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The Book of Kohelet: What Constitutes a Flourishing Life

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The Message of KOHELET
ESTHER WEIN
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1. Question: WHAT CONSTITUTES A FLOURISHING LIFE?

Answer: Choosing the “correct paradigm” and opting out of the “wrong paradigm”.

2. Kohelet refers to the “wrong paradigm” as תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ -Tachat Hashemesh

Kohelet 1:14

רָאִיתִי אֶת-כָּל-הַמַּעֲשִׂים שֶׁנַּעֲשׂוּ תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וְהִנֵּה הַכֹּל הֵבֵל וְרַעוּת רוּחַ:

I observed all the happenings **beneath the sun**, and I found that all is **fleeting** and and is **unsuitable for our spirit**.

Ra means unsuitable for its purpose or broken as in - כסא רעוה -

Tov means permanently functional and suitable for its purpose

Rashi

וְרַעוּת רוּחַ. שֶׁבָר רוּחַ, כְּמוֹ "רַעוּ עַמִּים וְחָתוּ". רוּחַ טַלְנִ"ט. סוֹף הַמַּעֲשֶׂה בָּא לִידֵי כָאֵב לֵב

And unsuitable for our spirit. The breaking = וְרַעוּת of the spirit as in, “Shatter רַעוּ, O peoples, and be devastated.”

“רוח” is *talent* in Old French. At the end of the deed it becomes heartache.

3. Defining תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ -Tachat Hashemesh

The analogy of the stage and the curtain/הסתר-hester, טמא-טהור /tameh- tahor-

Operating “Tachat Hashemesh” yields fear, confusion, anxiety, self doubt, self pity, depression, defeatism, anger, jealousy, etc. Furthermore...

Kohelet 4:4

וְרָאִיתִי אֲנִי אֶת-כָּל-עֵמֶל וְאֶת כָּל-כְּשָׁרוֹן הַמַּעֲשֶׂה כִּי הִיא קִנְיַת-אִישׁ מִרְעֵהוּ גַם-זֶה הֵבֵל וְרַעוּת רוּחַ

I have also noted that all initiative/effort and skillful enterprise/talent/ come from **men’s envy of each other**— this too is fleeting, futile and breaks one’s spirit.

RASHI

And I observed that all initiative/effort. These are the sins, (initiative, effort) which are toil in the eyes of the Holy One, Blessed Is He.

And all skillful enterprise/talent. Which is not for the sake of Heaven, but for one’s envy of his friend, both of which are futile.

Is the result of man’s envy. Which is the result of man’s envy of his neighbor.

4. The raising of the curtain- יציאת מצרים Yetziat Mitzrayim and מתן תורה - Matan Torah

a) Devarim 4:35

אֲתָהּ הִרְאִיתָ לְדַעַת כִּי ה' הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים אֵין עוֹד מִלְבָּדוֹ

You have been shown so that you know that Hashem is Elokim and there is nothing other than Him

b) Shemot 15:2

עֲזִי וְזַמְרַת לַיהוָה לִישׁוּעָה זֶה אֱלֹהֵי וְאֵין אֲחֵרֵי וְאֵין מִמֶּנּוּ:

The LORD is my strength and might; He is become my deliverance. This is my God and I will enshrine Him; The God of my father, and I will exalt Him.

Rashi

THIS IS MY GOD — In His glory did He reveal Himself to them and they pointed to Him זה אלי — as it were — with the finger exclaiming “This is my God!” A maid servant beheld at the Red Sea what even the prophets never saw

5. תכלית הבריאה is -living inspired by what we experienced (4 above) via keeping the מצוות - Mitzvot which are all based on יצאית מצרים - yetziat mitrayim AND thereby being a vehicle for Kavod Shamayim.

6. Defining דעת, כבוד, - Kavod and Daat

a) הכל ברא לכבודו - Everything was created for His honor

Bracha under the chuppah

b) קדוש קדוש קדוש ה' צב-ות מלא כל הארץ כבודו - Separate Separate Separate Hashem Lord of Hosts, the entire earth is filled with His honor

*Kavod, can not be bestowed upon oneself. Hashem's Kavod is in our hands, we must raise the curtain.

c) Yeshayahu 11:9 את ה' כמים לים מכסים לא ירעו ולא ישחיתו בכל הר קדשי כי מלאה הארץ דעה - He shall not do what is unsuitable and he shall not destroy in all of my Kadosh mountain, for the whole world will be filled with “Deah” as the water covers the sea basin.

