יַעֲצִים
קִנִּיתִי עֲבָדִים וְשִׁפְחוֹת וּבְנֵי־בֵית הָיָה לִי גַם
מִקְנֵה בָקָר וְצֹאן הַרְבֵּה הָיָה לִי
מִכֹּל שֶׁהָיוּ לְפָנַי בִּירוּשָׁלַם
כְּנַסְתִּי לִי גַם־כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב וְסִגְלַת מְלָכִים וְהֶמְ-
דִּינוֹת עָשִׂיתִי לִי שָׂרִים וְשִׁרֹת וְתַעֲנָנוֹת בְּנֵי
הָאָדָם שָׂדֵה וְשִׂדּוֹת

"I made great works for myself; I built houses; I planted vineyards. I made gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kinds of fruits. I made pools of water, to water with it a forest of growing trees. I acquired servants and maidens, and household members; also I had great possessions of herds and flocks, more than all who were in Jerusalem before me. I gathered also silver and gold, and the treasure of kings and of the provinces; I set for myself servants and maid servants, and the delight of men, chariots and wagons." (2:4-8)

These five verses describe the King's degree of indulgence, silencing any doubt of whether he truly attempted to enjoy the luxuries and sophistications that wealth offers. He intended to leave no stone unturned in his exploration of happiness.

WEALTH

וְגִדְלֹתַי וְהוֹסַפְתִּי מִכָּל שֶׁהָיָה לְפָנַי בִּירוּשָׁלַם
 אֶף חֵכְמַתִּי עִמָּדָה לִי

“And I was great, and increased more than all whom preceded me in Jerusalem; but my wisdom remained with me.” (2:9)

“...but my wisdom remained with me” means that King Solomon retained his objectivity, despite the blinding self image of prestige that successful men fancy themselves.

The Rabbis say this refers to the wisdom he learned with anger.¹⁶ The reason why אַף (anger) is necessary here is due to the overpowering emotion to cave to the feeling of sophistication.¹⁷ Anger was needed to overpower this emotion.

Maimonides says that one cannot acquire Torah through laziness; learning must be through energetic attempts.

16) A play on the word אַף which can mean “but” or “anger.”

17) Anger helps one strengthen his intellect over his emotions. This is treated at length in the chapter entitled *The Psyche & Perfection*, p 95.

INDULGENCE

וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר שָׁאָלוּ עֵינַי לֹא אֶצְלָתִי מֵהֶם
לֹא־מָנַעְתִּי אֶת־לִבִּי מִכָּל־שִׂמְחָה
כִּי־לִבִּי שִׂמַּח מִכָּל־עֲמָלִי
וְזֶה־הָיָה חֶלְקִי מִכָּל־עֲמָלִי

*“And whatever my eyes desired I kept not from them;
I did not restrain my heart from any joy, for my heart
rejoiced in all my labor, and this was my portion of all
my labor.” (2:10)*

“...for my heart rejoiced in all my labor” means that King Solomon enjoyed the labor; it satisfied the real need for accomplishment. But mere possession of products and wealth provided no enjoyment.¹⁸

SOPHISTICATION

וּפְנִיתִי אֲנִי בְּכָל־מַעֲשֵׂי שְׁעָשׂוּ יָדַי וּבְעָמַל
שְׁעַמְלָתִי לַעֲשׂוֹת וְהִנֵּה הַכֹּל הֶבֶל וְרַעוֹת רוּחַ
וְאִין יִתְרוֹן תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ

18) When man labors towards a goal, there is happiness in the process of accomplishing. Man's natural ambition is being satisfied. But subsequent to completing his labors, the mere possession of his products does not satisfy any innate psychological need. This is contrary to the popular view that possessions afford man real satisfaction. Happiness occurs only when a real need is addressed, and not when one chases fantasies.

“Then I looked at all the works that my hands had done, and at the labor that I had labored to do; and, behold, all was futile and a vexation of spirit, and there was nothing additional under the sun.” (2:11)

After King Solomon acquired servants, a household, luxurious living, cultivated landscapes, vehicles, wealth and other amenities of the rich and sophisticated lifestyle, he was depressed. This is because sophistication is man’s removal from the instincts. The King calls this sophistication “*futile and a vexation of spirit*.” Futile, because there is nothing in life to substantiate this feeling of importance. A “*vexation of spirit*” means depression. Since the instincts are being thwarted and are not being satisfied, this results in frustration.¹⁹ Feeling important stems from the need²⁰ for importance, and not from reality.

“Then I looked at all the works that my hands had done.” The labors were depressing, empty and not realistic. When a person involves himself in a worthless pursuit such as trying to be the successful businessman, his reality principle knows this to be false; it is a facade. But he must suppress this reality. And once there is a suppression, there is naturally an unsatisfied part existing within him. Thus, he will be unhappy.

19) A sophisticate restrains his base drives, acting with refined mannerism such as formal dining etiquette learned in finishing schools. Man’s base instinct is to eat without restraint, freely satisfying the appetitive drive. But when this drive is restrained in order to appear refined in company, that drive undergoes frustration.

20) A need of the ego. Ego is an essential psychological component, and has its place in a Torah lifestyle. But often, man satisfies his ego drive in a futile or destructive fashion. Thus, many needs should not be satisfied as man typically wishes.

This ends Rabbi Chait's initial lectures from the early 1970s. The following chapters are lectures from 1986 and 1987 which include further insights on the first chapter and address most of the remaining chapters of Kobeles.

Part II: Contradictions
INTRODUCTION

The problems with Koheles are due to the contradictory²¹ nature of the book: many verses conflict with others. The purpose of the following lectures is to show the underlying philosophy of Koheles. King Solomon hides his philosophy within the contradiction, but the solutions lie right next to the contradictions. He discusses knowledge, happiness, success, justice, ethics and least mentioned, *Olam Haba*, the Afterlife. In all topics, the solutions are interspersed.

Verses will be followed by summaries, isolating the succinct message of each verse. This method of presentation will help the reader grasp the precise contradictions.

Part III will provide resolutions.

21) Rabbi Chait explained that King Solomon employed contradictions in order to keep the ideas hidden for the wise men to discern. Perhaps the use of apparent contradictions is the King's method of enabling this discernment. Mere facts do not engage the mind. But when the wise reader detects statements like "wisdom is pain," and then reads "nothing compares to wisdom," he is driven to resolve the contradiction. Primarily, he must determine if wisdom is a benefit or not. Once he determines its benefit, he must interpret the other verse explaining "when and why" wisdom is pain. Uncovering the verse's clues, he derives what considerations render wisdom to partake of contradictory values, resolving the contradiction. The reader then arrives at the intended lesson, which would be lost, had he not been prodded to resolve a contradiction.

KNOWLEDGE

וְנִתְּתִי אֶת־לְבִי לְדָרוֹשׁ וְלִתְּוֹר בְּחִכְמָה עַל כָּל־
 אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם הוּא | עֲנִין רַע נָתַן
 אֱלֹהִים לְבָנֵי הָאָדָם לְעִנּוֹת בּוֹ

“And I applied my heart to inquire and search with wisdom on all that is performed under the heaven; it is an evil matter God gave to the sons of man to afflict him.” (1:13)

If knowledge is evil, why does he engage it? A contradiction.

כִּי בְּרַב חִכְמָה רַב־כָּעַס

וְיֹסִיף דַּעַת יֹסִיף מְכָאוֹב

“For in much wisdom there is much anger, and he that increases knowledge increases sorrow.” (1:18)

Wisdom results in pain.

הַחֶכֶם עֵינָיו בְּרֹאשׁוֹ וְהַפְּסִיל בַּחֲשֵׁף הוֹלֵךְ

וַיִּדְעֵתִי גַם־אֲנִי שֶׁמִּקְרָה אֶחָד יִקְרָה אֶת־כֻּלָּם

“The wise man’s eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness; and I myself perceived also that one event happens to them all.” (2:14)

Even though wisdom is good—“eyes are in his head”—you end

up the same as a fool. Wisdom does not shield the wise man from death.

כִּי מִהֵיּוֹתֵר לְחָכָם מִן־הַכָּסִיל
מִה־לָּעֲנִי יוֹדַע לְהֵלֵךְ נֶגֶד הַחַיִּים

*“For what advantage has the wise man over the fool?
What has the poor man who knows how to walk among
the living?” (6:8)*

There is no advantage in being a wise person.

הַחֲכָמָה תַּעֲזֹ לְחָכָם מִעֲשָׂרָה שְׁלִיטִים
אֲשֶׁר הֵיוּ בָעִיר

*“Wisdom strengthens the wise more than ten rulers who
are in the city.” (7:19)*

Now King Solomon contradicts himself, saying wisdom is strength.

מִי־כֶהָחָכָם וּמִי יוֹדַע פֶּשֶׁר דְּבָר
חֲכָמַת אָדָם תֵּאִיר פָּנָיו וְעַז פָּנָיו יִשְׁנֶא

*“Who is like the wise man and who knows the meaning
of a matter? A man’s wisdom makes his face shine, and
the boldness of his face is changed.” (8:1)*

Wisdom is incomparable.

דְּבַרֵי חֲכָמִים כְּדֶרְבֵּנוֹת וְכַמְשֻׁמְרוֹת נְטוּעִים
בְּעֵלֵי אֶסְפוֹת נִתְּנוּ מִרְעָה אֶחָד

“The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings, which are given by one shepherd.” (12:11)

The words of a wise man are unshakable, like hammered nails. They cannot be uprooted; they are true.

דְּבַרְתִּי אֲנִי עִם־לְבִי לֵאמֹר אֲנִי הִנֵּה הִגַּדְתִּי
וְהוֹסַפְתִּי חֲכָמָה עַל כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־הִיָּה לְפָנַי עַל־
יְרוּשָׁלַם וְלְבִי רָאָה הַרְבֵּה חֲכָמָה וְדַעַת

“...and my heart has seen much of wisdom and knowledge.” (1:16)

I saw much knowledge, it is a value.

כָּל־זֶה נִסִּיתִי בְּחֲכָמָה אֲמַרְתִּי אֶחְכָּמָה וְהִיא
רְחוֹקָה מִמֶּנִּי

“All this have I proved by wisdom; I said, I will be wise; but it was far from me.” (7:23)

He is in contradiction even with his personal knowledge.

HAPPINESS

הַבֵּל הַבָּלִים אָמַר קִהְלֵת הַבֵּל הַבָּלִים הַכֹּל
הַבֵּל מִהֵי־תְרוֹן לָאָדָם בְּכָל־עֲמָלוֹ שִׁיעֲמֹל
תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ דּוֹר הַלֵּךְ וְדוֹר בָּא וְהָאָרֶץ
לְעוֹלָם עֹמֶדֶת

“Vanity of vanities, said Koheles, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What gains a man from all his labor at which he labors under the sun? One generation passes away, and another generation comes; but the earth abides for ever.” (1:2-4)

There is no happiness; all is futile.

כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים יִגְעִים לֹא־יִוָּכַל אִישׁ לְדַבֵּר לֹא־
תִּשְׂבַּע עֵין לְרֵאוֹת וְלֹא־תִמְלֵא אָזֶן מִשְׁמָעַת

“All things are wearisome; man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled from hearing.” (1:8)

There is no satisfaction.

אָמַרְתִּי אֲנִי בְּלִבִּי לְכֹה־נָא אֲנִסְכָּה בְּשִׂמְחָה
וְרֵאָה בְּטוֹב וְהִנֵּה גִס־הוּא הַבֵּל

“I said in my heart, ‘Come now, I will try you with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure’; and, behold, this also is vanity.” (2:1)

I tried to be happy, but it is nonsense and impossible.

גַּם כָּל־הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר נָתַן־לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים עֹשֶׁר
וּנְכָסִים וְהַשְׁלִיטוֹ לֶאֱכֹל מִמֶּנּוּ וְלִשְׂאת אֶת־
חֻלְקוֹ וְלִשְׂמֹחַ בְּעִמְלּוֹ זֶה מַתַּת אֱלֹהִים הִיא
כִּי לֹא הִרְבֵּה יִזְכֵּר אֶת־יְמֵי חַיָּיו כִּי הָאֱלֹהִים
מַעֲנֶה בְּשִׂמְחַת לְבָבוֹ

“Every man also to whom God has given riches and wealth, and has given him power to eat of it, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God. For he shall not much remember the days of his life, in which God provides him with the joy of his heart.” (5:18,19)

If a person has his needs, he is happy. But in verse 5:19 King Solomon says that one won't remember the days of his life. He contradicts verse 5:17, *“...enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun during the number of the days, which God gave him.”*

אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִתֶּן־לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים עֹשֶׁר וּנְכָסִים
וְכָבוֹד וְאִינְנוּ חָסֵר לְנַפְשׁוֹ | מִכֹּל אֲשֶׁר־יִתְּאֹנֶה
וְלֹא־יִשְׁלִיטֵנוּ הָאֱלֹהִים לֶאֱכֹל מִמֶּנּוּ כִּי אִישׁ
נָכָרִי יֵאָכְלֵנוּ זֶה הֶבֶל וְחֻלִּי רָע הוּא

“A man to whom God has given riches, wealth, and honor, so that he lacks nothing for his soul of all that he desires, yet God does not give him power to eat of it, but a stranger eats it; this is vanity, and it is an evil disease.” (6:2)

There is no satisfaction.

טוֹב לְלֶכֶת אֶל־בֵּית־אֵבֶל מִלֶּכֶת אֶל־בֵּית
מִשְׁתֶּה בְּאִשֶּׁר הוּא סוֹף כָּל־הָאָדָם
וְהַחַי יִתֵּן אֶל־לִבּוֹ

לֵב חֲכָמִים בְּבֵית אֵבֶל
וְלֵב כְּסִילִים בְּבֵית שִׂמְחָה

“It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting; for that is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to his heart.” (7:2)

“The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.” (7:4)

The reality of death diminishes pleasures.

וְשִׁבַּחְתִּי אֲנִי אֶת־הַשִּׂמְחָה אֲשֶׁר אֵין־טוֹב
לָאָדָם תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ כִּי אִם־לֶאֱכֹל וְלִשְׁתּוֹת
וְלִשְׂמוֹחַ וְהוּא יִלְוֶנוּ בְּעֵמְלוֹ יְמֵי חַיָּיו אֲשֶׁר־
נָתַן־לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ

“And I commended mirth, because a man has no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry; for this will go with him in his labor during the days of his life, which God gives him under the sun.” (8:15)

Eat, drink and be merry for this is happiness. He contradicts himself in other verses suggesting there is no happiness.

JUSTICE

אִמַּרְתִּי אֲנִי בְּלִבִּי אֶת־הַצְּדִיק וְאֶת־הָרָשָׁע
 יִשְׁפֹּט הָאֱלֹהִים כִּי־עַתָּה לְכָל־חֶפֶץ וְעַל כָּל
 הַמַּעֲשֵׂה שֵׁם

“I said in my heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked; for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work.” (3:17)

There is justice.

כִּי מִקְרָה בְּנִי־הָאָדָם וּמִקְרָה הַבְּהֵמָה
 וּמִקְרָה אֶחָד לָהֶם כָּמוֹת זֶה בֶּן מוֹת זֶה
 וְרוּחַ אֶחָד לְכָל וּמוֹתֵר הָאָדָם מִן־הַבְּהֵמָה אֵין
 כִּי הַכֹּל הֶבֶל

“For that which befalls the sons of men befalls beasts; one thing befalls them both; as the one dies, so dies the other; they have all one breath so that a man has no preeminence above a beast, for all is vanity.” (3:19)

Man is equal to animal. Where is the justice?

