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Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim



Lulav & Succah

The Connection

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Solomon crowned king at age 12

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LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Harmful Religious Emotions

TOBY: I listened to a shiur where the lecturing rabbi mentioned a story in the Gemara about a rabbi who had a very beautiful daughter and prayed to Hashem that she should die so that she wouldn't cause men to sin because of her beauty. The rabbi giving the shiur said, "It's very difficult for us to understand this story because the rabbi who prayed that his daughter should die was on a very high spiritual level, and we are not on that level. Therefore, it's hard for us to understand his actions from our perspective." I'm wondering how you would interpret this Gemara.

RABBI: Context is crucial. The rabbi to whom you were listening made a mistake about R. Yosei from Yokeret by not properly analyzing the gemara or researching Gemara's commentaries: (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

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Taanis 24a:

Rav Asbi said to Rabbi Yosei bar Avin, "And didn't the Master (you) sit before and frequent the study hall of Rabbi Yosei from Yokeret?" Rabbi Yosei bar Avin replied, "Yes." Rav Asbi asked further, "And what is the reason that the Master left him and came here?" Rabbi Yosei bar Avin said to him, "I was concerned and departed because he is so severe and unforgiving. He is a man who has no mercy on his own son and daughter. How, then, could he have mercy on me?"

What is the incident involving his son? One day Rabbi Yosei from Yokeret hired day laborers to work his field. It grew late and he did not bring them food. The workers said to the son of Rabbi Yosei from Yokeret, "We are starving." They were sitting under an unripe fig tree, so the son said, "Fig tree, fig tree, yield your fruits so that my father's workers may eat." The fig tree yielded fruit, and they ate.

In the meantime, his father came and said to the workers, "Do not be angry with me for being late, as I was engaged in a mitzva, and until just now I was traveling for that purpose and could not get here any sooner." They said to him, "May the Merciful One satisfy you just as your son satisfied us and gave us food." He said to them, "From where did he find food to give you?" They said, "Such-and-such an incident occurred." Rabbi Yosei from Yokeret said to his son, "My son, you troubled your Creator to cause the fig to yield its fruit not in its proper time, so too, you will die young." And indeed, his son died before his time.

What is the incident involving Rabbi Yosei from Yokeret's daughter? He had a very beautiful daughter. One day he saw a certain man piercing a hole in the bush surrounding his property and peeking at his daughter. Rabbi Yosei said to him, "What is this?" The man said to him, "My teacher, if I have not merited taking her in marriage, shall I not at least merit to look at her?" Rabbi Yosei said to her, "My daughter, you are causing people distress. Return to your dust, and let people no longer stumble into sin due to you."

Blindly accepting such stories and not searching for their intended deeper meaning, we do an injustice to Torah, and Jews seeking truth. The characters of the story may be true, but the accounts are allegories. One indication that these stories are allegorical is that the rabbi's son "miraculously" produced fruits. Second, why is his name Rabbi Yosei from "Yokeret?" Rabbi Yosei bar Avin means he was Avin's son, the correct name format, as seen in all Gemara personalities: "Rabbi X bar X." Why then isn't the other rabbi named after his father as well? This place "Yokeret" may be a clue.

Yokeret or yakar, means "precious." By Gemara naming this rabbi Yokeret, it indicates his overly precious and obsessive values that were misplaced. He cared less about his children than about a religious emotions he held most precious. He felt his son's great efforts to feed hungry workers (miraculously creating fruits) were not as important as respecting God's natural laws. He raised nature over man's needs. But as his son did nothing wrong, the rabbi was wrong to condemn his son for helping others. The son dying early means his father's ridicule distressed him greatly. In other cases, Gemara uses death to refer to harming another fundamentally, but not miraculously causing death.

Rabbi Yosei from Yokeret also demonized man's sins over his daughter's feelings, a girl in no way responsible for men who cannot control their lusts. His daughter should have been treated more importantly than strangers for whom he is not responsible.

Man possesses a religious emotion, and he can distort Torah's priorities in favor of satisfying a feeling of being overly-religious. A person in shul may daven loudly and shuckle fiercely to display his religiosity to others, but arrogance is wrong, and such acts make one less religious. Here, one uses religion for egoistical purposes. There are many expressions man finds to gain peer approval, when he should in fact seek only God's approval. Rabbi Yosei from Yokeret wrongly prioritized man sinning, when he should have prioritized Torah's value of treating children properly. Rabbi Yosei from Yokeret erred by not following Torah's priorities.

The lecturing rabbi you listened to also failed to follow the Torah method. That is, there are fundamentals truths that are never compromised. One is the principle of Reward and Punishment which has clear parameters for defining guilt and merit. Rabbi Yosei from Yokeret's daughter was without guilt. How can one's appearance, which is outside of one's control, be a reason to condemn a person? This alone must teach the reader that Rabbi Yosei from Yokeret was wrong. And furthermore, a woman is not asked to restrict her beauty until after she's married, when only then she covers her hair. Chayei Adam comments that Rabbi Yosei from Yokeret was wrong. He cites how, during the famine, when Abraham had to descend to Egypt, which had food, he turned to his beautiful wife Sarah and asked her to say that she was his sister and not his wife so the immoral Egyptians shouldn't kill him to take Sarah. But Abraham did not say to his wife, "Since you're beautiful you should die and not cause men to sin." Chayei Adam was right. This biblical incident exposes Rabbi Yosei from Yokeret as gravely wrong, unlike the lecturing rabbi you heard.

