

# Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra's Commentary To Kohelet

Translated and annotated by H. Norman Strickman

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## INTRODUCTION

Rabbi Abraham ben Meir ibn Ezra was one of the outstanding personalities produced by medieval Andalusian Jewry. He was born in 1092 C.E. in Tudela, Spain, and died in 1164.<sup>1</sup> His place of death is unknown.

Ibn Ezra has been described as a polymath.<sup>2</sup> He was a noted poet, mathematician, astrologer, grammarian, and philosopher. According to Leon Weinberger, Ibn Ezra “was one of the best known and admired Jewish figures in the West. His *Pisan Tables* in astronomy were the authoritative guides for Roger Bacon..., Nicolas of Cusa..., and Pico della Pirandola..., and he was remembered for his pioneering efforts in introducing the mathematics of the Arabs to the Europeans.”<sup>3</sup> However, above all, he was one of the greatest Bible commentators of all time. His commentaries influenced all major Bible commentators. He is quoted in the works of Abraham son of Maimonides, Nachmanides, Bachya, Rabbag, and Abravenel.

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<sup>1</sup>According to a statement found in several codices, Ibn Ezra (or, “I.E.”) died on a Monday, on the first day of 1 Adar 4927 (January 23, 1167) at the age of 75. If this date is accepted, then I.E. was born in 1092. See M. Friedlander, ed. and trans., *The Commentary of Ibn Ezra on Isaiah* (London, 1873), p. xxvii n. 54. However, H. Graetz believes that I.E. was born in 1088 or 1089. See H. Graetz, *Divre Yeme Yisra'el*, ed. and trans., S. P. Rabinowitz, Vol. 4, p. 212 (Warsaw, 1916). Also see J.L. Fleisher, *Be-ezu Shanah Met Rabbenu Avraham ibn Ezra*, pp. 5-16, in *R. Avraham ibn Ezra, Kovetz Ma'amarim Al Toledatav Vi-Yetzirotav* (Tzion. Tel Aviv, 1970).

<sup>2</sup> See Isadore Twersky and Jay Harris, *Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra: Studies in the Writings of a Twelfth-Century Jewish Polymath*, Harvard University Press, 1993.

<sup>3</sup>Henry Rasof, Abraham Ibn Ezra and the Metaphors of Imagination. <http://www.medievalhebrewpoetry.org/articles/abraham-ibn-ezra-metaphors-imagination>.

He probably also had a great influence on Maimonides.<sup>4</sup> A will attributed to Maimonides claims that the great philosopher and codifier of Jewish law charged his son not to pay attention to any Bible commentaries other than those of Ibn Ezra.<sup>5</sup> Though many question the authenticity of this will, the fact that someone supposed that people would believe, and many did, that Maimonides would shower praises on Ibn Ezra is in and of itself worthy of note.

While in Spain Ibn Ezra was primarily known as a poet. He reminisced:

In days of old in my youth;

I composed poems;

I placed them as pearls;

On the necks of the Hebrews.<sup>6</sup>

Ibn Ezra lived in Spain until 1140 C.E.<sup>7</sup> He then left his homeland and lived as a peripatetic scholar until his death. His travels included Italy, France, and England.<sup>8</sup> His itinerary might also have taken him to Egypt, other places in North Africa, and the Land of Israel.<sup>9</sup> It was during this period that his biblical commentaries and other works, with the exception of his poetry, were written. Ibn Ezra probably composed commentaries on the entire Bible, but we lack his work on the Early Prophets, Chronicles, Proverbs, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Ezra, and Nehemiah.

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<sup>4</sup> See H. Norman Strickman, "Abraham ibn Ezra's 'Yesod Mora'" in *Hakirah* 12 (2011) 139-169. Also see Isador Twersky, "Did R. Abraham Ibn Ezra influence Maimonides?" (Hebrew) in *Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra: Studies in the Writings of a Twelfth-Century Polymath* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

<sup>5</sup> *Iggerot Ha-Rambam* in *Kovetz Teshuvat Ha-Rambam Ve-Iggerotav* (Lipsia, 1861) p. 38-40.

<sup>6</sup> See Kahana Vol. 1, p.22.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Melammed, pp. 519-520.

<sup>9</sup> Norman Golb, *History and Culture of the Jews of Rouen in the Middle Ages* (Heb). Devir Co. Ltd. Tel Aviv, 1976. P. 45.