וּשְׁבַתִּי אֲנִי וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת־כָּל־הָעֹשִׂים אֲשֶׁר
 נַעֲשִׂים תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהִנֵּה | דְּמַעַת הָעֹשִׂים
 וְאֵין לָהֶם מִנְחָם וּמִיַּד עֹשְׂקֵיהֶם כָּח
 וְאֵין לָהֶם מִנְחָם

“So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun, and behold, the tears of such as were oppressed. And they had no comforter, and on the side of their oppressors there was power, but they had no comforter.” (4:1)

No justice for the oppressed.

יִשְׁהַבֵּל אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה עַל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר | יֵשׁ
צַדִּיקִים אֲשֶׁר מִגִּיעַ אֲלֵהֶם כְּמַעֲשֵׂה הַרְשָׁעִים
וַיֵּשׁ רְשָׁעִים שֶׁמִּגִּיעַ אֲלֵהֶם כְּמַעֲשֵׂה הַצַּדִּיקִים
אָמַרְתִּי שְׁגִם־זֶה הַבָּל

“There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there are just men, to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked; again, there are wicked men, to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity.” (8:14)

There is no justice.

כִּי אֶת־כָּל־מַעֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים יָבֵא בְּמִשְׁפַּט עַל
כָּל־נֶעְלָם אִם־טוֹב וְאִם־רָע

“For God shall bring every deed into judgment, with every hidden thing, whether it is good, or whether it is evil.” (12:14)

Every action is judged. There is justice; a contradiction.

ETHICS

תִּרְתִּי בְּלִבִּי לְמִשׁוֹךְ בֵּינִי אֶת־בְּשָׂרִי וְלִבִּי נִהַג
 בְּחִכְמָה וְלֹאֲחֹז בְּסִכְלוֹת עַד אֲשֶׁר־אֶרְאֶה אִי
 זֶה טוֹב לְבְנֵי הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשׂוּ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם
 מִסֵּפֶר יְמֵי חַיֵּיהֶם

“I sought in my heart to give myself to wine, yet guiding my heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, until I might see what was good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life.” (2:3)

One should follow a life of folly.

אַל־תִּהְיֶי צַדִּיק הַרְבֵּה וְאַל־תִּתְחַכֵּם יוֹתֵר לָמָּה
 תִּשׁוּמֶם אַל־תִּרְשַׁע הַרְבֵּה וְאַל־תִּהְיֶי סָכָל
 לָמָּה תָמוּת בְּלֹא עֵתְךָ

“Do not be too righteous; nor make yourself too wise; why should you destroy yourself? Do not be too wicked, nor be foolish; why should you die before your time?” (7:16,17)

Do not be too righteous or too foolish, but partake of both.

This conflicts with the previous verse.

SUCCESS

מה־יִתְרוֹן הָעוֹשֶׂה בְּאִשֶּׁר הוּא עֹמֵל

“What gains has he who works, in that in which he labors.” (3:9)

There is no benefit in labor.

וְגַם־זוּה רָעָה חוֹלָה כָּל־עֵמֶת שֶׁבָּא בֶן יֵלֶךְ
וּמֵה־יִתְרוֹן לוֹ שִׁיעֵמֵל לְרוּחַ

“And this also is a grievous evil, that inasmuch as he came, so shall he go; and what gains has he who has labored for the wind.” (5:15)

What is the purpose of working?

וְשִׁנְאַתִּי אֲנִי אֶת־כָּל־עֹמְלֵי שְׂאֲנֵי עֹמֵל תַּחַת
הַשָּׁמַיִם שֶׁאֲנִיחֵנוּ לָאָדָם שִׁיְהִיָּה אַחֲרַי
וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ הַחֲכָם יְהִיָּה אוֹ סֶכֶל וַיִּשְׁלַט בְּכָל־
עֹמְלֵי שְׁעֵמֶלְתִּי וְשִׁחַכְמֹתַי תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם
גַּם־זוּה הֶבֶל וְסִבּוֹתַי אֲנִי לִיֵּאֵשׁ אֶת־לִבִּי עַל
כָּל־הָעֹמֵל שְׁעֵמֶלְתִּי תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם
כִּי־יֵשׁ אָדָם שֶׁעֹמְלוֹ בְּחֲכָמָה וּבְדַעַת וּבְכִשְׁרוֹן
וּלְאָדָם שֶׁלֹּא עֹמְלִבּוֹ יִתְנַנּוּ חֲלָקוֹ גַּם־זוּה הֶבֶל
וְרָעָה רַבָּה

אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִתֶּן־לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים עֶשֶׂר וּנְכֹסִים

וְכָבוֹד וְאִינְנוּ חָסֵר לְנַפְשׁוֹ | מִכֹּל אֲשֶׁר־יִתְּאֶוֶה
 וְלֹא־יִשְׁלִיטֵנוּ הָאֱלֹהִים לְאָכֹל מִמֶּנּוּ כִּי אִישׁ
 נִכְרִי יֵאכְלֵנוּ זֶה הֶבֶל וְחָלִי רָע הוּא

“And I hated all my labor which I had taken under the sun because I should leave it to the man that shall be after me. And who knows whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? Yet, he shall have rule over all my labor in which I have labored, and in which I have showed myself wise under the sun. This also is vanity. Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labor which I took under the sun. For there is a man whose labor is with wisdom, and with knowledge, and with skill. Yet, to a man that has not labored in it shall he leave it for his portion. This also is vanity and a great evil.” (2:18-21)

“A man to whom God has given riches, wealth, and honor, so that he lacks nothing for his soul of all that he desires. Yet, God does not give him power to eat of it, but a stranger eats it; this is vanity, and it is an evil disease.” (6:2)

A person works and leaves it to another. Labor is futile.

וּפְנִיתִי אָנִי בְּכָל־מַעֲשֵׂי שֶׁעָשׂוּ יְדֵי וּבַעֲמָל
 שֶׁעָמַלְתִּי לַעֲשׂוֹת וְהִנֵּה הֶבֶל וְרַעוּת רוּחַ
 וְאִין יִתְרוֹן תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַשׁ

“Then I looked at all the works that my hands had done, and at the labor that I had labored to do, and

behold, all was vanity and a stressful spirit, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.” (2:11)

All my work is useless; it provided no gain.

טוב שם משמון טוב ויום המות מיום הנלדו

“A good name is better than precious oil; and the day of death than the day of one’s birth.” (7:1)

Of what use is a good name, as I won’t be around to experience this?

בִּימֵי אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר [יִחְבֵּר] אֶל כָּל־הַחַיִּים יֵשׁ
בְּטָחוֹן כִּי־לְכָל־בַּיִת חַי הוּא טוֹב מִן־הָאֲרִיָּה הַמֵּת

“For to him who is joined to all the living there is hope; for a living dog is better than a dead lion.” (9:4)

This means that success is limited by death. The very concept of success is ludicrous because it is inherently limited.

AFTERLIFE & IMMORTALITY

מִי יוֹדֵעַ רוּחַ בְּנֵי הָאָדָם הַעֹלָה הִיא לְמַעַלָּה
וְרוּחַ הַבְּהֵמָה הַיֹּרֶדֶת הִיא לְמַטָּה לְאָרֶץ

*“Who knows [whether] the spirit of man goes upward
and the spirit of the beast that goes downward to the
earth?” (3:21)*

One occurrence happens to man and animal. Everything came from the Earth and everything returns to the Earth. Most men don't know what's going to happen after death.

וְרָאִיתִי כִּי אֵין טוֹב מֵאֲשֶׁר יִשְׂמַח הָאָדָם
בְּמַעֲשָׂיו כִּי־הוּא חֵלְקוֹ כִּי מִי יְבִיאֵנוּ לְרֵאוֹת
בְּמָה שִׁיְהִי אַחֲרָיו

*“So I saw that there is nothing better, than that a man
should rejoice in his work for that is his portion. For
who can bring him to see what shall be after him?”
(3:22)*

One might as well enjoy this world. Man's earthly existence is praised over death.

כֹּל אֲשֶׁר תִּמְצָא יָדְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּכַחַד עֲשֵׂה כִּי
אֵין מַעֲשֵׂה וְחִשְׁבוֹן וְדַעַת וְחִכְמָה בְּשֵׂאוֹל
אֲשֶׁר אֶתָּה הַלֵּךְ שָׁמָּה

“Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your strength, for there is no work, nor scheme, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave to which you are going.”
(9:10)

The afterlife doesn't exist. Not only is there no physical, but no intelligence as well.

Chapter 12 deals with man's deterioration. Man reaches a point where he doesn't desire life. The city deteriorating is a metaphor for man:

וּזְכֹר אֶת־בּוֹרְאֶיךָ בְיָמֶיךָ בְּחַוְרֹתֶיךָ עַד אֲשֶׁר לֹא־
יָבֹאוּ יָמֶיךָ הָרְעָה וְהִגִּיעוּ שָׁנִים אֲשֶׁר תֹּאמַר אֵיךְ־
לִי בָהֶם חֶפֶץ עַד אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תַחֲשֶׁף הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ
וְהָאֹר וְהַיָּרֵחַ וְהַכּוֹכָבִים וְשָׁבוּ הָעֵבִים אַחֵר
הַגִּשְׁמִים בְּיוֹם שִׁיזְעוּ שְׁמֵרֵי הַבַּיִת וְהִתְעֹנְתוּ
אֲנָשֵׁי הַחֵיל וּבָטְלוּ הַטְּחָנוֹת כִּי מַעֲטוּ וְחָשׂוּ־
כּו הָרָאוֹת בְּאַרְבּוֹת וְסָגְרוּ דְלֹתַיִם בְּשׁוֹק
בְּשֹׁפֵל קוֹל הַטְּחָנָה וַיִּקּוּם לְקוֹל הַצִּפּוֹר וַיִּשְׁחֹ
כָּל־בְּנוֹת הַשִּׁיר גַּם מִגְבֵּה יִרְאוּ וְחִתְּחֹ־
תַיִם בַּדְרֹךְ וַיִּנְאֹץ הַשֶּׁקֶד וַיִּסְתַּבֵּל הַחֶגֶב וְתִפֹּר
הָאֲבִיוֹנָה כִּי־הִלֵּךְ הָאָדָם אֶל־בַּיִת עוֹלָמוֹ וְסָבְבוּ
בְּשׁוֹק הַסּוֹפְדִים עַד אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִרְחַק
[יִרְתַּק] חֶבֶל הַכֶּסֶף וְתַרְץ גֶּלֶת הַזָּהָב וְתִשְׁבֹּר
כַּד עַל־הַמְבוּעַ וְנָרַץ הַגִּלְגָּל אֶל־הַבּוֹר וַיֵּשֶׁב
הָעֶפֶר עַל־הָאָרֶץ כְּשֶׁהָיָה וְהָרוּחַ תָּשׁוּב אֶל־
הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר נָתַנָּה

“Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come, and the years draw near, when you shall say, I have no pleasure in them. Before the sun, and the light, and the moon, and the stars are darkened, and the clouds return after the rain. In the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those who look out of the windows are dimmed. And the doors are shut on the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low. Also when they are afraid of that which is high, and fears are in the way, and the almond tree blossoms, and the grasshopper drags itself along, and desire fails; because man goes to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets. Before the silver cord is removed²², or the golden bowl is broken²³, or the pitcher is broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. And the dust returns to the earth as it was and the spirit returns to God who gave it.” (12:1-7)

But in verse 12:7 he says the spirit returns to God, indicating that he does believe in the Afterlife. A contradiction.

In summary, King Solomon appears to contradict himself on matters of knowledge, ethics, happiness, justice, success and the afterlife. In the following chapters, Rabbi Chait resolves many of these apparent contradictions and lectures on numerous themes throughout Koheles. At times, the resolutions are brief and even a single sentence, which suffice to resolve the contradiction or present a concept. Other times, when necessary, the resolutions will be more elaborate.

22) A metaphor for the spinal cord (Rashi)

23) The male organ (Rashi)

Part III: Contradictions Resolved
KNOWLEDGE

כֹּל אֲשֶׁר תִּמְצָא יָדְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּכַחַךְ עֲשֵׂה כִּי
אֵין מַעֲשֵׂה וְחִשְׁבוֹן וְדַעַת וְחִכְמָה בְּשֵׂאוֹל
אֲשֶׁר אֶתָּה הַלֵּךְ שָׁמָּה

*“Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your strength; for there is no work, nor scheme, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave to which you are going.”
(9:10)*

The King does not reject the Afterlife. He means that man’s fantasy of what knowledge will afford him doesn’t exist in the grave, for man’s fantasies are attached to his earthly existence. When he realizes his mortality, he devalues knowledge, since knowledge was viewed as a means to immortality: mortality devalues knowledge. Verse 2:15 echoes this idea, “*Then said I in my heart, ‘As it happens to the fool, so it happens even to me, and why was I then more wise?’ Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity.*” Meaning, this sentiment is spoken only by one who views wisdom as a tool for earthly objectives. Since knowledge does not procure his immortality, he questions the value of knowledge. The King is echoing the foolish man who despises wisdom once he realizes it doesn’t save him from the grave. Again, the King is not voicing his opinion, but that of the fool. This contradiction is resolved.

כִּי בְרַב חִכְמָה רַב־כָּעַס
וַיִּוְסִיף דַּעַת יוֹסִיף מִכְּאוֹב

“For in much wisdom there is much grief; and he that increases knowledge increases sorrow.” (1:18)

The more reality man sees, the more he recognizes he can't be happy with what he desired. His desires are exposed as useless, or incapable of providing the fantasies he sought, like immortality or prestige. But this is not a rejection of wisdom. It is a commentary on the foolish man who finally wakes up.

מִי־כִהְיֶה חָכֶם וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ פֶּשֶׁר דְּבַר חִכְמַת אָדָם
תִּאֲיֵר פָּנָיו וְעַז פָּנָיו יִשְׁנֶא

“Who is like the wise man and who knows the meaning of a matter? A man's wisdom makes his face shine, and the boldness of his face is changed.” (8:1)

King Solomon's personal view: nothing compares to wisdom.

HAPPINESS

וּשְׂבַחְתִּי אֲנִי אֶת־הַשְּׂמֵחָה אֲשֶׁר אֵין־טוֹב
לְאָדָם תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ כִּי אִם־לֶאֱכֹל וְלִשְׁתּוֹת
וְלִשְׂמוֹחַ וְהוּא יִלְוֶנוּ בְּעֵמְלוֹ יְמֵי חַיָּו אֲשֶׁר־
נִתְּנוּ הָאֱלֹהִים תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ

“And I commended mirth, because a man has no better thing under the sun than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry; for this will go with him in his labor during the days of his life²⁴, which God gives him under the sun.”
(8:15)

Man must partake of a happy existence.