With such stories, Gemara follows God's Torah principle of sharing the flaws of our leaders. God does not hide the sins of our prophets or biblical personalities. Here too the Gemara also is teaching that rabbis make errors. Rabbi Yosei bar Avin said, "Rabbi Yosei from Yokeret is so severe and unforgiving. He is a man who has no mercy on his own son and daughter." So the very account in our Gemara opens with an accusation of Rabbi Yosei from Yokeret. Thereby, to suggest Rabbi Yosei from Yokeret "is on a very high spiritual level" and beyond reproach, is a misinterpretation. Torah focuses on God, not man. Gemara isn't a history book, it shares stories both literal and metaphoric that contain deep lessons discovered only after careful analysis. But all too often today, rabbis read the surface information only, understanding it literally. They ignore Maimonides and his son's words teaching that Gemara's stories many times are allegorical, requiring interpretation by trained minds. ■

READER: Can you please explain the relationship of the lulav and etrog to the succah? On most holidays, there is usually a relationship between the mitzvos and the holiday like matzoh on Pesach, or the succah and Succos. So what is the purpose of the lulav and etrog? I am finding it very hard to find any information; of the many people I have spoken to, little information is known. The main response I get is, “We do it because we are commanded to by God.” Well, this of course is a given, but I find this response problematic.

RABBI: In his book entitled Horeb[1], Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch explained a close relationship between the succah, esrog and lulav. I will mention his ideas, followed by my thoughts, stimulated by Rabbi Hirsch. The mitzvah of succah—a minimalistic home—intends to break man away from his materialistic lifestyle: the physical world is not the goal of our temporal earthly existence. And the 4 species embodies the correct attitude towards the source of all physical good: we give thanks to God for His bountiful harvest. Waving produce in all 4 directions—and upwards and downwards—we demonstrate that God alone has complete dominion over the world. The Talmud states, (Succah 37b):

Why do we wave the Lulav? R. Yochanan said, “We wave out and back (horizontally) to the One who owns all four directions on Earth. And we wave the lulav up and down to the One Who owns heaven and Earth.”

Rabbi Yochanan separates the two acts of waving “forward-back-left-right” from “up-down” to teach us that there are two areas of God’s dominion which require our affirmation. God is the sole Creator of all. This is why we wave up and down, referring to heaven (up) and Earth (down): all creation is contained in these two realms. But if up and down covers all creation, what is left to recognize about God’s greatness, as we must also wave in 4 directions? These 4 directions refer not to creation, but to God’s government of mankind: God has complete knowledge/governance of man’s “travels” on Earth (our actions), alluded to by these “4 directions.” The 4 directions depict man’s movement across Earth’s surface. This subtle difference points us to the realization that there are two distinct areas of God’s greatness:

1) God is omnipotent: He can do all, as He created heaven and Earth (waving up/down), (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

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2) God is omniscient: He knows all, as He is aware of all our travels and actions (forward-back-left-right). This theme is reiterated as the two main themes of the High Holiday prayers, Malchios (omnipotence), and Zichronos (omniscience). Rabbi Yochanan's view is that waving the four species on Succos intends to demonstrate our acceptance and praise for God's dominion in all areas: His creation (heaven and Earth), and His government of man (4 directions). We wave His vegetation up and down to demonstrate that He created all that is above, and all that is below. But He also governs all that He created, demonstrated by waving the species in all 4 directions. God's omnipotence and omniscience is again on display in the Temple: the Menora possesses 7 branches (7=creation) and a Table of 12 showbread displays God's providence (food) over the 12 Tribes.

Lulav and Succah: The Connection

Why must the Succah be temporal and frail by design? Koheles 7:29 says, "God created man upright, but they [man] have sought out many calculations." Targum writes as follows:

God made Adam the First upright before him and just; and the serpent and Eve seduced him to eat of the fruit of the tree, because those who eat its fruit would be wise to discern between good and evil, and they brought upon him and all the inhabitants of the earth the day of death; [then] they sought to find many calculations in order to bring deficiency upon the inhabitants of the Earth.

Targum (Ibid.) teaches that it was only after bringing mortality to mankind, that Adam sought these many calculations. These calculations refer to man's obsession with many physical preoccupations. Sforno writes, "Adam was involved in many troubles before he even ate bread." [Simple bread is insufficient for the distorted man, who derailed the plan for simplistic physical needs, into a

preoccupation with its preparation and many details, like sweetness.] God made man "upright": to be satisfied with simple physical needs, but Adam toiled greatly for certain types of breads, to find very sweet things (Sforno). (Rabbi Israel Chait) Man denies his mortality by seeking a permanent attachment to life. He does so by chasing physical securities through riches and earthly permanence, expressed in building luxurious homes, expensive autos, and fine garments. But man must view God as his security, instead of viewing himself and the physical as real. With his attachment to physical security, man removes God from the equation and fails to appreciate God's vital role. Therefore, God commands us to dwell in a flimsy structure for a week, as a detachment from our greatest physical security: our homes. God must retain central focus. Succah breaks man away from his desire for physical security. Lulav complements succah by emphasizing the use of the physical for the right reasons. We thank God—the Source of our bounty—replacing our faulty view of the physical with proper thanks to God for providing sustenance. All physical objects we are fortunate to receive should be used in recognition of the Creator, and not to reaffirm our physical strength.

It also makes sense that Succah—not Lulav—is used to demonstrate man's required break from the physical. Man's home is the one object which embodies earthy permanence...not so man's food. Therefore, a frail home (succah) is used as opposed to fruits, which are consumed objects, and do not afford man the satisfaction of permanence. Since man does not attach himself to fruits as he does his home, the home is from where man must make his break. Succah breaks down man's weighty attachment to the physical, while lulav redirects man's attachment towards God, the source of all our sustenance. This is the connection. This explains why we read Koheles (Ecclesiastes) on Succos. In this philosophical masterpiece, King Solomon presents the correct philosophy in relation to God, society, labor, security,

wealth, success, pleasure, happiness, death, ego, accomplishments and myriads of emotions and philosophies. Numerous times King Solomon states, "What extra is there for man in all his toil that he toils under the sun?" He even commences his work with his summary, "Futility of futilities." The Rabbis questioned King Solomon's statement, "How can King Solomon say all is futile, when God said in Genesis that the world is very good?" The answer is that King Solomon only critiqued the physical as an ends in itself. When God said it was good, He meant that as long as it serves only as a "means" to man's pursuit of wisdom and a perfected life. There is no contradiction between King Solomon and God (Rabbi Israel Chait).