It is not certain why Ibn Ezra left Spain. We do not know what motivated him to leave his homeland and wander across the face of Europe.

It would appear that economics played a major role in his decision. He was respected in Spain. However, he was poor.<sup>10</sup>

Concerning his poverty, he wrote:

I cannot become rich, the fates are against me

Were I a dealer in shrouds, no man would ever die,

Ill starred was my birth, unpropitious the planets

Were I a seller of candles, the sun would never set.<sup>11</sup>

In a similar vein he complains about an apparent attempt to either sell a poem or gain a patron:

I come in the morn

To the house of the nobly born.

They say he rode away.

I come again at the end of the day,

But he is not at his best and needs rest.

He is either sleeping or riding afar-

Woe to the man who is born without a star.<sup>12</sup>

In another poem he complains about his threadbare cloak:

Like to a sieve is that old cloak of mine,

A sieve that wheat and barley might refine.

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<sup>10</sup>Friedlander, p. xiv.

<sup>11</sup>Friedlander, p. xiv.

<sup>12</sup> A History of Jewish Literature. Meyer Waxman, New Jersey. 1960. Vol. 1, p. 234.

I spread it tent-like in the mid of night,  
And view through it the stars in endless line;  
The Moon, Orion, and the Pleiades  
And countless constellations through it shine.  
I am weary counting all its numerous holes,  
Jagged and cleft like a saw in their design.  
The threads with which my cloak is patched exceed  
The warp and weft by more than nine times nine;  
And should a fly fall in its mazy web  
He's speedily despair and to death resign...  
O God, exchange it for a cloak of praise,  
But make its seams much stronger, Power divine!<sup>13</sup>

In his introduction to *The Book of Lamentation* Ibn Ezra notes that he came to the city of Rome with “an affrighted soul.”<sup>14</sup> He goes on to implore God for a change in fortune, for up to now he has been like *a terebinth whose leaves wither*.<sup>15</sup>

Ibn Ezra was poor in material wealth, but he was rich in knowledge. He was a master of Hebrew grammar, Sephardic biblical exegesis, astrology, mathematics, and philosophy. The latter were generally unknown by the inhabitants of Italy, France, and Germany.

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<sup>13</sup> Harry H. Fine, *Gems of Hebrew Verse. Poems For Young People*. Translated From the Original Tongue. Bruce Humphries Inc. Boston. 1940.

<sup>14</sup> See Ps. 6:4.

<sup>15</sup> See Isaiah 1:30

Ibn Ezra apparently decided to parley his expertise into a source of sustenance. He tells us that upon coming to Rome, " he prepared his heart to explain and to instruct."<sup>16</sup>

Rabbi Judah ibn Tibbon (c. 1120-1190) writes:

“The Jews living in exile in France and in all the borders of Edom do not know Arabic. Books written in Arabic are like sealed books to them. They cannot approach them until they are translated into the Hebrew tongue.... [This was so] until the wise man Rabbi Abraham ben Ezra came to their country and helped them...with regard to this by composing short compositions...”<sup>17</sup>

In Rome Ibn Ezra commenced his career as a teacher of bible, philosophy, astrology and mathematics.

Ibn Ezra's commentary on the Book of Kohelet was, as far as we know, his first work of Biblical exegesis. He composed this work in 1140,<sup>18</sup> the year that he left Spain and arrived in Rome.

Ibn Ezra does not tell us why he chose the Book of Kohelet as his first work of Biblical interpretation. Most of those who composed commentaries to Scripture started with the Pentateuch. They commenced with Genesis and went on to comment on the following books.<sup>19</sup> Some completed their commentaries on Scripture. Others, for one reason or another, did not complete their work. However, we do not know of a commentator who started his work on Scripture with a commentary on Kohelet.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibn Ezra's Introductory poem to his commentary on Kohelet.

<sup>17</sup> See Wilinsky, M. *Sefer Ha-Rikmah Le-Rabbenu ibn Janah, be-targumo shel Rabbenu Yehudah ibn Tibbon*. Jerusalem. p. 4.

<sup>18</sup> See I.E.'s concluding poem. on Kohelet.

<sup>19</sup> Don Isaac Abarvenel is another notable exception. He composed his first commentary on the Book of Joshua in 1483. He published his commentary on Genesis in 1505.