*Daat is the unifying of 2 separate entities into one - וְדַע אֶת־תְּנוּהָ אֶשְׁתּוֹ (Br. 4:1)

7. 99% of getting life right is opting out of the “Tachat Hashemesh” - wrong paradigm. In the place of the afflictive states of mind there is מנוחת הנפש - menuchat hanefesh, patience, sympathy, trust, humility, forgiveness, honesty, respect, etc...
Ayin tov, עין טוב - nachat ruach, נחת רוח - Ayin tov, trust, humility, forgiveness, honesty, respect, etc...

8. שכר - Schar and - עונש Onesh is our reaction to the raising of the curtain, and is all דעת-Daat.

Schar: Rambam Laws of Teshuva chp. 8

אֵלָא צְדִיקִים יוֹשְׁבִים וְעִטְרוֹתֵיהֶם בְּרֹאשֵׁיהֶן וְנִהְיִין מִזִּיו הַשְּׂכִינָה" .. וְכֵן זֶה שְׂאֲמְרוּ עִטְרוֹתֵיהֶן בְּרֹאשֵׁיהֶן
כְּלוּמַר דְּעַת שְׂיֻדְעוּ שְׁבַגְלָלָה זְכוּ לְחַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא מִצִּוְיָהּ עִמָּהּ וְהִיא הָעֵטְרָה שְׁלֵהֶן כְּעִנְיָן שְׂאֲמַר שְׁלֵמָה
(שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים ג יא) "בְּעֵטְרָה שְׂעֵטְרָה לֹא אִמּוֹ". וְהִרִי הוּא אוֹמֵר (יִשְׁעִיָּה לֵה י) "וְשִׁמְחַת עוֹלָם עַל רֹאשָׁם"
וְאִין הַשְּׂמִחָה גּוּף כְּדִי שְׂתַנּוּחַ עַל הָרֹאשׁ. כִּי עֵטְרָה שְׂאֲמְרוּ חֲכָמִים כָּאֵן הִיא הַיְדִיעָה. וְמֵהוּ זֶה שְׂאֲמְרוּ
נִהְיִין מִזִּיו הַשְּׂכִינָה. שְׂיֻדְעִים וּמְשִׁיגִין מֵאֲמַתַּת הַקְּדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מֵה שְׂאִינָם יוֹדְעִים וְהֵם בְּגוּף הָאֶפֶל
הַשְּׂפֵל:

The righteous are “sitting” and their “crowns” are “in their heads” and they are enjoying the radiance of the Shechina...The crowns in their heads means the DAAT that they acquired, with which they merit life in Olam Habba, is with them and is their crown, as it is stated..... The crown that our wise men are speaking of here is knowledge - Yediah. And what does “enjoying the radiance of the shechina mean? That they have yediah and they grasp of the truth of HKBH, that which they could not “know: as long as they were in a lowly and dark body.

Onesh: Bereishit 45:3

וַיֹּסֶף אֶל־אָחָיו אֲנִי יוֹסֵף הֲעוֹד אָבִי חַי וְלֹא־יָכְלוּ אָחָיו לַעֲנֹת אֹתוֹ כִּי נִבְהָלוּ מִפְּנָיו:

Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still well?" But his brothers could not answer him, so dumbfounded were they on account of him.

Kli Yakar

ורז"ל אמרו, (בר"ר צג יא) שמבהלה זו יוקח לימוד על יום הדין, כדאמר רבי אלעזר בן עזריה ווי לנו מיום הדין ווי לנו מיום תוכחה, ומה יוסף כשאמר לאחיו אני יוסף לא יכלו לענות אותו כשהקב"ה עומד לדין על אחת כמה וכמה שנאמר (ישעיה י ג) ומה תעשו ליום פקודה וגו', כי האחים סברו שיוסף הזכיר עונם בדרך שנתבאר, ומה יעשה האדם ליום פקודה כי יפקד מושבו ומשאו ומתנו, וביד כל אדם יחתום לומר ראי דרכך מה עשית, ודעת ר"א שלכך כתבה לנו התורה שאחיו נבהלו כדי שהמשכיל יתן אל לבו חרדת יום הדין וללמוד ק"ו מאחי יוסף.