Fulfill the obligations of this Succos holiday. Adhere to the commands of eating, drinking, and certainly sleeping in the succah, even light naps. Make the scach (succah covering) from detached plant life such as reeds, wood, or bamboo. Gaze through the gaps at the stars as you repose in your succah, recognizing your Creator, the sole cause of the universe. Wave the 4 species in all horizontal directions demonstrating God's exclusive dominion over all man's affairs. Wave them upwards and downwards, demonstrating God's exclusive creation of that which is up and down—heaven and Earth.

By living in these frail booths, we strip ourselves of our false security, and with our waving of the lulav, esrog, haddasim and aravos we redirect our security towards the One who provides sustenance, thereby realizing that our ultimate protection and security comes from God. ■

[1] Soncino Press, 6th English Edition 1997, pp 132



SOLOMON'S WISDOM

Rabbi Israel Chait on Koheles

The book of Koheles (Ecclesiastes) was authored by King Solomon who was “wiser than all men...” (Kings I, 5:11). He wrote Koheles with Divine inspiration, wherein he analyzes which is the most rewarding philosophy. The Rabbis intended on hiding his book. They were concerned the masses might misconstrue King Solomon’s views, and his words be gravely understood in a contradictory or heretical sense. However, the very fact that King Solomon wrote in such a fashion should draw our intrigue. As he could have written in a clear fashion, his purposeful, cryptic and seemingly contradictory style must carry its own lesson, aside from the underlying content. Why did King Solomon write this way in this book only, in contrast to Proverbs, for example? Perhaps, when presenting a work on the correct philosophy, King Solomon must first expose the false philosophies. To do so, he must get the masses to read his words. He does so by verbalizing the masses’ popular feelings and values. On the surface, it appears as though such verbalization is an endorsement; it may sound as though the King is vocalizing his own views in agreement with the masses. But in fact, he is not. He verbalizes false views so they may be exposed. More than once, Ibn Ezra says King Solomon’s words are the masses’ views, they are not his own views. King Solomon first voices foolishness without evaluation, as a strategy to first lure the masses to read his words, making them think, “Oh look, King Solomon agrees with an epicurean life was we do,” so the masses read further. The masses finally read King Solomon’s rejection of any life other than a Torah life. King Solomon describes foolishness in its many forms, luring the masses to read on, and finally exposes the errors contained in these falsehoods, teaching the true philosophy. Pay careful attention to King Solomon’s commencing chapter on psychology explained by Rabbi Israel Chait, wherein he sets the stage for the rest of his book. Without knowledge of human psychology, we have no means to judge a philosophy as deviating or conforming to man’s design, and happiness.

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KOHES

Based on Rabbi Israel Chait's lectures

1:1) "The words of Kohes, son of David, king in Jerusalem."

King Solomon wished to inform us of his qualifications to share wisdom. "Kohes" is a derivative from the root "kahal", meaning a group. As king, King Solomon had all at his disposal to gather to himself the wise of his generation. His ideas were tested against the best minds; hence, his conclusions deserve earnest attention. As "son of David," King Solomon had the greatest teacher. "Jerusalem" was the seat of wisdom (Sforno). We are informed of the King's outstanding circumstances to arrive at the greatest truths.

1:2) "Futility of futilities, says Kohes, futility of futilities, all is futile."

"Futile" is mentioned 7 times. Each word "futile" in the singular indicates 1, and each in the plural, 2. So the phrase, "futility of futilities" contains 3 references. 7 "futilities" are derived by adding all instances in this verse. 7 is indicative of the 6 days of

Creation plus God's rest on the seventh day. King Solomon associates futility with the Creation. The Rabbis asked, "How can Solomon deny what God said, 'And God saw all that He made, and behold it (Creation) was very good?'" (Gen. 1:31) But King Solomon did not suggest Creation is futile. His intent is that when creation is not used properly, only then it is futile. But when used properly, God is correct, "it is very good."

So we must ask, when is creation abused, and when is it used properly? Additionally, aside from numerics, this verse must make sense in its plain reading. What is disturbing is what King Solomon means by "futility of futilities." I understand what a "futility" is; if someone seeks something vain, or improper, we would call this a futility. But what is the additional futility to which King Solomon refers to as "futility of futilities"? What can be futile about a futility?

Rabbi Chait said King Solomon's second "futility" is referring to "fantasy." Not only is the pursuit of money (for itself) a futile endeavor, but also, one's fantasy about his plan—before he acts—is an additional futility. "Fantasizing" about any material pleasure is what King Solomon refers to. Not only is the acquisition a futility, but one's energies being used for fantasy prior to the acquisition is an additional futility. King Solomon teaches that man doesn't simply follow an emotional attraction, while his thoughts are blank. No. Man acts out his emotion as the last step in a series. Man's first step is his arousal; he then conjures up a picture-perfect fantasy. He imagines the abundant wealth and fame he will soon acquire. But this is all fantasy. It is a futile use of his energies, which could have been used to study God's wisdom, where happiness truly comes from. This is valuable time lost. Fantasizing is a futility, in addition to the actual amassing of excess wealth.

When is the physical an evil or a good? It is a good, provided one uses it as a means for a life of wisdom. All was created for the sake of man's search for truth. If man uses any part of creation without this goal in mind, he forfeits this goal. Of course, man

has emotions, and they must be satisfied on some level. But satisfaction is so man is content enough to live a life as a philosopher. Torah does not prohibit indulgence, but overindulgence is not praised. "Kedoshim tihiyu", "Sanctified shall you be" teaches that even with what is permissible, man should curb his indulgence.