It is possible that Ibn Ezra chose Kohelet, to be his first work of Biblical commentary because this book offered Ibn Ezra an opportunity to display both his exegetical skills and his philosophical and scientific knowledge.

It is worthy of note that in addition to his commentary on Kohelet Ibn Ezra also wrote a commentary to Job<sup>20</sup> while in Rome. Job, like Kohelet, is a challenging work. It presents theological and exegetical problems.

While in Rome, Ibn Ezra also translated the grammatical works of Rabbi Judah Hayuj from Arabic to Hebrew. Judah Hayuj's work on Hebrew grammar was groundbreaking. He was the first grammarian to teach that all Hebrew stems consist of three letters. All later Hebrew grammarians based their works on him. Most of the technical terms employed in Hebrew grammar are translations of the Arabic terms employed by Hayuj. Hayuj's work on Hebrew grammar, via the translations of Ibn Ezra, opened up new vistas for Jews living in exile in Catholic Europe.

Ibn Ezra also composed a grammatical work called *Moznayim* (The Scales), while in Rome.<sup>21</sup>

As noted above, Ibn Ezra commenced his work on Biblical exegesis with a commentary on Kohelet. Kohelet is one of the most challenging and problematic books in Scripture.

According to Rabbinic sources, there were Sages who wanted to keep the Book of Kohelet out of Scripture. They offer two reasons for the aforementioned:

1. Kohelet contradicts himself;
2. Some of the opinions expressed by Kohelet appear to be heretical.

We thus read in *Kohelet Rabbah*:<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See I.E.'s introduction to his commentary to *Job*. Also see Graetz. *Geschichte*, VI, p. 371.

<sup>21</sup> Graetz. *Geschichte*, VI, p. 371.

<sup>22</sup> A Midrash composed in the Land of Israel.

"Rabbi Benjamin said: The Sages wanted to hide the Book of Kohelet,<sup>23</sup> for they found in it ideas that leaned towards heresy. They said: Should Solomon have said, "What real value is there for a man in all his laboring that he labors beneath the sun?"? Might this not implicitly include also laboring in the study of Torah? But they pointed out: It does not say in all laboring, but in "all *his* laboring"—he profits not from what he labors for himself but does profit from laboring in the Torah."<sup>24</sup>

"Rabbi Samuel son of Rabbi Isaac said: The Sages wanted to hide the Book of Kohelet, for they found in it ideas that leaned towards heresy. They said: Should Solomon have said, *O youth, enjoy yourself while you are young! Let your heart lead you to enjoyment in the days of your youth. Follow the desires of your heart and the glances of your eyes* (Kohelet 11:9)? How can it be that Moses said, *Do not follow your heart and eyes in your lustful urge* (Num. 15:39), and yet Solomon said, *Follow the desires of your heart and the glances of your eyes*?

"Is there neither justice nor judge? Is all restraint to be removed?

"But since he continued, *Know well that G-d will call you to account for all such things* (Kohelet 11:9), they said: Solomon spoke wisely. "<sup>25</sup>

It is to be noted that the Babylonian Talmud<sup>26</sup> also deals with the attempt to "hide" the Book of Kohelet. It reads:

"Rav Judah son of R. Samuel b. Shilat said in Rav's name: The Sages wished to hide the Book of Kohelet because its words are self-contradictory; yet why did they not hide it? Because its beginning is religious teaching and its end is religious teaching. Its beginning is religious teaching, as it is written, *What real value is*

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<sup>23</sup> To remove Kohelet from the Biblical Canon.

<sup>24</sup> Kohelet Rabbah 28:1 in *Midrash Rabbah, Part 11*, Vilna; reprint, no date given. Our translation is taken, with some changes, from Gil'ad Sasson's "The Sages wished to hide the book of Ecclesiastes" in the Bar-Ilan University Parshat Hashavua Study Center; Sukkot 5774/October 9-15, 2014. A similar Midrash with a slightly different reading is found in *Va-Yikra Rabbah* 28:1.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. A similar midrash with a slightly different reading is found in *Va-Yikra Rabbah* 28:1.

<sup>26</sup> *Midrash Rabbah* was composed in the Land of Israel.