אֶת־הַכֹּל עָשָׂה יָפָה בְּעֵתוֹ גַּם אֶת־הָעֹלָם נָתַן
בְּלִבָּם מִבְּלֵי אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִמְצָא הָאָדָם אֶת
הַמְּעֵשָׂה אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה הָאֱלֹהִים מִרֵאשׁ וְעַד־סוֹף
יִדְעֵתִי כִי אֵין טוֹב בָּם כִּי אִם־לִשְׂמוֹחַ וְלַעֲשׂוֹת
טוֹב בְּחַיָּו וְגַם כָּל־הָאָדָם שִׂיאֵכֹל וְשִׂתָּה
וְרָאָה טוֹב בְּכָל־עֵמְלוֹ מִתַּת אֱלֹהִים הִיא

“He has made every thing beautiful in his time; also he has set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work which God has made from the beginning to the end. I know that there is nothing better for

24) Notice that the King repeats “his life.” This stresses that the real enjoyments “during” life are worthwhile. As those are matters actually enjoyed—they are not fantasies. In contrast, an immortal fantasy like leaving wealth to another cannot be realized. For man is gone at the moment his wealth is bequeathed: *“And who knows whether he shall be a wise man or a fool, yet he shall have rule over all my labor in which I have labored (2:19).”*

them, than to rejoice, and to do good in his life. And also that it is the gift of God that every man should eat and drink, and see the good of all his labor.” (3:11-13)

The only way to enjoy life is to abandon the fantasy of immortality. Then, man can value the here and now. One’s happiness should be without ego satisfaction, “*the gift of God.*”²⁵

וְרָאִיתִי כִּי אֵין טוֹב מֵאֲשֶׁר יִשְׂמַח הָאָדָם בְּמֹ-
עֲשָׂיו כִּי־הוּא חֶלְקוֹ כִּי מִי יִבְיָאֵנוּ לְרִאוֹת בְּמָה
שִׁיְהִיָּה אַחֲרָיו

“So I saw that there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his work; for that is his portion; for who can bring him to see what shall be after him (3:22)?”

Happiness should not be tied to what occurs afterwards.

JUSTICE

אִמַּרְתִּי אֲנִי בְלִבִּי אֶת־הַצְדִּיק וְאֶת־הַרְשָׁע
יִשְׁפֹּט הָאֱלֹהִים כִּי־עַת לְכֹל־חַפֵּץ וְעַל כָּל
הַמַּעֲשֵׂה שֵׁם

25) Only with this perspective does man free himself from his feeling of success, and can appreciate it as external to his accomplishments, a “gift.”

"I said in my heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked; for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work." (3:17)

God judges fairly.

וְשָׁבֹתִי אֲנִי וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת־כָּל־הָעֲשָׂקִים אֲשֶׁר
נַעֲשִׂים תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַשׁ וְהִנֵּה | דְּמַעַת הָעֲשָׂקִים
וְאִין לָהֶם מִנְחָם וּמִיַּד עֲשֻׁקֵיהֶם כַּח וְאִין לָהֶם
מִנְחָם

"So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun; and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter." (4:1)

There is injustice for the oppressed.

יִשְׁהַבֵּל אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה עַל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר | יֵשׁ
צַדִּיקִים אֲשֶׁר מִגִּיעַ אֲלֵהֶם כְּמַעֲשֵׂה הַרְשָׁעִים
וְיֵשׁ רְשָׁעִים שְׂמֹנִיעַ אֲלֵהֶם כְּמַעֲשֵׂה הַצַּדִּיקִים
אָמַרְתִּי שְׂגִם־זֶה הַבָּל

"There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there are just men, to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked; again, there are wicked men, to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous; I said that this also is vanity." (8:14)

The King seems to say there is no reward for righteous people. How do we answer these contradictions? Insofar as man views these questions from a material framework, he won't find an answer. Meaning, if one views "the good" as physical security, these verses support questions on God's justice.

However, the true good that God intends for man, and what man should value, is not temporal earthly life. True goodness is what affects our souls; our eternal element. Again we see how man's immortality fantasy tells him Earth is all that exists, so he values and devalues based on his assessment of his earthly successes, be it fortune, fame, or health.

רֵאֵה חַיִּים עִם־אִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר־אָהַבְתָּ כָּל־יְמֵי
 חַיֵּי הַבְּלָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַתְּ לָךְ תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ כֹּל יְמֵי
 הַבְּלָה כִּי הוּא חֶלְקְךָ בְּחַיִּים וּבְעֵמֶלְךָ אֲשֶׁר
 אָתָּה עֹמֵל תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ

"Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of the life of your vanity, which He has given you under the sun, all the days of your vanity for that is your portion in life, and in your labor in which you labor under the sun." (9:9)

If a person has the true ideas, no matter how little wealth he has and no matter what befalls him, he will be happy. Genuine happiness is derived from living in line with truth and appreciating God's wisdom. Some of the Rabbis were extremely

poor, but they were also extremely happy in their Torah lives. However, if man is tied to a physical life, he won't be happy. The Talmud²⁶ teaches that children, income, and one's lifespan aren't due to merits, but to chance.²⁷

The King had more knowledge than anyone. This refers to factual knowledge. But in terms of "feeling" smarter, he remarked, "*I said I would become wise, but it was far from me*" (7:23). When he tried to satisfy the emotion of attaining a self-image of a "wise man", it fell short. Like all fantasies, the reality must fall short of how we imagine we will feel. Fantasies are perfect; we concoct a flawless image in our minds. Then we add to the impossibility of attaining that fantasy, the additional feeling that the fantasy will endure endlessly. But reality cannot provide this.

The main idea of Koheles is a breakdown of the immortality fantasy. There are occurrences which ruin long-term plans and fantasies: "*...the righteous, and the wise, and their deeds, are in the hand of God...*" (9:11).

26) Moade Kattan 28a

27) The point being that man is not correct in questioning God's justice about these three matters, for they are not granted based on our righteousness. This explains why the Rabbis who lived in poverty didn't complain. Additionally, these matters cannot remove a person from pursuing true happiness through studying God's Torah and His universe; our true objective.

AFTERLIFE & IMMORTALITY

מִי יוֹדֵעַ רוּחַ בְּנֵי הָאָדָם הַעֹלָה הִיא לְמַעַלָּה
וְרוּחַ הַבְּהֵמָה הַיֹּרֶדֶת הִיא לְמַטָּה לְאָרֶץ

*“Who knows the spirit of man, that goes upward,
and the spirit of the beast that goes downward to the
Earth.” (3:21)*

The King did not say הַעֹלָה (ha-olah) “*if it goes up*”, which would question if the soul endures. Rather, he says הַעֲלָה (haw-olah) “*that goes up*.” Thus, the King was not questioning the truth of the Afterlife; he knew it was so.²⁸ He was saying “Which people are convinced in the truth of the Afterlife?” This is the meaning of “*Who knows the spirit of man, that goes upward...*” This removes the question of whether King Solomon believed in the Afterlife. He clearly affirms its truth.

וְרָאִיתִי כִּי אֵין טוֹב מֵאֲשֶׁר יִשְׂמַח הָאָדָם
בְּמַעֲשָׁיו כִּי־הוּא חֶלְקוֹ כִּי מִי יבִיאֵנוּ לְרִאוֹת
בְּמָה שִׁיְהִיָּה אַחֲרָיו

*“So I saw that there is nothing better, than that a man
should rejoice in his work; for that is his portion; for
who can bring him to see what shall be after him?”
(3:22)*

28) His intent is to say, “*Which men know the Afterlife is a truth?*” Meaning, the Afterlife is a reality, but so few men know of this, or live with this conviction.

One should be concerned with only the here and now, and not the Afterlife. In this verse, King Solomon depicts man's false view. Very few men have knowledge about the soul after death. The King means to say that man's fantasy of immortality causes this belief, that all man has is an earthly existence. This is not an opinion based on knowledge.²⁹

The King is not concerned merely with what the good is, but also with understanding human motivation. Here, man's fantasy of immortality motivates him to view his earthly existence as his only existence. Most men question the eternity of the soul. Again, the King was not questioning this. He means "Who among men know that the soul truly continues?" And based on this doubt among most men, verse 3:22 expresses their natural conclusion, "*...there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his work; for that is his portion...*"

King Solomon maintained that the most detrimental part of man is his ego, "אֵת הַיְהוָה עָלָם נָתַן בְּלִבָּם ; *Also the world He has placed in man's heart*" (3:11). This feeling prevents man from uncovering reality. The ego drive in man expresses itself through success, religion and knowledge. These are the ways through which man feels he will achieve immortality.

Man's nature and his relationships to his objectives are such, that he targets goals which cannot be achieved in reality. His

29) Many times in Koheles (3:19, 9:4, 9:7), King Solomon voices the opinion of the popular, and not his own opinion. Knowing this fact, we remove many questions. By voicing the popular (ignorant) view of mankind, he gains man's attention (for they think he will endorse their beliefs) thereby enabling man to hear his rejection of their unexamined views.

true objective is to attain immortality. That is why man is frustrated when he arrives at his goal: what he searched for doesn't exist.³⁰ He deluded himself as he aspired to achieve fame or riches. In truth, he harbored an underlying desire for immortality.³¹ Therefore, the riches cannot satisfy this fantasy, and he remains unhappy.

30) He is not immortal.

31) When, after decades of labor, man attains great wealth and fame, man is unsatisfied since these were not his true objectives. He was seeking immortality. Throughout life, he senses dissatisfaction and frustration, until in old age, he senses depression when he finally accepts his mortality.

Part IV: Themes of Koheles
PSYCHOLOGY

Ancient philosophers possessed true ideas, but they did not demonstrate how to incorporate these ideas into one's life. Koheles addresses not only philosophy, but also psychology. Without psychology, one cannot benefit from the ideas. An example is one whose immortality fantasy encompasses immortal earthly life and endless physical pleasures. He is not in the position to question why evil happens to good people. Understanding the psychology at play, we appreciate why this is so. The personality has distorted values, for he prioritizes the physical world. The good person who seems to be suffering from poverty may not see as much evil in his meager lifestyle as the one who prioritizes riches to attain his pleasures. Thus, by understanding psychology, we grasp the philosophical aspects of happiness and justice.

Why did King Solomon have to go through the experiences personally to attain his knowledge? Couldn't he have simply pondered? No. Without going through the actual experiences, he wouldn't have experienced the emotions' dynamics to intimately know how to battle them. King Solomon was the only individual who could immerse in the pleasures without them affecting him, *"...but my wisdom remained with me (2:9)."*

WISDOM

וְנִתַּתִּי אֶת־לִבִּי לְדָרוֹשׁ וְלִתּוֹר בְּחִכְמָה עַל כָּל־
 אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם הוּא | עֲנִין רַע נָתַן
 אֱלֹהִים לְבְנֵי הָאָדָם לְעֲנוֹת בּוֹ

“And I applied my heart to inquire and search with wisdom on all that is performed under the heaven; it is an evil matter God gave to the sons of man to afflict him.” (1:13)

If wisdom is an evil matter, why did King Solomon investigate with it? Man has a task to search out a philosophy by which to live. Other creatures possess instincts which naturally determine their actions. Man’s task to search out a philosophy is something which is an “evil” matter because man has no natural means which tell him how to live. He’s walking in the dark. *“For in much wisdom there is much grief; and he that increases knowledge increases sorrow” (1:18)*. Even the process itself is rough. The more knowledge, the more pain. Verse 1:13 says the undertaking of human investigation per se is a painful, and 1:18 deals with the pains of actual investigation.

וּפְנִיתִי אֲנִי לְרֵאוֹת חִכְמָה וְהוֹלִלוֹת וְסִכְלוֹת כִּי
 | מִה הָאָדָם שִׁיבוֹא אַחֲרֵי הַמְלֹךְ אֶת אֲשֶׁר־
 כָּבַר עָשׂוּהוּ

“And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly; for what is man who comes after the King, even that which has been already done?” (2:12)

Man is given no right to choose what happiness is, even though he's human. “Man came after the King” means after the framework has been set up, man cannot change it. God laid down how man functions and what is his design. Therefore, man must follow his design. Man's investigation cannot be prejudiced by his drive for pleasure; man usually decides where his happiness is depending upon where his energies lie.

Existentialists like this notion, that everything must conform to how they feel. They suggest that man's happiness must be in line with how he feels.

וְרָאִיתִי אֲנִי שֵׁשׁ יִתְרוֹן לְחָכְמָה מִן
הַסְּכָלוֹת כִּי־תְרוֹן הָאוֹר מִן־הַחֹשֶׁךְ הַחֹכֵם
עֵינָיו בְּרֹאשׁוֹ וְהַכְּסִיל בַּחֹשֶׁךְ הוֹלֵךְ וְיַדְעֵתִי גַם־
אֲנִי שֶׁמְקַרְהָ אֶחָד יִקְרָה אֶת־כָּלֶם

“Then I saw that wisdom excels folly, like light excels darkness. The wise man's eyes are in his head; but the fool walks in darkness...” (2:13,14)

The King says that wisdom is best, but he does not say that it is happiness. He merely states that there are practical benefits.

כֹּחַ הַמֶּלֶךְ יִנְרָקִי יִנְא־סֶגְ לִיסְכָּה הַרְקֻמֶּכְ יִבְלֹב יִנְא יִתְרַמְאֵן
 וְזָרְכֵן וְיֵא יֵכ לִבָּה הַז־סֶגְשׁ יִבְלֹב יִתְרַבְדֵן רִתִּי זֵא יִנְא יִתְמֵן
 חֲכָשֵן לִכָּה סִיאָבָה סִימִיָּה רִבְכָּשֵב סְלוֹעֵל לִיסְכָּה־סֵעַ סְכָחֵל
 לִיסְכָּה־סֵעַ סְכָחָה תּוּמֵן תּוּמֵן דִּיאֵן

“Then said I in my heart, ‘As it happens to the fool, so it happens even to me; and why was I then more wise?’ Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity. For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool forever; seeing that the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dies the wise man just like the fool?” (2:15,16)

The King applies his search to wisdom and learns that man doesn’t find the happiness in wisdom³² for which he was searching. Frustrated emotions must have an outlet. The fantasy of immortality is gone. But something is left: “Perhaps my energies that were invested will have some reward or satisfaction” the King thinks. But even this he doesn’t find.

וְשִׁנְאֵתִי אֶת־הַחַיִּים כִּי רַע עָלִי הַמַּעֲשֶׂה
 שֶׁנַּעֲשָׂה תַחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ כִּי־הַכֹּל הֶבֶל וְרֵעוֹת
 רוּחַ וְשִׁנְאֵתִי אֲנִי אֶת־כָּל־עֲמָלִי שֶׁאֲנִי עֹמֵל
 תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ שֶׁאֲנִיחֲנוּ לָאָדָם שִׁיְהִיָּה אַחֲרָי

32) This dissatisfaction with wisdom is not because he didn’t enjoy wisdom. The King already said there is nothing like wisdom. He is echoing the man who uses wisdom as a tool to attain immortality. “*And how dies the wise man just like the fool?*” expresses man’s disappointment when he confronts his mortality. He recognizes that his fantasy that wisdom would somehow secure immortality, is false. He questions wisdom’s benefit, since it doesn’t save him from the grave. But the person who studies Torah and nature purely to appreciate God’s wisdom will find the greatest joy: “*A man’s wisdom makes his face shine, and the boldness of his face is changed (8:1).*”

וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ הַחֶכֶם יִהְיֶה אֹו סָכַל וַיִּשְׁלַט בְּכָל־
 עֲמָלִי שְׁעַמְלָתִי וְשִׁחַכְמָתִי תַחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ
 גַּם־זֶה הַבָּל

“Therefore I hated life; because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me; for all is vanity and a stressful spirit. And I hated all my labor which I had toiled under the sun; because I should leave it to the man that shall be after me. And who knows whether he shall be a wise man or a fool, yet he shall have rule over all my labor in which I have labored, and in which I have showed myself wise under the sun. This also is vanity.” (2:17-19)

Once a person is out of the picture, there’s no control over his possessions. Man is plagued by the uncertain fate of all the fruits of his labor.³³

כִּי־יֵשׁ אָדָם שֶׁעָמְלוֹ בְּחָכְמָה וּבְדַעַת וּבְכִשְׁרוֹן
 וּלְאָדָם שֶׁלֹּא עָמְלָבוּ יִתְּנֶנּוּ חֶלְקוֹ גַּם־זֶה הַבָּל
 וְרָעָה רַבָּה

“For there is a man whose labor is with wisdom, and with knowledge, and with skill; yet to a man that has not labored in it shall he leave it for his portion. This also is vanity and a great evil.” (2:21)

33) But this worry too, is futile. For the person concerns himself about an unknown matter, “Who knows...” Additionally, he is not alive when his possessions transfer to another. King Solomon expresses what he felt, but discounts it as futile, since in fact it does not diminish from the good life. It is a mere fantasy, and fantasies must not plague a person. Reality alone must be man’s concern.