1:3) "What additional (gain) is there to man, in all his labor that he labors under the sun?"

Rashi explains this to mean "earnings plus extra." What "extra" is Rashi referring to? Is King Solomon criticizing one who labors to eat? This cannot be. But we do notice that he does not say "gain", but "additional gain." What is additional, over and above the earnings man receives for his labor? We must also ask a more primary question: what is so important about this question, that the King started his book with it? One may view King Solomon's verse as his own question. But you may also read it as the King's verbalization of other peoples' question. Meaning, King Solomon is merely reiterating the futile thoughts on man's mind, not his own. King Solomon was exceedingly wise, let us not make the error of assuming his thoughts matched ours. In this verse, King Solomon points to an emotional need in man. This need is the "extra" which man seeks out, in addition to his earnings. What is this "extra"? It may be a feeling of honor one desires, so he works hard for decades to rise above others for this attention. He may wish to be viewed as a sophisticate, so he dons certain clothing and dines at exclusive locations. But all these needs, emotional projections, or self-images, are of no use to one seeking the correct life. King Solomon correctly states, "what extra is there?" King Solomon teaches that man should be anchored in reality, not imagination. Honor is in one's mind, as is one's self-image of a sophisticate. Living a fantasy is futile. Only what is real and practical is worthwhile. Don't seek the "extra", the imagined self-images. Rabbi Chait taught that King Solomon is

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exposing our base drive which underlies all others; the need for “accomplishment.” Man is seeking to accomplish much in his life. Why? After one’s needs are met, it appears that further accomplishment serves man’s desire to remove insecurity from himself. Too often though, a realistic security grows into an abundance of wealth, which is never spent. This too is yet another emotion, but it is the primary propelling force in man leading him to other imagined goals. This need to “accomplish” takes on many faces. “Under the sun”: The fantasy of immortality is essential, if one is to create his other fantasies. If we knew we were dying, we could not invest our energies into amassing wealth. We would admit our time is ending. The reality of our mortality would be too stark, and it would tap all our energies. For this reason, King Solomon ends this verse with “under the sun.” He thereby teaches that the remedy to a life of fantasy is to contemplate that we have a limited lifespan. “Under the sun” means, on Earth, a temporal earthly existence. This dose of reality helps one to temper his energies, and accept his mortality. With this reality factor, man will not so quickly indulge his fantasies. He will be safeguarded to keep his attention to what is truly real: God’s wisdom is eternal. In truth, man should be attached to what is eternal. Sforzo writes on this verse, (1:3) “And he (King Solomon) said this on man’s work under the sun in matters which are transient. For what use is this, that it is fitting for an intelligent being to strive at all to achieve (these matters)?” Sforzo teaches that regarding matters, which are transient and temporal, man must not invest any time into them. It is a waste.

1:4) “A generation comes, and a generation goes, and the land eternally stands.”

What is the relevance of a “generation” and why do I need to know that one comes and goes? As we read through the book of Koheles, we must determine whether a

given verse is King Solomon’s advice, or is it him voicing man’s ignorant opinions. The verses are either King Solomon’s proper instruction, or his exposure of man’s destructive emotional counsel. Be sensitive to the issues, and be mindful that this book was written by our wisest sage, and only after he analyzed man’s behavior. Remember, he was King David’s son, he was king, he had all the sages at his disposal to discuss and arrive at decisive, intelligent, and true concepts. And most important to know is that King Solomon’s wisdom was gifted to him by God at the age of 12 (Kings I, 3:5).

Clearly with this verse, “a generation comes, and a generation goes” King Solomon attacks the core of the immortality fantasy, i.e., not only do individuals expire, but so do generations. Individual man is dwarfed by a generation. The insignificance of the self is undeniably admitted in the face of “mankind.” And in turn, mankind’s expiration dwarfs one’s individual, immortality fantasy. King Solomon wishes man to undermine this destructive fantasy of immortality. By doing so, man will not find the backdrop necessary for chasing fantasies. He will be forced to confront reality, and will then be guided only by truth.

“And the land eternally stands.” If man is to truly accept his own mortality, there must be that which he recognizes “outlives” him. For if all would expire with one’s own death, the immortality fantasy would be replaced with yet another destructive phantasm; the ego. If one was unsure whether the world continued when he was gone, he would thereby feed his ego. Therefore, King Solomon aligns man’s expiration with the realization that the world continues even without us. The knowledge that the universe continues without us, is the necessary measuring rod for our mortality. There must be something against which we may contrast our lifespan, and that is the universe, which “eternally stands.” Contrasting the eternity of the universe to one’s own few decades, man is helped to confront his mortality.

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1:5) “And the sun shines, and the sun sets, and unto its place it yearns (to) shine there.”

This is a prime example of the universe’s unrelenting nature. This sentiment substantiates the previous comment that only the world endures. It draws on an example of the most prominent, celestial sphere. We also learn that a created inanimate entity, undiluted with human agendas (i.e., the sun) performs perfectly as it functions precisely in line with its nature, designed by God. Man would be wise to take this lesson to heart. But what strikes us is the term “yearns” being applied to an inanimate object. How can the sun “yearn”?

More than other matters, one element is essential to understand human psychology: the unconscious. This is the ever-functioning but hidden part of our emotional make up. We have many desires, fears, loves, hates, and numerous other emotions, completely hidden from our consciousness. We are truly blind to them. These emotions, wishes and fears are manifest in our dreams; they cause our “slips of the tongue” and continually motivate us. If we do not analyze our dreams, and examine our actions and feelings, we lose out greatly: “An uninterpreted dream is like an unopened letter” (Tal. Brachos). We forfeit our perfection when we allow these unconscious forces to control us, and not the reverse. Perfection requires one to be in as much control of his actions and opinions as possible. Although many emotions are elusive and remain undetected, not reflecting on ourselves is unacceptable. What is it that “yearns” to shine? What is “shining”? Perhaps King Solomon alludes to this unconscious, which does both; it “rises” and “sets.” It “rises”, as it pushes forth its force into what is in daylight (rising), i.e., consciousness. It also “sets”, as it recedes back into its hidden realm, the unconscious. It “yearns to shine,” means that the unconscious always seek to affect man, who is functioning in a waking state. “Yearning” to shine means that the

unconscious forces are relentless in their “desire” to control our actions.