*there for a man in all his laboring that he labors beneath the sun? (Kohelet 1:3); and its end is religious teaching, as it is written, The sum of the matter, when all is said and done: Revere God and observe His commandments! For this applies to all mankind' (Kohelet 12:13)."*<sup>27</sup>

According to Ibn Ezra the apparent contradictions and heretical opinions found in Kohelet do not represent the thinking of Solomon. They are the opinions of those who lack wisdom. They are straw men set up by Kohelet which he proceeds to knock down. For example, Kohelet reads:

*The living know that they shall die; but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten... (Kohelet 9:5).*

And:

*Whatsoever thy hand attaineth to do by thy strength, that do; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest. (Ibid. 9:10).*

These verses seem to be saying: Enjoy yourself while you can, for existence ends with death.

The above is contrary to the teachings of normative Judaism. The Mishnah teaches:

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<sup>27</sup> Sabbath 30b. Translated by Gil'ad Sasson. Gilad Sasson's "The Sages wished to hide the book of Ecclesiastes" in the Bar-Ilan University Parshat Hashavua Study Center. The Babylonian Talmud speaks of the contradictions in Kohelet. It does not mention the heretical views expressed in this book. Dr. Gilad Sasson of Bar Ilan University offers the following explanation for this. He writes:

" The Babylonian Talmud preferred to ascribe to Solomon literary carelessness leading to internal contradictions rather than ascribe to him heretical views. Perhaps the Babylonian Talmud followed this approach because of its repulsion at the thought of calling Solomon a heretic—an extremely grave accusation. But toning things down in this way takes out all the punch from the idea of hiding the book: simply because of an author's carelessness is a book to be excluded from the Canon and stored away?"

"Rabbi Yaakov said, 'This world is like an entrance chamber before the World to Come. Prepare yourself in the entrance chamber [this world]so that you may enter the banquet hall [in the world to come].'" (Avot 4:20).

Another Mishnah reads:

"And let not your impulse assure thee that the grave is a place of refuge for you; for against your will were you formed, against your will were you born, against your will you live, against your will you will die, and against your will you will give an account and reckoning before the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He (Ibid. 22)."

Ibn Ezra maintains that Kohelet 9:5 and 9:10 and other such verses are not the teachings of Kohelet. They represent the beliefs of the uneducated. It is as if Kohelet were saying that people who lack wisdom say, "The dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward, " and "There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest." However, an enlightened person knows that this is not so.,

Ibn Ezra similarly claims that Kohelet does not contradict himself, for "We all know that the least among the wise will not compose a book in which he contradicts himself...It is certain that Solomon would not contradict himself being that Scripture bears testimony that no king that will reign after him will be as wise as he (1Kings 3:12) .On the contrary, all his words *are all plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge* (Prov. 8:9).

Ibn Ezra argues that the verses in Kohelet that seem to contradict themselves only appear to do so. However, in reality they do not disagree, for they apply to different circumstances.

For example:

Kohelet 7:3 reads: *Vexation is better than laughter; for by the sadness of the countenance, the heart may be gladdened.*

However, Kohelet 7:9 states: *Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry; for anger resteth in the bosom of fools.*

I.E. maintains that Kohelet 7:3 speaks of the vexation brought about by a person's struggle with his physical desires. This conflict involves effort and is often vexing. Indeed, Rabbi Saadiah Gaon said: "Woe unto me, from [from the pain of resisting] my [evil] inclination."

According to I.E., Kohelet maintains that is better to suffer the vexation caused by struggling against one's evil inclination than indulging in laughter and self-indulgence. On the other hand, vexation over things of no consequence is foolish.<sup>28</sup> There are those who read Kohelet as a very pessimistic work. Kohelet declares: "all is vanity" (Kohelet 1:2)." Were more pessimistic words ever uttered?

In Jewish tradition, seven stops are made as a body is carried to the grave.<sup>29</sup> Each stop is supposed to recall one of the seven times the word *hevel* (vanity) is mentioned) in Kohelet.

Ibn Ezra does not see Kohelet as a pessimistic work. He sees it as a guide for a good life. He writes:

"The Lord God of Israel stirred up the spirit of His friend<sup>30</sup> Solomon to explain "words of delight" (Kohelet 12:10) ...<sup>31</sup> and to teach the straight path." Thus, the purpose of Kohelet is not to depress, but to enlighten.