The King already said above that he disliked leaving his work to someone else. What then is he adding here? He is adding the idea that on one hand, accomplishment offers some recompense for all one's toil. But if someone else obtains more than you without working, your feeling of accomplishment is vanquished. The sense of accomplishment is a rationalization for all the work one went through. But when another person attains more than you without effort, your labors lose their value. For wealth ends up in the lap of others, at times without labor, like inheritances.

כִּי כָל־יְמֵיָו מִמָּאֲבִים וְכַעַס עֲנִינֹו גַם־בַּלַּיְלָה
 לֹא־שָׁכַב לְבוֹ גַם־זֶה הַבָּל הוּא

“For all his days are sorrows, and his labor grief; even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity.”
 (2:23)

King Solomon says he is in a state of constant pain. This exists whenever man strives for something. For all the while one strives, he is not yet where he wants to be. His inner desires aren't being met within reality.³⁴

34) Anguish is yet another frustration associated with ambition.

ENJOYMENT

אִין־טוֹב בְּאָדָם שְׂיֹאכַל וְשָׁתָה וְהִרְאָה אֶת־
נַפְשׁוֹ טוֹב בְּעֵמְלוֹ גַּם־זֶה רְאִיתִי אֲנִי כִּי מִיַּד
הָאֱלֹהִים הִיא

“There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labor. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God.”
(2:24)

The only good is eating and drinking.³⁵ What does he mean by “*it was from the hand of God?*” Verse 3:13 seems identical: “*And also that it is the gift of God³⁶ that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labor.*”

Verse 2:24 is a compound statement. The first part is supported by the next verse 2:25: “*For who can eat, or who can enjoy pleasure more than I?*” King Solomon means, that which is enjoyable, is the physical reality (2:24). Why is this what man enjoys? The answer is verse 2:25, i.e., because who else will?³⁷

35) This is a real enjoyment and not a fantasy.

36) If man looks into himself seeking accomplishment or other fantasies as the object of his drive for pleasure, he will find frustration. This is because fantasies cannot be satisfied by reality. Man invents impossible goals. But if man views his food outside the self, as a “gift from God,” then he has separated his fantasies from the real food. Now he can enjoy the food, as he is not viewing it as a means to fulfill a fantasy, but simply as food. And food, isolated from a fantasy, can satisfy man. For now, man is functioning in reality; he is not seeking anything more than the food can offer, i.e., satiation and taste.

37) If man limits the expected satisfaction to himself, meaning not a fantasy, he can attain satisfaction.

כִּי לְאָדָם שְׂטוֹב לְפָנָיו נָתַן חֵכְמָה וְדַעַת
 וְשִׂמְחָה וְלַחֹטֵא נָתַן עֲגִיז וְלַכְנוּס לִיתֵת
 לְטוֹב לְפָנָי הָאֱלֹהִים גַּם־זֶה הַבֵּל וְרַעוּת רֹחַ

“For God gives to a man who is good in his sight; wisdom, and knowledge, and joy; but to the sinner He gives the task of gathering and heaping up, that he may give it to one who is good before God. This also is vanity and a stressful spirit.” (2:26)

Even though the King says to enjoy what you do, it depends on your psychological makeup whether you’ll enjoy it or not. This is because there are two personalities [who cannot enjoy]: one personality is to consume, another is to accumulate. Since the first type of person doesn’t have the drive to accumulate; he possesses nothing to enjoy. And one who is driven to accumulate cannot stop and enjoy what he possesses, for his drive won’t allow him to suspend his accumulation activities long enough to enjoy life.

Verse 2:26 comes as an answer to the last part of verse 2:24 where he says that everything is from God. Meaning, even though the King said that you should enjoy things, nonetheless, it depends on how you are structured. He is showing how his last possibility for happiness isn’t so easy either. Man must function in line with his nature.

PERMANENCE & SECURITY

לְכָל־זְמַן וְעֵת לְכָל־חֶפֶץ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם
עֵת לְלֵדָת וְעֵת לְמוֹת עֵת לְטִיעַת וְעֵת לְעָקוּר
נְטוּעַ עֵת לְהַרוֹג וְעֵת לְרַפּוֹא עֵת לְפָרוֹץ
וְעֵת לְבָנוֹת עֵת לְבָבוֹת וְעֵת לְשַׁחֹק עֵת
סְפוֹד וְעֵת רִקּוּד עֵת לְהַשְׁלִיךְ אֲבָנִים וְעֵת
כְּנוּס אֲבָנִים עֵת לְחַבּוֹק וְעֵת לְרַחֵק מִחֶבֶק
עֵת לְבַקֵּשׁ וְעֵת לְאַבֵּד עֵת לְשָׂמוֹר וְעֵת
לְהַשְׁלִיךְ עֵת לְקַרְוֵעַ וְעֵת לְתַפּוֹר עֵת
לְחַשׂוֹת וְעֵת לְדַבֵּר עֵת לְאַהֵב וְעֵת לְשֹׂא
עֵת מִלְחָמָה וְעֵת שָׁלוֹם

“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven. A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted. A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up. A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance. A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing. A time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away. A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak. A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.” (3:1-8)

What does King Solomon mean by “there is a time” for these things? He means that people try to maintain an attitude per-

manently. He is describing a certain security people seek in their actions and in their feeling.³⁸ Therefore, by showing that there is time for each thing, he means that there is a limit.³⁹ This is similar to the role model feeling. Man sees someone successful and desires that life. However, the error is that man locks this person into a split second when he enjoys complete success. He then projects this fantasy image onto eternity and desires it for himself.⁴⁰

אֶת־הַכֹּל עָשָׂה יְפֶה בְּעֵתוֹ גַּם אֶת־הָעֵלָם נָתַן
 בְּלִבָּם מִבְּלִי אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִמְצָא הָאָדָם אֶת
 הַמַּעֲשֵׂה אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה הָאֱלֹהִים מֵרֵאשִׁית וְעַד־סוֹף

“He has made every thing beautiful in his time; also he has set the world in their heart, so that man cannot find out the work which God has made from the beginning to the end.” (3:11)

King Solomon discusses immortality. When man views one attitude in an eternal framework,⁴¹ this prevents him from looking at the whole picture “*from the beginning to the end.*”

38) Man is naturally uncertain about the future. This makes him insecure and fearful. Feeling that matters will remain the same provides a sense of knowledge and security about the future. King Solomon exposes this insecurity by saying man should not follow this natural disposition. A time for all matters means each attitude has an appropriate time, and limit.

39) That is, now might be the time for peace, but not later, when war is required.

40) Man does not look past the present moment. Had he done so, he would learn of the frustrations that his role model endured prior and subsequent to his success, and he would not be so fast to desire his life. Two errors exist: 1) one imagines the role model never endured frustrations or failures, and 2) one projects a fantasy where such role model success can be attained forever. Again, immortality is the required backdrop for a fantasy.

41) As he does when fantasizing about the role model.

Imagining an attitude is eternal, one blinds himself to the outcome. Thereby, he cannot see the pitfalls.

יְדַעְתִּי כִּי אֵין טוֹב בָּם כִּי אִם-לְשִׂמּוֹחַ
וְלַעֲשׂוֹת טוֹב בְּחַיָּיו

“I know that there is nothing better for them, than to rejoice, and to do good in his life.” (3:12)

King Solomon gives an answer: the only good is to do good actions.⁴²

וְגַם כָּל-הָאָדָם שֶׁיֹּאכַל וְשָׁתָה וְרָאָה טוֹב בְּכָל-
עֲמָלוֹ מִתַּת אֱלֹהִים הִיא

“And also that it is the gift of God that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labor.” (3:13)

Someone who can enjoy his eating and drinking has the enjoyment of “a gift from God.” Meaning, he is removed from the emotion of accomplishment and can enjoy the temporal pleasure for itself. The chocham (wise man) described here, is not enjoying things via his feeling of accomplishment. Rather, he looks at everything as “a gift from God.” We mentioned this truth above.

42) This reiterates the earlier fundamental: man’s actions, and not the fantasies he creates, do offer satisfaction.

CONTROL

יִדְעֵתִי כִּי כָּל־אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה הָאֱלֹהִים הוּא יִהְיֶה
 לְעוֹלָם עָלָיו אֵין לְהוֹסִיף וּמִמֶּנּוּ אֵין לְגָרֵעַ
 וְהָאֱלֹהִים עֹשֶׂה שְׂרָאוֹ מִלְּפָנָיו

*“I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever;
 nothing can be added to it, nor any thing taken from it;
 and God does it so that men should fear before Him.”
 (3:14)*

God created a perfect universe. It is foolish to say, “If only it was this way or that way.” This person doesn’t see the perfection in creation. Now, if man were able to manipulate the world to satisfy all his wishes, he wouldn’t feel anything was out of his control. He would not possess fear of God. So there is a benefit in seeing that there is an order outside of man’s desired order. A fool wishes that particulars do or do not occur. He doesn’t accept the reality of a universal system. If he would recognize the system of the universe, he would not wish for these personal matters.⁴³

43) One who recognizes the harmony in the universe, in Torah, and in justice, is overcome by a deep admiration for the Creator. Thereby, his personal desires become small in his eyes as compared to the magnificent precision and brilliant design of Creation and Torah. He then loses focus on his personal life, and even understands and accepts times when he experiences difficulties. He will view such difficulties as a natural result of universal laws, or even his own errors. He will see that such hard times must be experienced by most people. As he admires the system God created, he fully accepts that due to this best system, there will occur conflicts and occasional disappointments. But this does not mar his admiration for the system, or God.

JUSTICE

מֵהַשֶּׁהָיָה כְּבָר הוּא וְאֲשֶׁר לְהִיּוֹת כְּבָר הָיָה
וְהָאֱלֹהִים יִבְקֹשׁ אֶת־נַרְדָּף

“That which is, already has been; and that which is to be has already been; and God seeks out the oppressed.”
(3:15)

King Solomon is discussing a person’s wish that the future will offer change. He tells us it does not. But why does he bring in the idea that God will search out the oppressed, to punish the oppressor?⁴⁴

God’s investigation of injustice doesn’t improve matters, for the oppressed will still be oppressed. This is due to the fact that as man has free will, God won’t interfere to save the oppressed.⁴⁵ This poses serious questions to philosophy.

What Koheles is teaching is that there are 2 cases. In the first case, one has achieved his ambition and its satisfaction fades. Or, one has yet to achieve his ambition. But when he does, he

44) Rashi 3:15

45) Of course, as Maimonides teaches based on numerous Torah sources, a person on a higher level of perfection earns God’s protection. The oppressor will sin in his attempts to hurt such an individual, but God will save him. Perfection refers to one who loves wisdom and studies at all times, has acquired Torah truths and lives by them, and avoids Torah prohibitions by controlling his emotions. The Torah refers twice to “tamim”, meaning perfect and without blemish: “Perfect (tamim) shall you be with Hashem your God (Deut. 18:13).” “Walk before Me and be perfect (Gen. 17:1).” The former refers to rejecting idolatrous beliefs, and the latter is regarding God’s command to Abraham to perform circumcision. Thus, man is “perfect with God” when he 1) rejects all imaginary beings (idolatry), and 2) subjugates his knowledge to God’s knowledge. When man accepts God as the sole authority on truth, following God alone, rejecting beliefs in all external deities or forces, and he subjugates his own thinking to God, man is then “perfect.”

will suffer the same fate as one who already achieved his ambition. Thus, he can learn from his experience and how they affect him.

But there is another fate of man. That is, when someone has been prevented from his achievement by others. What often happens is that the victim eagerly awaits his enemy's downfall, absorbed by fantasies of retribution. This too is a fate of man: the unresolved ambition due to its being prevented by an aggressive foe, and its resulting mental state.

וְעוֹד רָאִיתִי תַחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ מְקוֹם הַמִּשְׁפָּט
שָׁמָּה הָרָשָׁע וּמְקוֹם הַצְּדִיק שָׁמָּה הָרָשָׁע

“And moreover I saw under the sun that in the place of judgment wickedness was there; and that in the place of righteousness, iniquity was there.” (3:16)

Man's desire for justice is not for justice per se. His motivation comes from the same desire for fame and lusts. Man seeks justice⁴⁶ for the sake of receiving honor. And once he attains honor, his desire for justice falls the way.⁴⁷ Seeking out a public office is for self-aggrandizement. King Solomon teaches here that there is no place where human corruption is absent.

46) I.e., positions of justice, like politicians, judges, etc. Positions that offer man fame and glory.

47) I.e., once he attains his position, he no longer needs his former platform as a justice defender. Now he can indulge fame and glory, with no attention to defending truth and justice.

אִמְרָתִי אֲנִי בְּלִבִּי אֶת־הַצְּדִיק וְאֶת־הַרְשָׁע
 יִשְׁפֹּט הָאֱלֹהִים כִּי־עֵת לְכָל־חַפְזָן וְעַל כָּל
 הַמַּעֲשֵׂה שָׁם

“I said in my heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked; for there is a time there for every purpose and for every action there.” (3:17)

While it’s true that there is no place where corruption doesn’t take place, nonetheless, God will judge both the righteous and the wicked.

אִמְרָתִי אֲנִי בְּלִבִּי עַל־דְּבַר־תְּבִינֵי הָאָדָם לְבָרָם
 הָאֱלֹהִים וְלִרְאוֹת שְׁהִם־בְּהֵמָה הֵמָּה לָהֶם
 כִּי מִקְרָה בְּנִי־הָאָדָם וּמִקְרָה הַבְּהֵמָה וּמִקְרָה
 אֶחָד לָהֶם כְּמוֹת זֶה כֵּן מוֹת זֶה וְרוּחַ אֶחָד
 לְכָל וּמוֹתָר הָאָדָם מִן־הַבְּהֵמָה אֵין כִּי הַכֹּל
 הֵבֵל הַכֹּל הוֹלֵךְ אֶל־מְקוֹם אֶחָד הַכֹּל הִיָּה
 מִן־הָעֶפְרָר וְהַכֹּל שָׁב אֶל־הָעֶפְרָר מִי יוֹדֵעַ רוּחַ
 בְּנֵי הָאָדָם הָעֶלְיָה הִיא לְמַעַלָּה וְרוּחַ הַבְּהֵמָה
 הִירֵדָתָהּ הִיא לְמַטָּה לְאַרְצָן

“I said in my heart concerning the sons of men, that God is testing them, that they might see that they are but beasts. For that which befalls the sons of men befalls beasts; one thing befalls them both, as the one dies, so dies the other. They have all one breath so that a man has no preeminence above a beast; for all is vanity. All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to

dust again. Who knows that the spirit of man goes upward, and the spirit of the beast goes downward to the earth?" (3:18-21)

Man feels that he's chosen by God. This creates a sense of superiority (man chose God, or God chose man). This is a religious emotion.