“And Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the coming of dawn” (Gen. 32:25). The verse says that Jacob was alone, yet he wrestled with someone; a contradiction. Rabbi Chait resolved this contradiction by explaining that Jacob was in fact alone, but was really wrestling with himself; Jacob was the “man.” Jacob was wrestling with his unconscious. “until the coming of dawn”, means that which could not exist in daylight, in consciousness. We see daylight referring to man’s consciousness, and night referring to the unconscious. Jacob was fighting with some internal, unconscious element in his personality, indicated by the struggle ending at daybreak. I find King Solomon’s selected metaphor revealing; he uses the sun (shemesh) for this lesson. “Shemesh” also means a servant, a “shamashe.” Perhaps this is fitting, as the unconscious should serve us, not control us.

1:6) “It travels to the South, and circles to the North, circling, circling, travels the wind, and on its circuit does the wind return.”

Rabbi Chait explained:

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

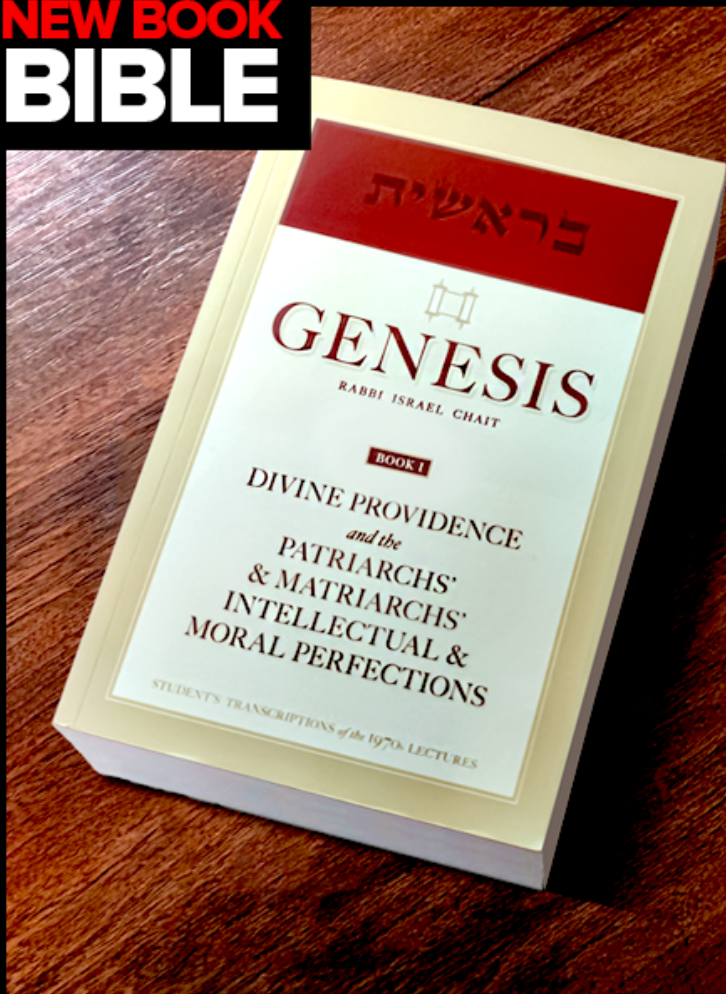
One only imagines that he is “progressing” when he meets his own, subjective goals. His desire to progress is only progress in his own terms, and not true progress according to Torah perfection. Man wishes to build empires, but in God’s eyes, they are meaningless, and in fact, man regresses with such activity. How does King Solomon indicate that such a desire is fruitless? “Circling, circling” describes a repeating pattern. One does not actually change his location, he circles on the same parcel of ground, not moving forward. This rotating activity is akin to one who does not see true progress in his life. Man imagines he progresses with his material successes and plans, but in truth, he keeps going in “circles.”

Here too King Solomon utilizes an appropriate metaphor; the “wind.” We too refer to man’s strength as his wind; “he knocked the wind out of me”, “he lost the wind from his sails.” King Solomon teaches that man directs his energies towards goals to give him a sense of worth. The underlying need for accomplishment has gone unchecked, and propels him to the “South and the North.” Instead, man should contemplate that his energies are better used in search of truth, instead of reacting to the unconscious, pushing him to make himself great through empire building, fame and riches. Such actions are the result of the imagination, and not a thought-out philosophy, which exposes such vanity. (CONT. ON PAGE 13)

Genesis Book II

(Published July 2026)