According to Ibn Ezra, the key to understanding Kohelet is the verse reading:

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<sup>28</sup> See I.E. to Kohelet 7:3: "Fools are always angry. It [anger] never leaves them. However, wise people are angry only when the situation calls for it"?

<sup>29</sup> Ganzfried, Shelomo. *Kitzur Shukahn Arukh 4, 198:12: Benei Berak: 1987.*

<sup>30</sup> Solomon was called *Yedidiah*, friend of God. See 2 Sam. 12:25.

<sup>31</sup> According to I.E., "words of delight "refers to the laws of nature. Specifically, "Understanding why something was created in a certain way and not in another way." See I.E. on 12:10.

"The dust return to the earth as it was, but the spirit returns to God who gave it" (Kohelet 12:7).

This verse contains two truths: The body, which is transient, returns to the elements out of which it was created. However, the soul if it acquires wisdom, takes its place with God.

Ibn Ezra believes that "The soul was brought [down to earth] to show [her the works of the Lord]. It is imprisoned<sup>32</sup> in a jail until the time that is set for its death. All of this<sup>33</sup> is for the spirit's benefit and good. If the spirit endures toil for a number of years, it will ultimately rest and rejoice forever without end."<sup>34</sup>

"Just as a traveler who is captured [and held prisoner] desires to return to his birthplace and be with his family, so does the intelligent spirit<sup>35</sup> [which is in man] desire to...ascend to the [level] of the legions<sup>36</sup> of the living God who do not rest in 'houses of clay'<sup>37</sup>(Job 4:19)."<sup>38</sup>

[Man reaches these heights] "when his spirit<sup>39</sup> dedicates its heart to know its origin and to perceive its secret with the eyes of wisdom, which [unlike physical eyes] do not grow dim, and to whom far and close are equal,<sup>40</sup> and night is as day."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Literally, "It is therefore enclosed."

<sup>33</sup> Being enclosed in a body.

<sup>34</sup> I.E.'s. introduction to his commentary on Kohelet. See *Sefer Kohelet im Pirush Ibn Ezra*, edited by Rabbi Mordecai Sha'ul Goodman *Mosad Ha-Rav Kook*, Jerusalem 2012 (henceforth R. Goodman), p.14.

<sup>35</sup> Ibn Ezra believed that man has three souls: vegetative, animal, and rational (or intelligent). See *The Secret of the Torah: A Translation of Abraham bin Ezra's Sefer Yesod Morah* by H. Norman Strickman, Jason Aaronson Inc. New Jersey 1995; 10:2; page 96.

<sup>36</sup> The angels

<sup>37</sup> Human bodies.

<sup>38</sup> I.E.'s. introduction to his commentary on Kohelet. R. Goodman pp. 13-14.

<sup>39</sup> The term used by I.E. is *ru'ach*. Here it refers to the rational soul.

Ibn Ezra goes on to say: When a person "knows the natural sciences... and learns the categories...taught by the science of logic, and masters the science of astronomy...and comprehends the science of geometry and the science of proportions,... [ he ascends] to the great level of knowing the mystery of the soul, the secret of the supernal angels, and the concept of the world to come as taught in the Torah, the prophets, and by the Sages of the Talmud. Such an individual will grasp and perceive the deep secrets... that are hidden from the eyes of most people."<sup>42</sup>

According to Ibn Ezra, "Man's soul ...is like a tablet set before a scribe. When God's writing...is inscribed on this tablet the soul cleaves to God the glorious while it is yet in man and also afterward when its power is removed from the body which is its place [here on earth.]"<sup>43</sup>

These are the glasses that Ibn Ezra employs in reading Kohelet.

The Book of Kohelet opens with:

"What profit hath man of all his labor wherein he laboreth under the sun? "

The Midrash comments:

[The meaning of "What profit hath a man of all his labor wherein he laboreth under the sun? "is:] Whatever a man may possess on earth—under the sun—he must inevitably part with, but it is different if he provides for himself [for what is] above the sun; i.e., what is in heaven. "(Midrash Rabbah Kohelet 1).

This Midrash could have been composed by Ibn Ezra.

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<sup>40</sup> The mind is not limited by space. One can think and know things that are far off.

<sup>41</sup>"Night" is a figure of speech for things that are not ordinarily known.

<sup>42</sup> *Yesod Mora 1:9*; *The Secret if the Torah* p. 31.