"...that they are but beasts." This means that everything which man does can be reduced to his animal instincts. King Solomon is emphasizing man's innermost thoughts.

וְרֵאִיתִי כִּי אֵין טוֹב מֵאֲשֶׁר יִשְׂמַח הָאָדָם
בְּמַעֲשָׁיו כִּי־הוּא חֶלְקוֹ כִּי מִי יִבְיָאֵנוּ לְרֵאוֹת
בְּמָה שִׁיְהִיָּה אַחֲרָיו

"So I saw that there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his work; for that is his portion; for who can bring him to see what shall be after him." (3:22)

King Solomon concludes that all one has are his temporal enjoyments.⁴⁸

48) As discussed above, man's fantasies cause him concern over events after his death. But this is fantasy. If man would live in reality alone, he could enjoy his work.

SOCIALITY

וּשְׁבַתִּי אֲנִי וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת־כָּל־הָעֲשָׂקִים אֲשֶׁר
נַעֲשִׂים תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ וְהִנֵּה | דִּמְעַת הָעֲשָׂקִים
וְאִין לָהֶם מְנַחֵם וּמִיַּד עֲשָׂקִיהֶם כֹּחַ וְאִין לָהֶם
מְנַחֵם | וְשַׁבַּח אֲנִי אֶת־הַמֵּתִים שְׂכָבָר מֵתוֹ
מִן־הַחַיִּים אֲשֶׁר הֵמָּה חַיִּים עַדְנָה
וְטוֹב מִשְׁנִיָּהֶם אֶת אֲשֶׁר־עָדוֹן לֹא הָיָה אֲשֶׁר
לֹא רָאָה אֶת־הַמַּעֲשֵׂה הָרָע אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה
תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ

“So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun; and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter. So I praised the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still alive. And better than both of them is he who has not yet been, who has not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.”
(4:1-3)

“...already dead” means that man’s unconscious forces include a self-destructive component.⁴⁹ But conscious instinctual forces go against self-destruction. People want to stay alive based on an emotion for living and a fear of death.

These verses are a natural conclusion from King Solomon’s dilemma. Death, or never being born solve life’s problems.

49) “Already” perhaps indicating a leaning towards self-destruction, like one who is heading in that direction.

What does oppression (4:1) have to do with this section? Ibn Ezra says that praising the dead is a follow-up on oppression. He addresses how man cannot tolerate oppression from man: man cries due to human oppression, but man can tolerate God's oppression. Verse 4:4 answers this conflict. Man desires to impress others. This is a competitive emotion; he labors not solely to fulfill himself.⁵⁰ This ties into the fantasy of immortality: being accepted by everyone, he feels that this will last.

וְרָאִיתִי אֲנִי אֶת-כָּל-עֵמֶל וְאֵת כָּל-בְּשָׂרוֹן
הַמַּעֲשֶׂה כִּי הִיא קְנֹאת-אִישׁ מִרֵּעֵהוּ גַם-זֶה
הַבָּל וְרַעוּת רוּחַ הַכֶּסֶל הַבֹּקֵץ אֶת-יָדָיו
וְאָכַל אֶת-בְּשָׂרוֹ

“And I saw that all labor, and every skill in work come from a man’s envy of his neighbor. This also is vanity and a stressful spirit. The fool folds his hands together and eats his own flesh.” (4:4,5)

King Solomon first describes the emotion of jealousy.⁵¹ The alternative is that a man “*eats his own flesh*.”⁵² This second individual isn’t motivated by jealousy and ends up not accomplishing anything. This attitude is a reaction to the first.⁵³ Man’s

50) Oppression is the condition when man is not accepted. Thus, man possesses a need for acceptance.

51) This ego emotion of competition drives man’s labors.

52) One not motivated by jealousy will not work, and will become impoverished, i.e., “eating his own flesh”: metaphorically speaking as he has nothing else to eat.

53) Meaning, his envy can lead to real work, or to folding his hands in resentment.

nature is that he has too much energy that needs satisfaction. Seclusion and simplicity—“folding his hands” in abandonment of labor—to an extreme, will not provide essential needs and any satisfaction. Man ends up frustrated. Both dispositions are wrong. But the second one is worse.

טוב מלא כף נחת
ממלא חפנים עמל ורעות רוח

“Better is a handful with quietness, than both hands full of labor and a stressful spirit.” (4:6)

According to Ibn Ezra, these are the words of the fool⁵⁴ whose rejection of labor (quietness) results in only one handful of food [i.e., poverty].

וּשְׁבַתִּי אֲנִי וְאֶרְאֶה הַבֵּל תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ
יֵשׁ אֶחָד וְאִין שְׁנַי גַּם בֵּן וְאָח אִי-לוֹ וְאִין קִץ
לְכָל-עֲמָלוֹ גַּם-עֵינָיו [עֵינָו] לֹא-תִשְׁבַּע עֵשֶׂר
וּלְמִי | אֲנִי עֲמִל וּמְחַסֵּר אֶת-נַפְשִׁי מִטוֹבָה גַּם-
זֶה הַבֵּל וְעֵנִין רָע הוּא

“Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun. There is a man alone, without a companion; he neither has son nor brother; yet there is no end of all his labor; nor is his eye satisfied with riches. ‘For whom do I labor, and bereave my soul of good?’ This also is vanity, indeed it is an evil matter.” (4:7,8)

54) The fool wants ease, he is lazy. He does not exert himself, so he has nothing.

“There is a man alone, without a companion.” Some try to live as a loner. However, being alone, one cannot accomplish: *“there is no end of all his labor.”* This verse rejects individualism. *“For whom do I labor?”* describes the emotion to benefit others, which here goes unfulfilled.

The reason for the redundancy of *“alone, without a companion”* is this: not only do people have the one emotion of being individualistic, but that emotion includes another emotion: to exclude others from one’s life. The *“aloneness”* is for the purpose of *“without a companion.”*

Rashi explains this idea of two being better than one. This extends to learning, where two are better than one. This also extends to social relationships, marriage, etc.

וְאִם־יִתְקַפּוּ הָאֶחָד הַשְּׁנַיִם יַעֲמְדוּ נִגְדוּ
וְהַחוּט הַמִּשְׁלֵשׁ לֹא בִמְהֵרָה יִנָּתֵק

“And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; a threefold cord is not quickly broken.” (4:12)

Why are three better than two? The dynamics of two people engaged in study are such, that there still exists an undercurrent of “my idea against his idea.” It’s me against him. But with three, one is not pitted up against another. It is not a personal one-on-one matter. In Torah study (Rashi) objectivity is mandatory, but is found less when only two people study.

ELITISM

טוֹב יֶלֶד מִסֶּכֶן וְחָכָם מִמֶּלֶךְ זָקֵן וְכֹסִיל אֲשֶׁר
לֹא־יָדַע לְהִזְהַר עוֹד כִּי־מִבֵּית הַסּוּרִים יֵצֵא
לְמֶלֶךְ כִּי גַם בְּמַלְכוּתוֹ נוֹלַד רָשׁ רְאִיתִי
אֶת־כָּל־הַחַיִּים הַמְהֻלְכִים תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם עִם
הַיֶּלֶד הַשֵּׁנִי אֲשֶׁר יַעֲמֵד תַּחְתָּיו אִי־קִץ
לְכָל־הָעָם לְכָל אֲשֶׁר־הָיָה לִפְנֵיהֶם גַּם
הָאֲחֵרוֹנִים לֹא יִשְׂמְחוּ־בּו כִּי־גַם־זֶה הַבָּל
וְרַעֲיוֹן רוּחַ

“Better is a poor and wise child⁵⁵ than an old and foolish king, who no longer knows how to take care of himself. For out of prison he comes to reign; for in his own kingdom he was born poor. I saw all the living who walk under the sun, with the second child that shall stand up in his stead. There is no end of all the people, even of all who have been before them; yet they who come after shall not rejoice in him. This also is vanity and a stressful spirit.” (4:13-16)

“Better is a poor and wise child than an old and foolish king” refers to Joseph and Pharaoh. At first, the masses viewed Joseph as a nobody. And even after Joseph established himself, people didn’t recognize him, other than for being in the public eye. But Joseph was better off even while in jail because he had the

55) Rashi learns this to be a reference to the Yetzer Hatove, the intellect. Ibn Ezra says this refers to a child because a child doesn’t yet have the ego. He asks out of pure inquisitiveness.

potential.⁵⁶ The reason people valued him was because once he became successful, they saw his greatness. But this was due only to his accidental feature of holding a high position.

When it says people walked with the child, it means they still didn't recognize him. In 4:16, "*yet they who come after shall not rejoice in him,*" means that even when he becomes king, he is not recognized due to his wisdom, but rather, due to his celebrity status.

This depicts the false idea of royalty or society's elite. This phenomenon is nonsense. For who would think of giving honor to a lad? When he gets older, society suddenly endows him with great importance. Thus, the masses are in a contradiction. If on the one hand the child has inherent royalty, even during youth the people should show him honor. But they don't. And if there is nothing given to him at youth, why honor him as an adult?

SPEECH

שְׁמוֹר רַגְלֶיךָ [רַגְלֶיךָ] בְּאֲשֶׁר תֵּלֵךְ אֶל־בַּיִת
הָאֱלֹהִים וְקָרוֹב לְשִׁמְעַת מִתַּת הַכְּסִילִים זָבַח
כִּי־אִינָם יוֹדְעִים לַעֲשׂוֹת רָע אֶל־תִּבְהַל

56) An inherent and independent value, as opposed to the dependent value attributed by the public due to his famed position.

עַל־פִּיךָ וְלִבְךָ אֱלֹהִים לְהוֹצִיא דָבָר לְפָנַי
 הָאֱלֹהִים כִּי הָאֱלֹהִים בְּשָׁמַיִם וְאַתָּה עַל־הָאָרֶץ
 עַל־כֵּן יִהְיוּ דְבָרֶיךָ מַעֲטִים כִּי בָּא הַחֲלוֹם
 בְּרַב עֲנָן וְקוֹל כְּסִיל בְּרַב דְּבָרִים כַּאֲשֶׁר
 תִּדְרֹךְ נֶדֶר לְאֱלֹהִים אֶל־תִּאָּחַר לְשַׁלְּמוֹ כִּי אִין
 חִפְץ בְּכִסְיִלִים אֶת אֲשֶׁר־תִּדְרֹךְ שְׁלָם
 טוֹב אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תִדְרֹךְ מִשְׁתַּדּוֹר וְלֹא תִשְׁלָם
 אֶל־תִּתֵּן אֶת־פִּיךָ לְחֹטִיא אֶת־בִּשְׂרָף וְאֶל־
 תֹּאמַר לְפָנַי הַמְּלֹאךְ כִּי שִׁגְגָה הִיא לָמָּה יִקְצֹף
 הָאֱלֹהִים עַל־קוֹלְךָ וְחִבֵּל אֶת־מַעֲשֵׂה יְדִידֶךָ
 כִּי בְּרַב חֲלָמוֹת וְהִבָּלִים וְדְבָרִים הִרְבָּה כִּי אֶת־
 הָאֱלֹהִים יִרְא

“Guard your foot when you go to the house of God; to get near to listen is better than to give the sacrifice of fools; for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with your mouth, and let not your heart be hasty to utter any thing before God; for God is in heaven, and you are on earth; therefore let your words be few. For a dream comes through a multitude of business; and a fool’s voice is known by a multitude of words. When you vow a vow to God, defer not to pay it; for He has no pleasure in fools; pay what you have vowed. It is better that you should not vow, than that you should vow and not pay. Do not allow your mouth to cause your flesh to sin; and do not say before the angel, that it was an error; why should God be angry at your voice, and destroy the work of your hands? For in the multitude of dreams and many words there are also many vanities; but you, fear God.” (4:17-5:6)

The difference between a fool and a chocham (wise man) is that the fool intersperses his fantasies in his words...in his *“multitude of words.”*

“...and you are on earth; therefore let your words be few.” As man is physical in nature (on Earth), he is irrational to an extent. Therefore, man is advised to minimize his words so as not to speak too much irrational talk.

Why is a vow mentioned here? One might think that perhaps it is true. When one normally talks, he can say foolish things. But when making a vow, [he feels] it is coming from a different part of his nature⁵⁷ and therefore he will be able to keep it. However, one is better off not making a vow, *“than that you should vow and not pay.”* This means one must not overestimate his power of keeping a vow. Maybe he cannot fulfill his words.

“Do not allow your mouth to cause your flesh to sin; and do not say, before the angel, that it was an error; why should God be angry at your voice, and destroy the work of your hands? (5:5)” This verse deals with the natural result of living this way.

“For in the multitude of dreams and many words there are also many vanities; but you, fear God (5:67).” Amidst the fantasies of life, one should try to maintain himself on the right track.

57) One might think by making a vow, he endows himself with added capacity to keep his word, than without making the vow.

EVIL

אִם-עֵשָׂק רָשׁ וְגִזְלַת מִשְׁפָּט וְצָדֵק תִּרְאֶה
בְּמִדְינָה אֶל-תִּתְמָה עַל-הַחֶפֶץ
כִּי גְבוּהַ מֵעַל גְּבוּהַ שִׁמְרֵם וְגְבוּהֵם עֲלֵיהֶם

“If you see the oppression of the poor, and the violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, do not be amazed by it; for higher than the higher watches; and there are yet higher over them.” (5:7)⁵⁸

The verse addresses⁵⁹ man’s nature in reference to evils and injustices. Man wishes reality to conform to his subjective feelings of justice. However, God’s system of justice doesn’t match man’s feeling of how God should mete out justice. The phrase “*higher than high*” means that there are set laws and considerations—“above” man’s understanding—determining how the *Hashgacha* (God’s providence) relates to man.

58) Sforno explains “*higher than higher*” refers to God who is higher than the city’s judges. “*Higher over them*” refers to matters higher than the justice deserved by the corrupt judges. Meaning, although evil officers deserve punishment, other considerations like maintaining a city’s order may require God to delay punishing the officials. Rashi says “*higher than higher*” refers to God’s messengers or angels whom God deploys to carry out justice over the city’s corrupt officials. The lesson: although we may not see the justice we desire to see, God has a system in place (angels) that the officials cannot escape, as the angels are higher. God also decides the timing.

59) This verse is a response to man’s question on apparent injustices. Man must not assume he possesses all knowledge as does God, so as to lodge a complaint against God’s methods of justice.

RICH & POOR

וַיִּתְרוֹן אֶרֶץ בְּכָל הַיּוֹם [הוּא] מִלֶּךְ לְשָׂדֵה נֶעֱבֵד

“And over all things land is more vital; for even a King must work the field.” (5:8)

No matter how much a person has risen, he must realize that he always remains dependent upon certain things.⁶⁰

אֱהָב כֶּסֶף לֹא יִשְׂבַּע כֶּסֶף

וּמִי־אֱהָב בְּהַמּוֹן לֹא תִבּוֹאֶה גְּסִיָּה הַבֵּל

“He who loves silver shall not be satisfied with silver; and he who loves the masses and not grain; this also is vanity.” (5:9)⁶¹

The reason one cannot be satisfied with silver is because it is only a replacement for food. Food provides satiety, but silver cannot because it is removed from the real pleasure.