NEW BOOK
BIBLE



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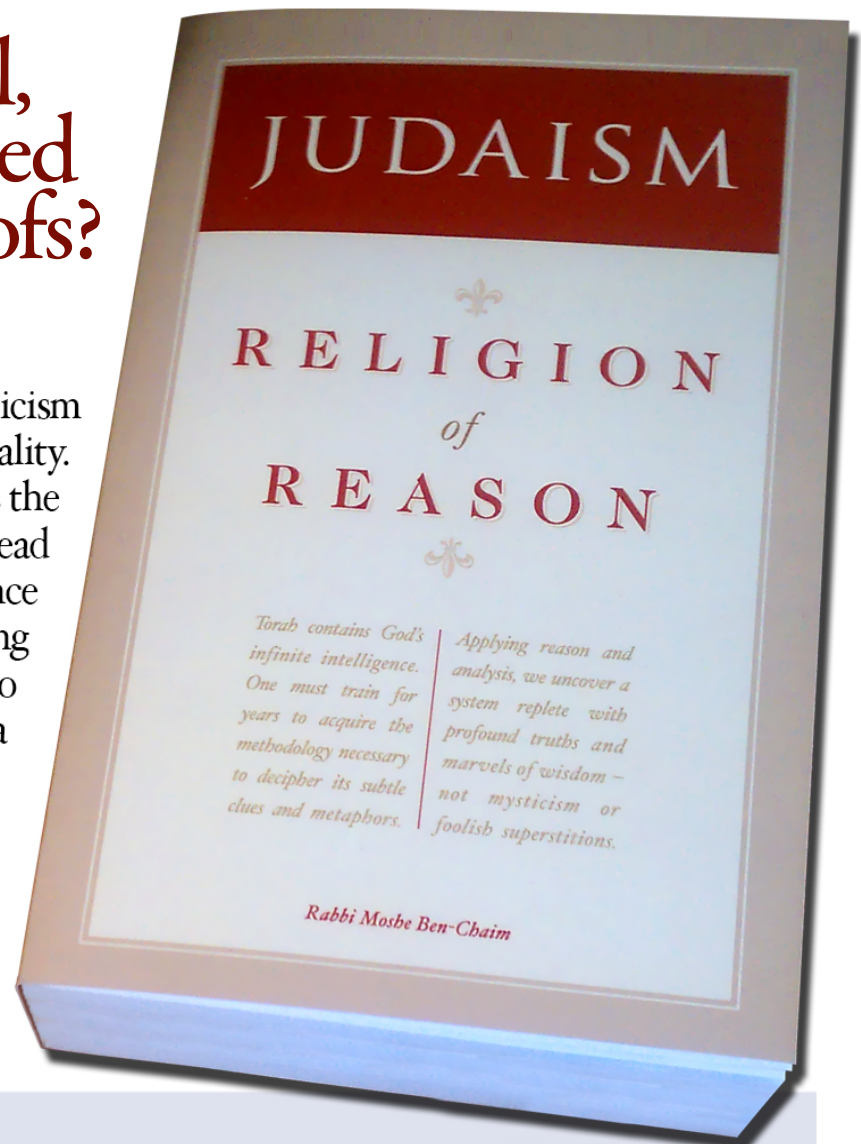
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1:7) “All the rivers go to the sea, but the sea is not full, to the place where the rivers go, there they return to go.”

Rabbi Chait continues:

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.”

This verse is a metaphor for man’s energies. This great psychological,

reservoir of energy is the cause for the previous verse’s teaching; that man has a great drive to accomplish. Man’s energies are always “flowing”, and they seek to become “full.” “But the sea is not full”, that is, man does not become fully satisfied. Man’s emotions are temporarily satisfied, but then again he seeks a new emotional satisfaction. Satisfaction, therefore, is temporary. Where man’s emotions flow, “there they return to go”, i.e., it is an endless process. “All the rivers go to the sea” indicates that all man’s energies have one focus for that period. Man is usually pulled in one direction, depicted here as a “sea”, one destination. It is interesting that “rivers” are also mentioned in Genesis, also in the commencing chapters. There is a relationship. The one river in Genesis branched into 4 rivers which are called 4 heads, Torah mentions Zahav (gold), Gichone (a stomach), Ashure (happiness) and Piras, fruitful. One energy source flowing towards 4 areas.

1:8) “All matters are wearying, man is unable to describe them, the eye does not become satisfied in seeing, the ear does not become full from hearing.”

Why are the eye and ear unable to behold their complete sensations? Is King Solomon describing the ineptitude of these organs? Or, perhaps he means to point us towards understanding that element in man, which seeks to “behold all.” The latter would indicate that man has a desire to have complete knowledge in a given field, but he cannot. This desire stems from another need; security. Man wishes to have a complete grasp on matters, otherwise, he feels inept. This wearied state, King Solomon says is due to man’s attempt to secure complete knowledge. Man desires to be secure that he has all the answers. Man is better advised to accept his limited scope of apprehension, than to deny his feeble

nature and strive for the impossible. Seeing and hearing are the two major senses used in learning. Being “unable to describe them”, teaches that man wishes to behold wisdom, so much that he can competently discourse on matters, his ego wishes self-sufficiency, autonomy, the removal of insecurity.

1:9) “That what was, will be, and what was done, will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.”

What human attitude is King Solomon responding to here? Note that he addresses both the “what”, (things), and “events” (what was “done.”) This encompasses all of man’s experiences on Earth: man relates either to objects, or to events, categorized as “space and time.”

King Solomon teaches that man seeks out “novelty”, looking for that which is new in objects, or in events. Why? What satisfaction does man imagine he will experience with something new, or a new event? Rashi correctly writes that in the universe, all has been created during Creation. Nothing afterwards can be created anew. In contrast, new ideas are in fact new to us, and afford enlightenment, and the invigoration that the soul is designed to seek.

“Novelty” is not an ends in itself, but a sought after cure for man’s stagnation. Man inescapably seeks enlightenment, but he seeks it in the physical realm, “under the sun”, the arena which King Solomon critiques. Man will only find the rejuvenating pleasure of novelty in the area of wisdom. All earthly attempts to fulfill this need will result in dissatisfaction.

Novelty has a funny way of vanishing immediately. Something is “new”, as long as it goes inexperienced. It is a “Catch-22.” Before we attain something, or go somewhere, it is new, but we have yet to enjoy our imagined pleasure. And once we attain it, or get there, it is no longer truly new. How many times have we anticipated arriving at a new destination, only to be

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)



disappointed that when we arrive, the novel and alluring element of our vacation, i.e., being “there”, goes unrealized. We are not “there”, because once we get “there”, it is now “here.”

1:10) “There is a thing that you will say, ‘Look at this, it is new’, (but) it was already in history, that was before us.”