<sup>43</sup> *YesodMorah10:2*; *The Secret of the Torah* page 143.

According to Ibn Ezra, Kohelet teaches that there are things that are eternal and things that are transient. Life under the sun is transient. However, there are things above the sun. These things are eternal.

"Vanity of vanities, all is vanity" was said only regarding things under the sun; that is, the acquisition of money, property, and the enjoyment of bodily pleasure.

Man can choose that which is transient. In this case, life is a vanity of vanities. It comes to an end. However, if a person chooses to develop his soul by abstaining from sin and studying wisdom then his soul returns to God upon his death and his life is not a vanity of vanities. According to Ibn Ezra, The Book of Kohelet does not incline to heresy or despair but is a guide to eternal life.

## RABBI ABRAHAM IBN EZRA'S INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF KOHELET<sup>44</sup>

LISTEN TO THE BEAUTIFUL WORDS OF ABRAHAM THE SCRIBE.  
HE RECORDED THEM IN A BOOK FOR THE INTELLIGENT SPIRIT.  
HE WAS NAMED THE SON OF MEIR AND IS KNOWN AS THE SON OF  
EZRA.  
HIS GLORY ASKS HIS ROCK FOR HELP,  
FOR LIGHT TO SHINE UPON HIS DARKNESS,  
AND FOR SUCCESS IN HIS ENDEAVORS.  
UNTIL NOW HE HAS BEEN LIKE AN OAK TREE THAT SHEDS ITS  
LEAVES.  
HE WAS SEPARATED FROM HIS HOMELAND WHICH IS IN SPAIN.  
HE WENT DOWN TO ROME WITH A FRIGHTENED SPIRIT.  
HE THERE PREPARED HIS HEART TO EXPLAIN AND TO TEACH.  
HE BESEECHES GOD WHO IS HIS HOPE, TO GIVE HIM MUCH  
STRENGTH.  
GOD WILL GIVE HIM WISDOM AND FORGIVE ALL ERRORS<sup>45</sup> IN HIS  
COMMENTS ON KOHELET.  
IN THE NAME OF GOD, DOMINION IS HIS,  
I BEGIN TO EXPLAIN THE BOOK OF KOHELET.

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<sup>44</sup> Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra's Commentary to the Book of Kohelet, translated and annotated by Rabbi Chaim Nachum (H. Norman) Strickman, © 2017 Rabbi Chaim Strickman (all rights reserved to the translator and copyright holder). Strickmans@gmail.com

<sup>45</sup> Literally, guilt.

[Scripture states:]

*The path of life goes upward for the wise, that he may depart from the nether-world* (Prov. 15:24).

Just as a traveler who is captured [and held prisoner] desires to return to his birthplace and be with his family, so does the intelligent spirit<sup>46</sup> [which is in man] desire to take hold of the upper levels till it ascends to the [level] of the legions of the living God<sup>47</sup> who do not rest in "houses of clay" (Job 4:19).<sup>48</sup>

[Scripture speaks of houses,] for human bodies are compared to houses. They are made out of dust.<sup>49</sup> *The angels, whose dwelling is not with flesh* (Dan. 2:11) makes a similar point.<sup>50</sup>

This will come to be<sup>51</sup> if the spirit is cleansed and sanctified from the defilement caused by the body's filthy desires which pollute the holy, and cause [people] to join those who are in *she'ol* below.<sup>52</sup>

[Man reaches these heights] when his spirit<sup>53</sup> dedicates its heart to know its origin and to perceive its secret with the eyes of wisdom, which [unlike physical eyes] do

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<sup>46</sup> I.E. believed that man has three souls: vegetative, animal and rational (or intelligent). See *The Secret of the Torah: A translation of Abraham ibn Ezra's Sefer Yesod Mora* by H. Norman Strickman, Jason Aaronson Inc. New Jersey 1995 (henceforth, *Secret of the Torah*); 10:2; p. 96.

<sup>47</sup> The angels

<sup>48</sup> In human bodies.

<sup>49</sup> See Gen. 2:7.

<sup>50</sup> That angels do not dwell in bodies.

<sup>51</sup> The spirit will, after death, ascend to the level of the legions of the living God.

<sup>52</sup> According to I.E., the ultimate punishment of the wicked is the destruction of their souls. See I.E. to Ps. 2:6: [The meaning of] "But the way of the wicked shall perish...is that the way of the wicked leads to destruction."