A psychologist once said that people cannot be happy with money (silver) because there is no instinct for money. This means that since there is no innate desire for money, there is no place in the psyche for satisfaction. In order to be happy or satisfied from something, there must be a loss or a need in the person for that thing. But man’s base drives do not include the

60) This truth must reduce man’s projection of greatness onto the elite, for even kings are dependent beings and must eat.

61) Ibn Ezra explains: *“one who loves masses”* as one who acquires many servants so as to have the people before him.

emotion for the accumulation of wealth. Rashi equates the accumulation of knowledge to this same emotion.

בְּרִבּוֹת הַטּוֹבָה רַבּוּ אוֹכְלֶיהָ וּמֵה־כֶּשֶׁרוֹן
לִבְעָלֶיהָ כִּי אִם־רְאִיתָ [רְאוֹת] עֵינָיו

*“When goods increase, they who eat them are increased;
and what good is there to its owners, saving the behold-
ing of them with their eyes?” (5:10)*

The only thing a rich man derives from his riches is fame, i.e., appearances. He is better off to maintain anonymity [forgo the fame] and avoid the trouble of others seeking his wealth at all times.

מִתּוֹקָה שְׁנַת הָעֶלֶבֶד אִם־מְעַט וְאִם־הֶרְבֵּה
יֹאכַל וְהַשָּׁבַע לְעֹשֶׂיִר אֵינָנו מִנִּיחַ לוֹ לִישׁוֹן

*“The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eats
little or much; but the abundance of the rich will not let
him sleep.” (5:11)*

Due to his preoccupation with his work, the rich man does not enjoy the pleasure of a good night’s sleep.⁶²

62) Another breakdown of the desire for wealth is that the rich man cannot enjoy one of the most basic pleasures. People desire wealth based on what their fantasies tell them they can purchase, or the associated fame they might receive. King Solomon reveals a few primary sacrifices a rich man makes, thereby advising the reader to question the chase for wealth.

כָּל־עֵמֶל הָאָדָם לְפִיהוּ וְגַם־הַנֶּפֶשׁ לֹא תִמְלֵא

“All the labor of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled.” (6:7)

His mouth refers to the instincts. Thus, man labors to satisfy his desires, but his soul isn’t satisfied.⁶³

כִּי מֵהַיּוֹתֵר לְחָכָם מִן־הַבְּסִיל
מֵה־לָּעֲנִי יוֹדֵעַ לְהֵלֵךְ נֶגֶד הַחַיִּים
טוֹב מִרְאֵה עֵינַיִם מֵהִלָּךְ־נֶפֶשׁ גַּם־זֶה הַבָּל
וְרַעוּת רוּחַ

“For what advantage has the wise man over the fool? What has the poor man who knows how to walk among the living? Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire; this also is vanity and a stressful spirit.” (6:8,9)

Ani is the insignificant person. Why should the one in the *ani* framework go after the wrong way of life? But it shouldn’t bother him to live while society puts him down. King Solomon means that people want to be recognized by others, *“Better is the sight of the eyes.”* A person seeks this to a great degree. The futility here is that although man recognizes truths, he prefers to follow actions that will achieve the recognition of others.

63) This was explained above (1:7); *“All the rivers flow to the sea, but the sea is not full.”*

טוֹב לְלַכֵּת אֶל־בֵּית־אֵבֶל מִלַּכֵּת אֶל־בֵּית
 מִשְׁתֶּה בְּאִשֶּׁר הוּא סוֹף כָּל־הָאָדָם וְהַחַי יִתֵּן
 אֶל־לְבוֹ

“It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting for that is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to his heart.” (7:2)

The first thing needed for a person to be happy is to envision his death as a reality, like any other reality. Man must realize that all the fantasies of mankind are just that: fantasies.

THE PSYCHE & PERFECTION

טוֹב כַּעַס מִשְׂחֹק כִּי־בָרַע פָּנִים יֵיטֵב לֵב

“Anger is better than laughter; for by the sadness of the countenance, the heart is made better.” (7:3)

Ibn Ezra comments:

“It is known that when man’s instincts are strengthened, the intelligence becomes weak and has no power to stand before it, for the body and all⁶⁴ instincts strength-

64) Perhaps indicating Rabbi Chait’s lesson that when one instinct is aroused, this in turn arouses all other instincts to seek their respective satisfactions. Rabbi Chait proved this point from the incident of the Gold Calf. Once the Jews engaged in the idolatrous emotion, they also sought to satisfy their carnal desires, as the verse states, *“They arose to make merry (Exod. 32:6)”*—illicit sexual activities (Rashi). Here too, Ibn Ezra says when the instincts are

en the instincts. Therefore, one who indulges in eating and drinking will never become wise. [But] when one joins the intelligence with one's ego, one may succeed over the instincts. Then, the eyes of the intelligence are opened a small degree and one is enabled to understand physical science. However he cannot [yet] understand the higher areas of wisdom due to the power of the ego which strives for power; and it is that ego which creates anger. And after the intelligence reigns over the base drives via the assistance of the ego, the intelligence requires to be immersed in wisdom, that it will strengthen it, until the intelligence succeeds over the ego, and the ego is now subjugated to the intelligence (7:3)."

Ibn Ezra teaches, when joining forces, the ego and the intellect can control the instincts.⁶⁵ [The person will create an intelligent plan to manifest a respected self-image by refraining from base instincts that would generate public disdain. In this manner, he has gained control over the instincts.] But he must then work to eliminate his egoistical goals for power. This is achieved through immersion in wisdom.

The idea of "*anger being better than laughter*" means it is better

strengthened, "*the body and all instincts strengthen the instincts.*"

65) Ruling over our instincts enables our pursuit of wisdom. This enables man to engage the intellect without distraction of emotional lures. Rabbi Chait explained that when we control our emotions to be equidistant from both poles (viz., not too miserly or too spendthriftly) the self (the ego) has neutralized the pull of that emotional spectrum. This works in any emotional spectrum, such as not acting with too much courage or shyness, too much morbidity or humor, or too hastily or passively. Maimonides teaches (*Hilchos Dayos, chap. I*) that by going to the opposite extreme temporarily, each person has the ability to work with his specific natural leanings to neutralize the emotional pole weighing on him. A lazy person should therefore engage in extreme acts of zeal, until he arrives equidistant from either pole. He is then free of the pull of both poles in that emotional spectrum, with neither pole drawing him, enabling his intellect freedom to act in line with God's will.

to be involved in the ego which “gives birth to anger”, than to be under the sway of the instincts, the emotions. Now, once the emotions are controlled by the ego-intellect combination, the ego must be conquered through immersion in wisdom.

Rashi (1:12) shows the progression of removing one’s self from the feeling of power. He says King Solomon was King over the world, afterwards only over Israel, after that only over Jerusalem, and finally King over his staff alone. This *midrash* means King Solomon slowly removed himself from the emotion of power until he reigned only over his staff. But why only over his staff? He should really reach to the extreme saying he wasn’t King at all, as this would show the total removal of the emotion. However, “staff” means he was finally King over himself. He made the decision to conquer his emotions.

The ruling part of man requires knowledge. As he gains wisdom, it grasps hold of him. Once he is overcome by the love of wisdom, he will abandon his power drive (ego) and he will care only for wisdom. Striving for power will lose all of its appeal.

Koheles’ ego is the “self,” that part which one views as the “me.” And this self changes with man’s perfection. As man moves toward wisdom, this affects the person.

We realize, metaphysics and psychology aren’t separate. The psyche is affected by perfection of the soul.

INTELLIGENCE

Human intelligence is limited by sight. But even this isn't accurate because solid matter, as we see it, is truly mostly space [between atoms and molecules]. The way we see is via light reflecting off of objects into our eyes.

What do the Rabbis mean by "*light was set aside for the righteous people in the Messianic Era?*"⁶⁶ We stated, light is the means for perception. Thus, a new "light" will be a new form of perception which will be made available for people living the correct life, and they will be able to use it for the sake of perfection. The reason why it wasn't given originally was because the wicked people would use this knowledge for their own schemes. We see this expressed by superpowers that harness present-day knowledge for harm. How much more harm would occur if more knowledge was made available?

The Rabbis are teaching us that our senses fall short of being able to perceive the physical world perfectly. Our minds can make use of more knowledge if we had it. But our physical composition doesn't allow us to perceive reality as it really is.

66) Rashi, Gen. 1:4

INDEPENDENCE

וּמוֹצֵא אֲנִי מֵרַמְמוֹת אֶת־הָאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר־הִיא
מִצְוֹדִים וְחַרְמִים לְבָהּ אֲסוּרִים יָדֶיהָ
טוֹב לְפָנַי הָאֱלֹהִים יִמָּלֵט מִמֶּנָּה
וְחוֹטֵא יִלְכָד בָּהּ

“And I find more bitter than death, the woman, whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands are fetters; whoever pleases God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be caught by her.” (7:26)

King Solomon wants to know the cause of human evil. The verse says that this evil is a woman. But what does he mean by woman? Rashi says woman refers to is an apostate. Ibn Ezra says it refers to love. He goes on to say that for a chocham, death is better. The state of love is one where man's ego is placed upon a woman. His energies are directed toward his love object. His self-esteem comes from the love object. Death being better than love means that for a chocham, if everything he does depends on his mate, he is not secure about himself and cannot function. The Torah is against a love in which one of the mates is totally dependent upon the other. Therefore, King Solomon's lesson is that ego depletion is the worst state. Advertising works with this same principle, viz., “You are worthless without this object.”

רֵאָה זֶה מִצָּאתַי אֲמַרָה קִהְלֹת אַחַת לְאַחַת
לְמִצְאָה שְׁבוּן

“Behold, this have I found, said Kobeles, counting one thing to another to find out the sum.” (7:27)

In order to gain knowledge, *chesbbon*, one must put together information piece by piece. A truly free investigation is one in which the person is not seeking an anticipated conclusion. The person must be independent.

אֲשֶׁר עוֹד־בִּקְשָׁה נַפְשִׁי וְלֹא מִצָּאתַי אָדָם אֶחָד
מֵאֵלֶּף מִצָּאתַי וְאִשָּׁה בְּכָל-אֵלֶּה לֹא מִצָּאתַי

“Which yet my soul seeks, but I find not; one man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found.” (7:28)

What prevented King Solomon from finding a woman in a thousand? The answer is like the verse says, *“and to your husband shall you cleave.”*⁶⁷ By nature, a woman is more dependent and hence, she is more removed from knowledge. *“Nashim daatios kallos; woman are light-headed”*⁶⁸ means that as a rule, women are naturally more subject to emotions than men.

67) Gen. 3:16

68) Kiddushin 80b, Sabbath 33b

GOOD & EVIL

שׁוֹמֵר מִצְוָה לֹא יֵדַע דְּבַר רָע וְעַתּוֹת וּמִשְׁפָּט
יֵדַע לֵב חָכָם כִּי לְכָל־חַפְצֵי יֵשׁ עֵת וּמִשְׁפָּט
כִּי־רַעַת הָאָדָם רַבָּה עָלָיו כִּי־אֵינְנוּ יֹדְעִים
מִה־שְׁיִיחָהּ כִּי כָאֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה מִי יִגִּיד לוֹ
אִין אָדָם שְׁלֵיט בְּרוּחַ לְכֹלֹא אֶת־הָרוּחַ וְאִין
שְׁלֵטוֹן בְּיוֹם הַמּוֹת וְאִין מִשְׁלַחַת בְּמַלְחָמָה
וְלֹא־יִמְלֹט רָשָׁע אֶת־בְּעָלָיו אֶת־כָּל־זֶה
רְאִיתִי וְנָתַן אֶת־לִבִּי לְכָל־מַעֲשֵׂה אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה
תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַשׁ עַת אֲשֶׁר שְׁלַט הָאָדָם בְּאָדָם
לְרַע לוֹ וּבָכֵן רְאִיתִי רָשָׁעִים קְבָרִים וּבָאוּ
וּמִמָּקוֹם קְדוֹשׁ יִהְלְכוּ וַיִּשְׁתַּכְּחוּ בְּעִיר אֲשֶׁר
כָּן־עָשׂוּ גַם־זֶה הַבָּל אֲשֶׁר אֵין־נַעֲשֵׂה כְּתוּבָה
מַעֲשֵׂה הָרָעָה מְהֵרָה עַל־כֵּן מָלֵא לֵב בְּנֵי־
הָאָדָם בָּהֶם לַעֲשׂוֹת רָע
אֲשֶׁר חָטָא עֲשֵׂה רָע מֵאֵת וּמֵאֲרִיף לוֹ כִּי
גַם־יֹדַע אָנִי אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה־טוֹב לִירְאֵי הָאֱלֹהִים
אֲשֶׁר יִירָאוּ מִלְּפָנָיו וְטוֹב לֹא־יִהְיֶה לְרָשָׁע
וְלֹא־יֵאֲרִיף יָמִים כְּצֵל אֲשֶׁר אֵינְנוּ יֵרָא מִלְּפָנָיו
אֱלֹהִים יִשְׁ־הֶבֶל אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשֵׂה עַל־הָאָרֶץ
אֲשֶׁר | יֵשׁ צְדִיקִים אֲשֶׁר מִגִּיעַ אֲלֵהֶם כְּמַעֲשֵׂה
הָרָשָׁעִים וַיֵּשׁ רָשָׁעִים שְׂמֹגִיעַ אֲלֵהֶם כְּמַעֲשֵׂה
הַצְּדִיקִים אִמְרַתִּי שְׂגַם־זֶה הַבָּל וְשִׁבְחַתִּי
אָנִי אֶת־הַשְּׂמִיחָה אֲשֶׁר אֵין־טוֹב לְאָדָם תַּחַת

הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ כִּי אִם־לֹאֲכַל וְלִשְׁתּוֹת וְלִשְׂמוֹחַ וְהוּא
 יִלְוֵנוּ בְּעֵמְלוֹ יָמֵי חַיָּיו אֲשֶׁר־נִתְּנָלוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים
 תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ כֹּאֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי אֶת־לִבִּי לְדַעַת
 חֲכָמָה וְלִרְאוֹת אֶת־הָעֲנִיָּן אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה עַל־
 הָאָרֶץ כִּי גַם בַּיּוֹם וּבַלַּיְלָה שְׁנָה בְּעֵינָיו אֵינְנו
 רֹאֶה וְרֵאִיתִי אֶת־כָּל־מַעֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים כִּי
 לֹא יוּכַל הָאָדָם לְמַצּוֹא אֶת־הַמַּעֲשֵׂה אֲשֶׁר
 נַעֲשָׂה תַּחַת־הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ בְּשׁל אֲשֶׁר יַעֲמַל הָאָדָם
 לְבַקֵּשׁ וְלֹא יִמְצָא וְגַם אִם־יֹאמֶר הַחֲכָם לְדַעַת
 לֹא יוּכַל לְמַצּוֹא