This verse seems repetitive. Also, what is the specific “thing” to which King Solomon refers?

Rabbi Chait taught that this verse discusses the emotion of “modernity.” Man wishes to feel that he lives in THE generation. We hear people ridicule ancient societies as backwards. We have electronics; we have something new. We live on the final frontier. We are better than all other generations.

Why do we wish to feel we are the most advanced generation? I believe such an emotion of modernity, attempts to deny mortality. If we live in the most advanced generation, this means, ipso facto, that no other generation may pass us: we will never die.

The cure for the imagined sense of modernity is to realize that others before us experienced what we do. Contemplating that other people have expired with history, forces us to recognize that what we experience as new, will also meet with the same fate. We must identify with other generations: they have come and gone. We are no different. We too will go the way of the world. This realization, that all mankind faces the same fate, enables man to apply this truth to himself. King Solomon describes the problems and offers correct solutions. He desired the good for all mankind. This good, means knowledge of what is truth, and a dismissal of fallacy. King Solomon describes so many of man’s pitfalls. Did God design man with destructive elements? No, He did not, “and behold it is very good,” referring to man and creation. He designed us with attitudes and emotions, which are to be studied, and

directed towards living an extremely happy existence. “Ki yetzer lave ha’adom ra m’naurav”, “Mans’ inclinations are evil from youth” (Gen. 8:21) means that only our “inclinations”, not our faculties, are initially not steered by intelligence. They drive towards what is evil and harmful. But with devoted study and self-application of our knowledge, we are well equipped to direct our energies, emotions and attitudes towards the good. Man’s mind is more powerful and convincing than his emotions. With intelligence and proofs, we are fully capable of attaching ourselves to the life outlined in the Torah.

By nature, man wishes to follow what he sees as true and good. This is our inherent design. As we study more and more, we abandon what is false, and naturally follow what is proven as good. Once we see a new idea clearly, we will naturally follow it. What is required, is to devote time to study, and endure research and analysis until we arrive at conclusive, proven opinions. Man’s drives are only evil from youth. By nature, the emotions have a head start on intelligence. This does not forecast our inevitable destruction. Our continual Torah study will refine our thoughts and values, to the point, that we see with ultimate clarity, how to use our energies to attain a truly enjoyable and beneficial existence.

1:11) “There is no remembrance to the first ones, and also to the later ones that will be, there will be no remembrance to them, with those that will be afterwards.”

Facing mortality, so clearly spelled out in the previous verse, King Solomon now closes the loop by addressing man’s final hope for mortality: to be memorialized in death. If man cannot achieve immortality in life, he still attempts to secure a memorial for himself. He wishes to go down in history. This fantasy strives at securing some vestige of his existence. But this will not be. How does King Solomon help man abandon such futility? He asks man to

recall previous generations, and man cannot, “There is no remembrance to the first ones.” This is an iron-clad argument against hoping for memorialization: time erases the history of everyone. King Solomon wisely advances man’s thoughts to the future, as if to say, “You think YOU will be remembered? Let us see if this happens.” The King’s response: “There is no remembrance of the first ones.” It does not happen to them, it will not happen to you, nor to any future generation. Reality is the best teacher, and King Solomon places reality between man’s eyes.

The Verses Defined

1. King Solomon’s “Qualifications” to address this topic.
2. “Fantasy”: The subject of Koheles.
3. “Accomplishment”: Man’s primary fantasy.
4. “Immortality”: The backdrop necessary for fantasy.
5. “The Unconscious”: The source of man’s fantasy life.
6. “Progress”: the goal of accomplishment.
7. “Energies”: Man’s abundant drive seeking satisfaction, and propelling his search for happiness.
8. “Independence”: Mans attempt to remove all insecurities by attempting to grasp complete knowledge.
9. “Novelty”: Where it is, and is not found; an inherent need in man.
10. “Modernity”: Striving for immortality in life.
11. “Memorialization”: Striving for immortality in death. ■