<sup>53</sup> The term used by I.E. is *ru'ach*. Here it refers to the rational soul.

not grow dim, and to whom far and close are equal,<sup>54</sup> and night is as day.<sup>55</sup> The spirit will then be fit to truly know the *certainty of words of truth* (Prov.22:11).<sup>56</sup> These words will be inscribed upon the spirit so that they will not be erased from it when it separates from its body, for the writing is God's writing.<sup>57</sup>

The soul was brought [down to earth] to show [her the works of the Lord].<sup>58</sup> It is imprisoned<sup>59</sup> in a jail until the time that is set [for the death of the body] comes. All of this<sup>60</sup> is for the spirit's benefit and good. If the spirit endures toil for a number of years, it will ultimately rest and rejoice forever, without end.

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<sup>54</sup> The mind is not limited by space. One can think and know things that are far off.

<sup>55</sup> Night is a figure of speech for things that are not ordinarily known. The eyes of wisdom do not need physical light in order to see.

<sup>12</sup> The words which are inscribed upon the spirit are God's writing. According to Ibn Ezra, the most valuable body of knowledge is that which develops man's soul. This knowledge comes from a study of the sciences and metaphysics. Thus Ibn Ezra writes it is only when a person "knows the natural sciences and their proofs...and learns the categories...taught by the science of logic, and masters the science of astronomy...and comprehends the science of geometry and the science of proportions, can one ascend to the great level of knowing the mystery of the soul, the secret of the supernal angels, and the concept of the world to come as taught in the Torah, the prophets and by the sages of the Talmud. Such an individual will grasp and perceive the deep secrets...that are hidden from the eyes of most people" (*Secret of the Torah* 1:9; p.33).

<sup>57</sup> "Man's soul is unique. When given by God, it is like a tablet set before a scribe. When God's writing...is inscribed on this tablet, the soul cleaves to God the glorious while it is yet in man, and also afterward when its power is removed from the body which is its place [here on earth]" (*Secret of the Torah* 10:2; p. 143).

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. 1:1; p. 7.

<sup>59</sup> Literally, it is therefore enclosed.

<sup>60</sup> Being enclosed in a body.

All creation is<sup>61</sup> divided into four categories:<sup>62</sup> that which is totally good, that which is mostly good but partially evil, that which is totally evil, and that which is mostly evil but partially good.

The first category is that of the angels. The second category are the living beings that exist on the earth.<sup>63</sup> The remaining two categories do not exist. It is impossible for them to exist, for God only creates things that are good, for the

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<sup>61</sup> Literally, all creations are.

<sup>62</sup> This should be understood as follows: All creation can theoretically be divided into four categories; however, the last two categories do not really exist.

<sup>63</sup>Life is a good thing. However, living beings experience some evil. See Maimonides: "The first kind of evil [that people face] is that which is caused to man by the circumstance that he is subject to genesis and destruction, or that he possesses a body. It is on account of the body that some persons happen to have great deformities or paralysis of some of the organs. This evil may be part of the natural constitution of these persons or may have developed subsequently in consequence of changes in the elements; for example, through bad air, or thunderstorms, or landslips. We have already shown that, in accordance with the divine wisdom, genesis can only take place through destruction, and without the destruction of the individual members of the species, the species themselves would not exist permanently. Thus, the true kindness, and beneficence, and goodness of God is clear. He who thinks that he can have flesh and bones without being subject to any external influence, or any of the accidents of matter, unconsciously wishes to reconcile two opposites; namely, to be at the same time subject and not subject to change. If man were never subject to change there could be no generation; there would be one single being, but no individuals forming a species.... Whatever is formed of any matter receives the most perfect form possible in that species of matter; in each individual case, the defects are in accordance with the defects of that individual matter. The best and most perfect being that can be formed of the blood and the semen is the species of man, for as far as man's nature is known, he is living, reasonable, and mortal. It is therefore impossible that man should be free from this species of evil. You will, nevertheless, find that that the evils of the above kind which befall man are very few and rare.... There are thousands of men in perfect health, deformed individuals are ...few in number....They are not one-hundredth, not even one-thousandth part of those that are perfectly normal" (*Guide for the Perplexed* 3:10-12: translated by Alan D. Corré in, Maimonides On the Evils -- A classic exposition of the existence of evil in The Popular Arabic Literature of the Jews; <https://pantherfile.uwm.edu/corre/www/judeo-arabic.html> ).

whole<sup>64</sup> is always good.<sup>65</sup> Scripture thus writes: *And God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good* (Gen. 1:31).