כִּי אֶת־כָּל־זֶה נָתַתִּי אֶל־לִבִּי וְלָבוֹר אֶת־כָּל־
 זֶה אֲשֶׁר הַצַּדִּיקִים וְהַחֲכָמִים וְעַבְדֵיהֶם בְּיַד
 הָאֱלֹהִים גַּם־אֶהְבֶּה גַם־שִׁנְאַה אֵין יוֹדַע הָאָדָם
 הַכֹּל לַפְּנִיָּהֶם הַכֹּל כֹּאֲשֶׁר לְכָל מְקַרָּה אֶחָד
 לְצַדִּיק וְלָרָשָׁע לְטוֹב וְלַטָּהוֹר וְלַטָּמֵא וְלַזָּבַח
 וְלַאֲשֶׁר אֵינְנו זֹבַח כְּטוֹב כַּחֲטָא הַנִּשְׁבַּע כֹּאֲשֶׁר
 שְׁבוּעָה יִרָא זֶה | רַע בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר־נַעֲשָׂה
 תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ כִּי־מְקַרָּה אֶחָד לְכָל וְגַם לֵב
 בְּנִי־הָאָדָם מְלֹא־רָע וְהוֹלִלּוֹת בְּלִבָּם בְּחַיֵּיהֶם
 וְאַחֲרָיו אֱלֹהֵי־הַמָּתִים כִּי־מִי אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר
 [יְחַבֵּר] אֵל כָּל־הַחַיִּים יֵשׁ בְּטַחֲוֹן כִּי־לְכָלֵב חַי
 הוּא טוֹב מִן־הָאָרֶיָּה הַמָּת
 כִּי הַחַיִּים יוֹדְעִים שְׂיַמְתּוּ וְהַמָּתִים אֵינָם יוֹדְעִים

מֵאוֹמָה וְאִין-עוֹד לָהֶם שְׁכָר כִּי נִשְׁכַּח זְכוֹרָם
גַּם אֶהְבֶּתֶם גַּם-שִׁנְאֶתֶם גַּם-קִנְאֶתֶם כְּכֹר
אֲבָדָה וְחֶלֶק אִין-לָהֶם עוֹד לְעוֹלָם בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר-
נַעֲשֶׂה תַחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ לֵךְ אֶכֶל בְּשִׂמְחָה
לְחֶמְדָּה וְשִׂתָּה בְּלֵב-טוֹב יִינֶה כִּי כְּכֹר רָצָה
הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת-מַעֲשֵׂיךָ בְּכָל-עֵת יִהְיוּ בְּגִדֶיךָ
לְבָנִים וְשָׁמֶן עַל-רֹאשְׁךָ אֶל-יַחֲסֹר
רָאָה חַיִּים עִם-אִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר-אֶהְבֶּתָ כָּל-יְמֵי
חַיֵּי הַבְּלָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַן-לְךָ תַחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ כֹּל יְמֵי
הַבְּלָה כִּי הוּא חֶלְקְךָ בְּחַיִּים וּבַעֲמֹלְךָ אֲשֶׁר-
אָתָּה עָמַל תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ כֹּל אֲשֶׁר תִּמְצָא
יָדְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּכַחַד עֲשֵׂה כִּי אִין מַעֲשֵׂה
וְחִשְׁבוֹן וְדַעַת וְחֶכְמָה בְּשִׂאוֹל אֲשֶׁר אָתָּה הַלֵּךְ
שָׁמָּה שִׁבְתִּי וְרָאָה תַחַת-הַשָּׁמֶשׁ כִּי לֹא
לְקַלִּים הַמְרוֹץ וְלֹא לְגִבּוֹרִים הַמְלַחֲמָה וְגַם
לֹא לְחֶכְמִים לָחֶם וְגַם לֹא לְנַבְנִים עֶשֶׂר וְגַם
לֹא לַיָּדַעִים חֵן כִּי-עֵת וּפָגַע יִקְרָה אֶת-כָּלֶם כִּי
גַם לֹא-יֵדַע הָאָדָם אֶת-עֵתוֹ כַּדָּגִים שֶׁנִּאֲחָזִים
בְּמִצּוֹדָה רָעָה וְכִצְפָּרִים הֵאֲחָזוֹת בַּפֶּח כֶּהֱם
יִוָּקְשִׁים בְּנֵי הָאָדָם לְעֵת רָעָה כְּשֶׁתִּפּוֹל עֲלֵיהֶם
פְּתָאֵם גַּם-זֶה רָאִיתִי חֶכְמָה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ
וְגִדּוּלָה הִיא אֵלַי

Chapter 8

5. *“Whoever keeps the commandment shall feel no evil thing; and a wise man’s heart discerns both time and judgment.*

6. *Because to every purpose there is time and judgment, though the misery of man is great upon him.*

7. *For he knows not that which shall be; for who can tell him when it shall be?*

8. *There is no man who has power over the wind to retain the wind; nor has he authority over the day of death; and there is no discharge in that war; nor shall wickedness deliver those who are given to it.*

9. *All this have I seen, and gave my heart to every work that is done under the sun; there is a time when one man rules over another to his own hurt.*

10. *And so I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the holy place, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done; this also is vanity.*

11. *Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.*

12. *Though a sinner does evil one hundred times, and his days are prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with those who fear God, who fear before him;*

13. *But it shall not be well with the wicked, nor shall he prolong his days, which are like a shadow; because he does not fear before God.*

14. *There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there are just men, to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked; again, there are wicked men, to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous; I said that this also is vanity.*

15. *And I commended mirth, because a man has no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry; for this will go with him in his labor during the days of his life, which God gives him under the sun.*

16. *When I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth; for neither by day nor by night one's eyes see sleep.*

17. *And I saw all the work of God, for a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun; because though a man would labor to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; and also if a wise man claims to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it."*

Chapter 9

1. *"For all this I laid to my heart, and sought to clarify all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their deeds, are in the hand of God; no man knows whether it is love or hatred; all is before them.*

2. *All things come alike to all; there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the pure, and to the impure; to him who sacrifices, and to him who does not sacrifice; as is the good man, so is the sinner; and he who swears as he who shuns an oath.*

3. *This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event to all; also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead.*

4. *For to him who is joined to all the living there is hope; for a living dog is better than a dead lion.*

5. *For the living know that they shall die; but the dead know nothing, nor do they have a reward any more; for the memory of them is forgotten.*

6. *Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy is now perished; nor have they any more a portion forever in any thing that is done under the sun.*

7. *Go your way, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has already accepted your works.*

8. *Let your garments be always white; and let your head lack no oil.*

9. *Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of the life of your vanity, which he has given you under the sun, all the days of your vanity; for that is your portion in life, and in your labor in which you labor under the sun.*

10. *Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your strength; for there is no work, nor scheme, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave to which you are going.*

11. *I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill; but time and chance happens to them all.*

12. *For man also does not know his time; like the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and like the birds that are caught in the trap; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falls suddenly upon them.*

13. *This wisdom have I seen also under the sun, and it seemed great unto me (8:5-9:13)."*

Evil, is an attitude to change reality to conform to one's emotions. Here King Solomon identifies the cause of evil.

8:12 contradicts 8:14. 8:12 reads, "*yet surely I know that it shall be well with those who fear God, who fear before him.*" While in 8:14, we read, "*...there are just men, to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked; again, there are wicked men, to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous...*" Another question is based on "*Because to every purpose there is time and judgment (8:6).*" What does "time and judgment" have to do with doing the mitzvah (8:5)?

On verse 8:6 Ibn Ezra says that a wise man doesn't wage war against one who is enjoying a successful hour. This means that an individual has good intuition in certain matters and will be successful.⁶⁹ The Gemara says that one should go into business with one who is successful. But what is the idea that a wise man knows that there are times of success for people? This means that a wise man doesn't overestimate himself. He realizes that reality won't change for him. So he deals with the situation as it is. But when someone is oppressing him, he will make a move against him when he slips up. He doesn't sit back and wait for God to step in (eventually He will in time). He waits for the slip-up, and then moves in.

“For he knows not that which shall be; for who can tell him when it shall be?” (8:7) The wicked man, the *rasha*, doesn't think. He desires, and acts. He doesn't evaluate the results ensuing from his actions. The wise man anticipates. Here the verse says that even when it happens, *“for who can tell him,”* the *rasha* doesn't even know, and he won't see the tragedy even when it's right in front of him.⁷⁰ The reason for this is since he is functioning with his emotions, he has nothing with which to investigate his actions. His mind is disengaged.⁷¹

69) Therefore, the wise man will not try to fight this reality.

70) He won't know that the tragedy is a punishment from Hashem. He attributes it to some other variable.

71) And therefore, he is outside the framework in which answers can be found.

Verse 8:8 literally states that one has no power over his day of death. “...*there is a time when one man rules over another to his own hurt (8:9)*” is another manifestation of situations in which one must realize that he has no control over the situation.

On verse 8:10 Rashi comments, “*I saw wicked people who came from another place and they came into the Temple and took it over. And they went home and were praised in the city from which they came concerning that which they did in the Temple. The Rabbis say that you shouldn’t read וַיִּשְׁתַּכְּחוּ (and they were forgotten) rather read the word וַיִּשְׁתַּבְּחוּ meaning they will be praised and finally forgotten.*” Rashi means that the praise these evildoers received displayed that their townspeople valued their conquest of the Temple. Praise is given for that which is valued. So even though their actions were wicked, when there is success, people identify it with justice and they offer praise. This ties in with verse 8:12 concerning the idea that the evil person does not anticipate his downfall. Here too, the people of the town are convinced this is a good and they can’t see the fault in it. Furthermore, we see that people succumb to the vulnerability of being drawn in to a faddish success. The “now” of this event is quite alluring. Even today, when institutions wish to attract support, they rave about their successes.

A person should never be swayed by success. It is no argument for their position. In truth, the success of any idea is external to the idea. Ideas should be argued on behalf of their internal logic.

אֲשֶׁר אֵינֶנְעֶשֶׂה פְּתֻגָּם מֵעֵשֶׂה הַרְעָה מְהֵרָה
עַל־כֵּן מָלֵא לֵב בְּנֵי־הָאָדָם בָּהֶם לַעֲשׂוֹת רָע

“Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.” (8:11)

King Solomon now addresses the questions which make it so difficult to accept Judaism. He deals with philosophical points, as well as emotional ones, touching on the point of success we just cited. That is, even if we dismiss the issue of “success” and claim that the conquerors of the Temple were wrong, we are still disturbed by their lack of punishment. This verse questions why there is no speedy punishment; people wish to see swift justice for the wicked, but they do not witness it. (On the *Az Yashbir*, Rashi says that through the destruction of the wicked, God’s fame is increased.) The following verse poses the same complaint:

אֲשֶׁר הִטָּא עֲשֵׂה רָע מֵאֵת וּמֵאֲרִיף לוֹ
כִּי גַם־יִוָּדַע אָנִי אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה־טוֹב לִירְאֵי
הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר יִירָאוּ מִלְּפָנָיו
וְטוֹב לֹא־יִהְיֶה לְרָשָׁע וְלֹא־יֵאֲרִיף יָמִים כְּצֶל
אֲשֶׁר אֵינָנו יֵרָא מִלְּפָנֵי אֱלֹהִים

“Though a sinner does evil one hundred times, and his days are prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with those who fear God, who fear before him. But it shall not be well with the wicked, nor shall he prolong his days, which are like a shadow; because he does not fear before God.” (8:12,13)

Many righteous people suffered more than some of the greatest perpetrators of evil. The next verse, 8:14, strengthens this question and formulates it:

יִשְׁהַבֵּל אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה עַל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר | יֵשׁ
 צַדִּיקִים אֲשֶׁר מִגִּיעַ אֲלֵהֶם כְּמַעֲשֵׂה הַרְשָׁעִים
 וַיֵּשׁ רְשָׁעִים שְׂמֹגִיעַ אֲלֵהֶם כְּמַעֲשֵׂה הַצַּדִּיקִים
 אָמַרְתִּי שְׁגִם־זֶה הַבָּל

“There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there are just men, to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked; again, there are wicked men, to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous; I said that this also is vanity.” (8:14)

Regarding this question of why there doesn't seem to be punishment for the wicked, Ibn Ezra says⁷² that there is nothing more powerful or more difficult to answer. Does Koheles offer an answer? Koheles intersperses some information within the verses:

שׁוֹמֵר מִצְוָה לֹא יֵדַע דְּבַר רָע
 וַיֵּת וּמִשְׁפָּט יֵדַע לֵב חָכָם

“Whoever guards the commandment shall know no evil thing; and a wise man's heart knows both time and judgment.” (8:5)

This verse employs the word “guards.” Why didn't King Solomon say “performs” or “performs Shabbos” instead of “guards a

⁷²) 9:3

mitzvah”? “Guarding” refers to one who does more than mere performance: he values the activity. King Solomon then questions why righteous people fall and wicked people prosper, and that “*a wise man’s heart knows both time and judgment*”, meaning that there is justice. He intersperses this. (Verses 8:6 and 8:12 also say that there is justice.) The answer is that on the whole, we do see justice. Through our thousands of years of persecution, we were still able to study Torah. There was ample time in which the Torah was studied, no matter how much our enemies tried to deter us. The splitting of the Red Sea illustrates the wicked and the righteous receiving their just rewards. Stepping back and viewing history over time, we find justice. But you cannot find it in the particular. Ibn Ezra says⁷³ that King Solomon understood the principle, but regarding the evil which occurs, he could not understand:

וְרֵאִיתִי אֶת־כָּל־מַעֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים כִּי לֹא יוּכַל
הָאָדָם לְמַצּוֹא אֶת־הַמַּעֲשֵׂה אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה
תַּחַת־הַשָּׁמַיִם בְּשׂוֹל אֲשֶׁר יַעֲמַל הָאָדָם לְבַקֵּשׁ
וְלֹא יִמְצָא וְגַם אִם־יֵאמַר הֵחָכֵם לְדַעַת
לֹא יוּכַל לְמַצּוֹא

“And I saw all the work of God, for a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun; because though a man would labor to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; and also if a wise man claims to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it.” (8:17)

73) 8:17

As King Solomon says that man cannot find out the works of God, how can he say in verses 8:12,13 that he knows that there will be good for those who fear God, and punishment for the wicked?

When King Solomon says that he knows *“there will be good for those who fear God”*, he is defining “good” by the value system of those who fear God.⁷⁴ And that is the performance of the mitzvos for their own sake, without an ulterior objective. Thus, the righteous do in fact enjoy that good life, and the wicked do experience tumultuous lives which don’t permit their souls any harmony. This is what King Solomon “knows.” The reason why Ibn Ezra said earlier that this area presents the most powerful questions, is because the typical person asks this out of an emotional basis and its carries with it much weight.

When Moshe asked God *“...please show me Your glory,”*⁷⁵ he was asking on a theoretical plane. He wasn’t insecure about his beliefs. He knew that according to his design, following the ideas was the best life. But he wanted to know the theories. In contrast, when a typical person asks how the wicked enjoy good lives, he asks out of desire to secure [his own] reward for living a righteous life. In other words, typical people ask the following: *“What kind of punishment will the wicked receive? I see him living to a ripe old age. So why should I live the life of Torah? I won’t lose out on what I really desire!”* Such a person

74) And not what is typically viewed as the “good.”

75) Exod. 33:18

desires the Torah only as a means for some anticipated reward which he fabricates in his fantasies. However, the person living the correct life doesn't seek reward. He is totally engrossed in his studies; he is completely satisfied and seeks nothing else.