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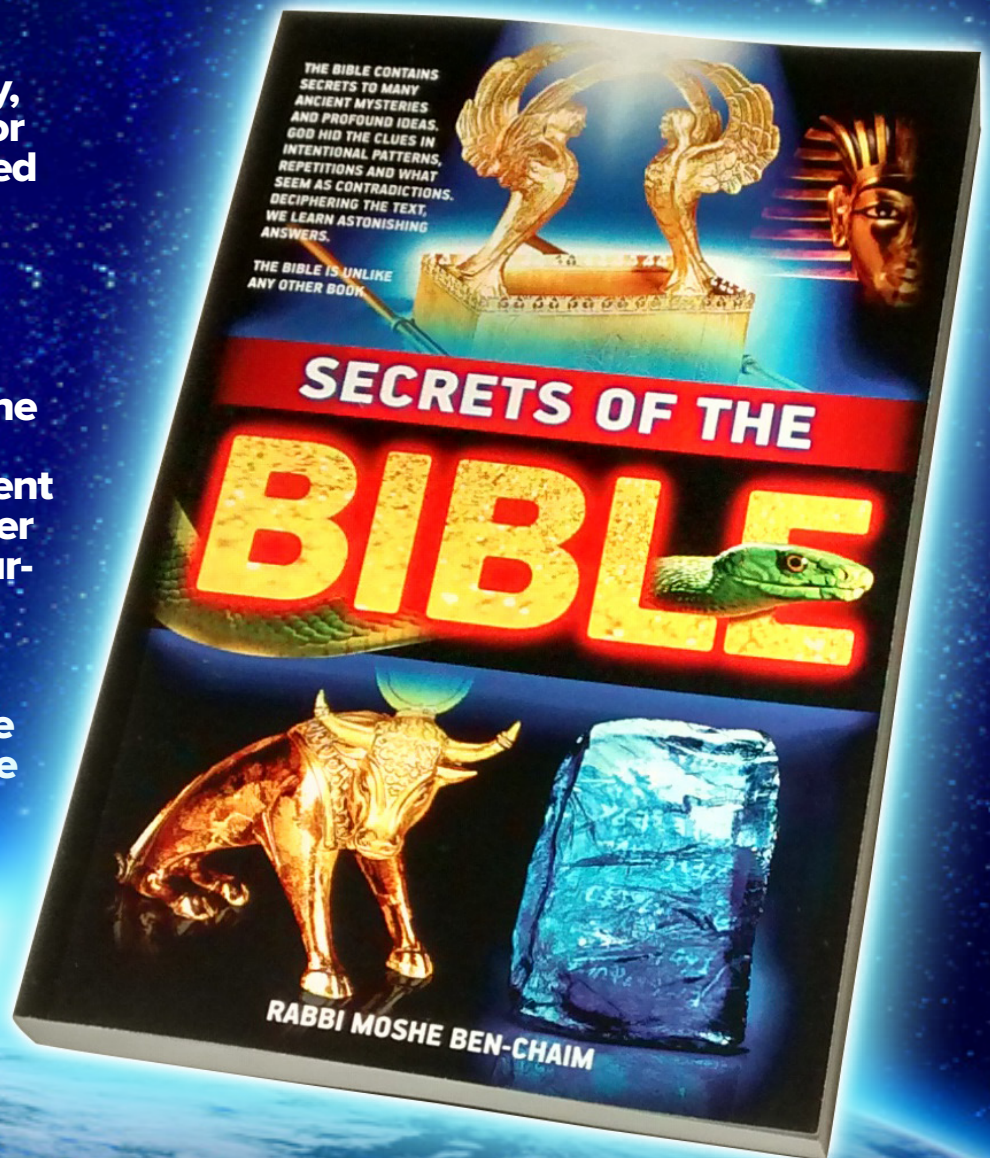
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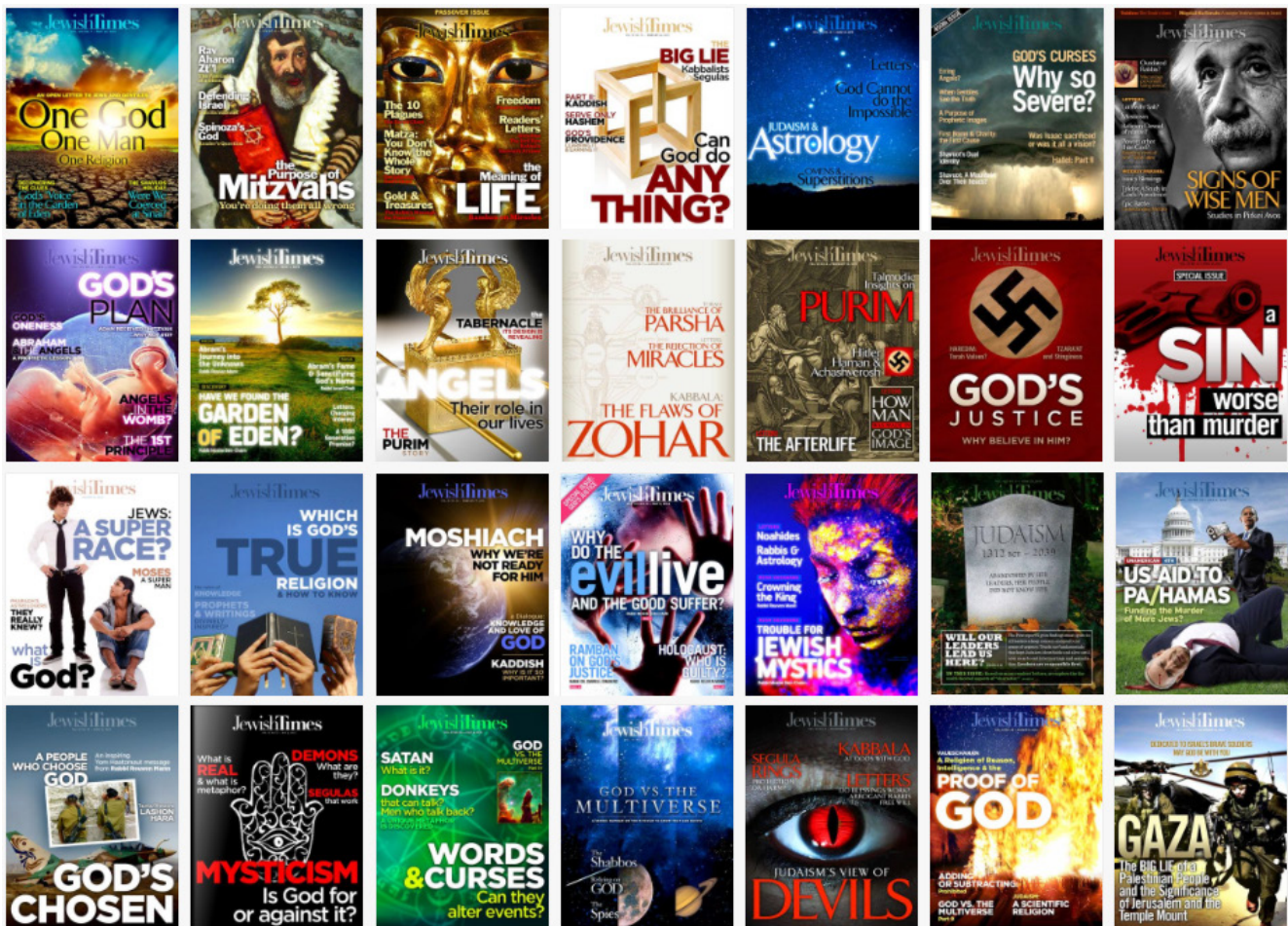
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