King Solomon also states that universally, we witness the righteous people being successful. He mentions this, for he wished to demonstrate that there is the factor of God's endorsement of the good life. This provides support for following the Torah lifestyle.

However, the question of how evil can happen to good people still remains a question. But the intellectual person places this question in the right place: theory. This question doesn't affect him practically: he knows without a doubt that the life that he already leads is enjoyable, and is the best life. A question on theoretics won't shake his conviction, which is 100% logical.

OVERESTIMATING LIFE

בִּיָּמֵי אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר [יִחְבֵּר] אֶל כָּל־הַחַיִּים יֵשׁ
בְּטָחוֹן כִּי־לְכֹלֵב חַי הוּא טוֹב מִן־הָאֲרִיָּה הַמֵּת

*"For to him who is joined to all the living there is hope;
for a living dog is better than a dead lion." (9:4)*

Ibn Ezra says that these verses are the incorrect views of mankind. In verse 9:5 we see how much importance is placed upon life: “...*but the dead know nothing, nor do they have a reward any more...*” One who voices this opinion says in other words, “the dead know nothing and are nothing; life is everything.” Verse 9:6 has the same meaning, “...*nor have they any more a portion forever in any thing that is done under the sun.*”

Emotions convince man that reality is defined by the here and now. We refer to the emotion is of modernity. Foolish people think, “If you are ‘*connected to life*’ (9:4) then you have value. But a dead lion, what’s he worth? He doesn’t have the here and now!”

These verses echo the masses’ incorrect view, i.e., the over-estimation of life. This view results in an abhorrence of death. The denial of death soothes one’s fears. And in doing so, he bolsters his fantasy of immortality. This person doesn’t view reality as the reality of the soul. But in actuality, the duration of earthly life is very brief as compared to that of the soul.

לֶךְ אֲכַל בְּשִׂמְחָה לַחֲמֶךָ וְשִׂתָּה בְּלֵב-טוֹב יַיִן
כִּי כָּבֵר רָצָה הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת-מַעֲשֶׂיךָ

“Go your way, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has already accepted your works.” (9:7)

Rashi says this refers to the righteous man living a good life. Ibn Ezra says that these words are the feelings of the masses, whom King Solomon is now condemning. If so, what then is meant by “*God has already accepted your works*”? A concern for God’s approval doesn’t sound like something the masses would say, concerning their own opinions.

In truth, the masses are speaking here. But what they mean is to live without guilt. They can’t tolerate the conflict. So they say, “Just be happy with what you’re doing.”⁷⁶

The succeeding verses follow the same tenor. The end of verse 9:10 states this view again, “...*for there is no work, nor scheme, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave to which you are going.*” Meaning, once you are dead, that’s it. Therefore, the masses again conclude that earthly life alone is what you should value.

שְׁבִתִּי וְרָאָה תַּחַת־הַשָּׁמַיִם כִּי לֹא לַקְלִים
הַמְרוֹץ וְלֹא לַגְּבוּרִים הַמְלַחֲמָה וְגַם לֹא
לַחֲכָמִים לֶחֶם וְגַם לֹא לַנְּבֹנִים עֵשֶׂר וְגַם לֹא
לַיָּדָעִים חֵן כִּי־עֵת וּפְגַע יִקְרָה אֶת־כֻּלָּם
כִּי גַם לֹא־יֵדַע הָאָדָם אֶת־עֵתוֹ כַּדָּגִים
שֶׁנֶּאֱחָזִים בַּמְצוּדָה רָעָה וְכַצְּפָרִים הָאֲחֻזוֹת
בַּפֶּחַ כֶּהֱם יוֹקְשִׁים בְּנֵי הָאָדָם לְעֵת רָעָה
כְּשֶׁתְּפוּל עֲלֵיהֶם פְּתָאִים

76) The masses say, “*God has already accepted your works*” as their justification for their chosen lifestyle of eating and drinking. They project onto God His approval of their lifestyle.

“I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill; but time and chance happens to them all. For man also does not know his time; like the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and like the birds that are caught in the trap; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falls suddenly upon them.” (9:11,12)

King Solomon now explains how the masses’ philosophy must fail. The “enjoy the now” life cannot provide happiness. The reason being, it is a fantasy: it includes only the good parts of life and conveniently omits that part of man’s essence which brings ruin to his plans. All of his inner conflicts are left out, as is the case with all fantasies.⁷⁷

THE WISE MAN

עֵיר קִטְנָה וְאֲנָשִׁים בָּהּ מְעֵט וּבְאֵ-אֱלֹהִים מְלֹךְ
 גָּדוֹל וְסָבֵב אֶתָּה וּבָנָה עָלֶיָּהּ מִצּוּדִים
 גְּדֹלִים וּמִצָּא בָּהּ אִישׁ מִסְכֵּן חָכֶם וּמְלֵט
 הוּא אֶת־הָעִיר בְּחֻכְמָתוֹ וְאָדָם לֹא זָכַר אֶת־

77) Therefore, when reality strikes in the manner that unforeseen troubles occur, as they always do, and the fantasy of living this “enjoy the now” lifestyle is destroyed, man will grow unhappy.

הָאִישׁ הַמְסָפֵן הַהוּא וְאִמְרָתִי אָנִי טוֹבָה
חֲכָמָה מִגְבוּרָה וְחֲכָמַת הַמְסָפֵן בְּזוּיָה וּדְבָרָיו
אֵינָם נִשְׁמָעִים דְּבָרֵי חֲכָמִים בְּנַחַת
נִשְׁמָעִים מִזְעָקַת מוֹשֵׁל בְּכַסִּילִים
טוֹבָה חֲכָמָה מִכְּלֵי קָרֵב וְחוֹטֵא אֶחָד יֵאָבֵד
טוֹבָה הַרְבֵּה

“There was a little city, and few men in it; and there came a great King against it, and besieged it, and built great siege works against it; And a poor wise man was found in it, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that poor man. And said I, wisdom is better than might; but the poor man’s wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard. The words of wise men are heard in quiet more than the shouting of him who rules among fools. Wisdom is better than weapons of war; but one sin destroys much good.”
(9:14-18)

People value power over wisdom. Rarely do we find people engaging ideas and wisdom for the pure enjoyment, without any expectation. Verse 8:16 voices this: *“the poor man’s wisdom is despised.”* Only when the wise man puts his wisdom to practical use, do any others recognize him (viz., *“and he by his wisdom delivered the city.”*)

The wise man is the one who abandons the values of the masses. He has no psychological need to obtain society’s approval. He is unconcerned about the fame and successes of oth-

ers, or their opinions about him. He pursues a life of wisdom because it is enjoyable, it is in line with his nature, and not for an ulterior motive.

זְבוּבֵי מוֹת יִבְאִישׁ יַבֵּיעַ שְׁמֹן רוֹקַח
 יִקַּר מְחַכְמָה מִכְבוֹד סְכָלוֹת מְעַט

“Dead flies putrefy the perfumer’s oil; so does a little folly outweigh wisdom and honor.” (10:1)

One sin outweighs much wisdom; more weighty than wisdom and honor is a little foolishness. This foolishness, Ibn Ezra says refers to sin.

King Solomon lived perfectly, except for one sin, and this caused the Torah to speak about him in a derogatory manner.⁷⁸ However, we must ask why is it all or nothing? Why must those in power function flawlessly, where even the smallest error ruins them? The reason is that people create a perfect image of a political figure. And this image can only be maintained in the public’s eye, provided the figure is consistent with the people’s view of him. Therefore, when he falters, the image is shattered, even though the mistake might be a minor oversight.

King Solomon’s oversight of his wives’s idolatry was described by the Rabbis as something which he performed him-

⁷⁸) “Then, Solomon built an altar for Kmosb, the disgrace of Moav on the mountain facing Jerusalem, and to Molech, the disgrace of Ammon (Kings I, 11:7).” Although he did not build these altars, the Rabbis said the altars were attributed to Solomon’s construction, on account that he did not dissuade his wives from building them (*ibid*, *Rashi*).

self. Even though he didn't actually commit this sin, it was attributed to him to show the severity of what occurred. The severity could be like Koheles describes here, i.e., the marring of a figure.

לֵב חָכָם לְיְמִינוֹ וְלֵב פֹּסֵל לְשִׁמְאֹלוֹ
וְגַם בַּדֶּרֶךְ בְּשִׁהְסָכֵל [בְּשִׁסְכָּל] הִלֵּךְ לְבוֹ חָסֵר
וְאָמַר לְכֹל סָכֵל הוּא

“A wise man’s heart inclines him to his right hand; but a fool’s heart to his left. And also, on the road, when a fool walks by, his understanding fails him, and he says to every one that he is a fool.” (10:2,3)

The heart of wise man “to his right” means that his emotions are leaning toward success.⁷⁹ But this seems to contradict verse 10:4 that says a wise man can be overtaken by his feelings of rulership. But the answer is that 8:4 is dealing with a wise man who abandons his wisdom.

Additionally, the wise man’s emotions aren’t compulsive, whereas the fool and the wicked man’s emotions are. But if the wise man leaves Torah, he too will become compulsive.

“...he says to every one that he is a fool” means that once foolishness overpowers the fool, it will be impossible to hide.⁸⁰

79) Torah often identifies the correct path as the “right” path.

80) As if he was literally “telling” everyone he is a fool.

RULERSHIP

אִם־רוּחַ הַמוֹשֵׁל תִּעָלֶה עָלֶיךָ מְקוֹמָךְ אַל־תִּנָּח
כִּי מִרְפָּא יִנְיַח חַטָּאִים גְּדוֹלִים

“If the spirit of the ruler rises against you, leave not your place; for deference pacifies great offenses.” (10:4)

If a person becomes wise, “he shouldn’t leave his place.” Ibn Ezra says this means removing one’s self from wisdom. For once a man removes himself from learning, he must descend back into foolishness. Additionally, regarding one who has acquired knowledge and leans towards rulership, if he abandons a life of wisdom, this desire for power will take over and destroy him.

יֵשׁ רָעָה רְאִיתִי תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ
כְּשִׁגְגָה שִׁיֵּצֵא מִלְּפָנֵי הַשִּׁלִּיט

“There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, as an error which proceeds from the ruler.” (10:5)

Rulers err due to the emotion of rulership. The gemara states this is a very powerful emotion. The reason why he who leaves learning becomes foolish, is predicated on the fact that learning improves someone only while one is involved in it. But there is no permanent change made by learning for any pro-

tracted duration of time. The gemara states, if one learns and then leaves learning, he will be ruined.⁸¹

FOOLS & LAZINESS

חֶפֶר גּוֹמֵץ בּוֹ יִפּוֹל וּפְרִיץ גְּדֵר יִשְׁכָּנּוּ נַחֲשׁ
מִסֵּיעַ אֲבָנִים יַעֲצֵב בָּהֶם בּוֹקֵעַ עֵצִים יִסָּכֵן בָּם

“He who digs a pit shall fall into it; and whoever breaks a hedge, a serpent shall bite him. He who removes stones shall be hurt by them; and he who chops wood shall be endangered by them.” (10:8,9)

Metzudas David says that Koheles doubles the cases to stress that this is always the case. Why always? Since the activity is inherently irrational, man will never succeed in his endeavors.

81) A similar sentiment: “Rav Shimon ben Lakish said, ‘It is found [written] in Megillas Chasidim, ‘If you abandon me one day, I will abandon you two days’ (Tal. Berachos 68a).” This metaphor is the personification of Torah; Torah is warning man. This means that when one leaves learning, the damage is greater than expected. Although man left his learning only one day, it will take two days to regain the level on which he was involved when he left it. Learning is not simply a matter of opening the sefer (book) and studying. Man naturally falls back into his emotional framework all the time he is not engaging study. There is no neutral state: one is either involved in wisdom, or his emotions. Thus, to return to a state of mind of learning, man must first extricate himself from his emotional attachments, taking “one day”, and then reengage his mind in thought, “a second day.” And if one leaves learning permanently, as Rabbi Chait explains, he will be ruined. The damage is compounded.

עֲמַל הַכֹּסִילִים תִּיגָעוּ אֲשֶׁר לֹא יֵדַע לָלֶכֶת
אֶל-עִיר

*“The labor of fools wearies him, for he does not know
how to go to the city.” (10:15)*

The fool’s emotions frustrate his desires; he can never achieve his desire, to “go to the city.”

בְּעֲצֵלְתַיִם יִמּוֹךְ הַמְּקָרָה
וּבִשְׁפִלוֹת יָדַיִם יִדְלֹף הַבַּיִת

“By slothfulness the beams collapse; and through idleness of the hands the house leaks.” (10:18)

Why is laziness brought in here? Laziness is a feeling which stems from the emotion that everything is going to be all right. Laziness is a withdrawal from reality.⁸²

A side note: the way for one to perfect himself must be accompanied by the knowledge that his childhood emotions are false. He must be able to see this clearly.

82) One who follows this feeling of laziness will not repair his home, or act to secure other basic needs, and suffer the consequences stated.

DEATH

Why does King Solomon discuss death at the end of his book? The reason is because a correct philosophy of life must—by definition—incorporate the fact that life has a limit. All the decisions one makes pertaining to his life must be based on the correct understanding of life. If one makes decisions thinking that he is going to live forever, his decisions will be erroneous.

*This ends Rabbi Chait's lectures from 1986 and 1987.
A summary follows.*

SUMMARY

Rabbi Chait teaches that King Solomon first validates himself as worthy of teaching these fundamentals. To understand which life is best, Rabbi Chait stated that King Solomon then introduces us to man's psychological makeup. From man's great ambition to succeed, his surging energies, and his immortality fantasy, the King lays the groundwork—a map of the psyche—so we might appreciate his explorations into man's quest for happiness. Rabbi Chait highlights the central theme that man creates and chases fantasies, and that these are the “futilities of futilities.” Man assumes there is something “additional” in his pursuits. King Solomon exposes these fallacies.

On the surface, it appears that King Solomon contradicted himself in numerous verses. We learn this was not the case. Wisdom can be both a good and an evil, if we consider that these two views are voiced by two individuals: King Solomon praises wisdom, while the masses deride it since they value earthly life, since “wise men die just as fools die.” As wisdom doesn't save them from death, they criticize wisdom. One error of deriding wisdom is based on another error of believing earthly life to be all there is. There is no contradiction.

Conflicting statements like “greater wisdom creates anger” while wisdom is also “praised” are resolved, as each sentiment

is voiced by two distinct individuals. The fool is frustrated when he learns his desires are empty, so he grows angry at his knowledge. But the wise man who lives a life pursuing wisdom, and is not chasing empty dreams, will not experience anger. He praises wisdom.

If one views “the good” as his physical existence, he questions God’s justice when earthly life does not meet expectations. Life does have its let downs. However, the true good, which God intends for man is that which affects our souls; our eternal element. A fool will complain when he doesn’t obtain every desire, while the wise man understands the physical is not perfect as an end, nor does he seek it as his goal. Rather, he finds wisdom to afford man the greatest joy. The wise man also lives by general rules and is not angered by isolated cases of difficulty, as is the fool. These two perspectives result in a wise man who is happy, and a fool who complains at every little inconvenience.

Ibn Ezra cites many verses⁸³ as the words of the masses; they are not King Solomon’s views. This alone resolves many other contradictions. Following these principles, other contradictions too will be resolved. ■

83) 3:19, 9:4, 9:7