If there were any evil in what God made, it was only at its fringe. From the point of view of the Upper Wisdom,<sup>66</sup> a great amount of good should not be withheld because of a little evil.<sup>67</sup>

The root of evil is due to the defect of the recipient.

We<sup>68</sup> can only compare the acts of God to His creations,<sup>69</sup> for everything is His creation.

Observe, we see that garments that are exposed<sup>70</sup> to the sun turn white, while the face of the fuller turns black. [Why is this so?] Doesn't that which acts [upon the garment and that which acts upon the face] come from the same source?<sup>71</sup> In truth, the effect of an act varies in accordance with the nature of its recipient, the object to which it is directed. The [effect of the sun's rays] differ depending on the nature of the objects that the sun's rays fall upon.

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<sup>64</sup> Anything created by God is mainly felt as good.

<sup>65</sup> Literally, does.

<sup>66</sup> God's Wisdom

<sup>67</sup> Creation as a whole is a great good. God should not have restrained Himself from creating the world because it occasionally causes pain to some individuals.

<sup>68</sup> Literally, if we.

<sup>69</sup> We can compare God's actions to that which He created. We cannot compare them to anything else, for that is the only existence we know of.

<sup>70</sup> Literally, stretched.

<sup>71</sup> Literally, doesn't one effect come from one cause? In other words, the sun produces rays. However, their effects are different.

The thoughts of people differ<sup>72</sup> in accordance with the nature of each and every person. The nature [of people] differs in accordance with the upper arrangements,<sup>73</sup> the place of the sun, [and] the object<sup>74</sup> that receives its power.<sup>75</sup> [It varies in accordance with] cities,<sup>76</sup> religions,<sup>77</sup> and food. Who can count all of these things?<sup>78</sup> The way of each man is pure in his eyes.<sup>79</sup>

The Lord God of Israel stirred up the spirit of His friend<sup>80</sup> Solomon to explain "words of delight" (Kohelet 12:10);<sup>81</sup> [that is,] topics dealing with wisdom and to teach the straight path.

All<sup>82</sup> things that a created being makes do not last. All created beings will grow weary [if they try] to create substance which is the bases of [all things],<sup>83</sup> or if they

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<sup>72</sup> Literally, change.

<sup>73</sup> The zodiac.

<sup>74</sup> The planet that the sun influences.

<sup>75</sup> The arrangement of the stars and planets at the time of a person's birth affect his nature.

<sup>76</sup> Literally, the cities.

<sup>77</sup> Literally, the religions.

<sup>78</sup> That affect a person's nature.

<sup>79</sup> The person who lives the unexamined life believes that the life that he leads is correct. The aforementioned life is based on the upper arrangements, the place of the sun and the planet it affects at the time of his birth, his place of residence, his religion and food.

<sup>80</sup> Solomon was called Yedidiah, friend of God. See 2 Sam. 12:25.

<sup>81</sup> According to I.E "words of delight" refer to the laws of nature. Understanding why something was created in a certain way and not in another way. See I.E. on 12:10.

<sup>82</sup> Literally, for all.

try to destroy substance and make it disappear.<sup>84</sup> All of man's works<sup>85</sup> consist of forms,<sup>86</sup> images, and accidents. Human beings<sup>87</sup> can separate that which is connected or connect that which is separated. They can move that which is at rest and put to rest that which moves.<sup>88</sup> Therefore, all the works of man are waste and empty.<sup>89</sup> [The only thing that is worthwhile is] the fear of the Lord. A person cannot attain to the level of the fear of the Lord unless he first ascends the ladder of wisdom<sup>90</sup> and his understanding is firmly developed and established.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> All things are made up of substance. Human beings cannot create substance. Only God can. See I.E. on Ps. 2:4.

<sup>84</sup> Substance cannot be destroyed.

<sup>85</sup> Literally, them.

<sup>86</sup> Man can shape substance.

<sup>87</sup> Literally, they.

<sup>88</sup> Man can manipulate substance. He cannot create it.

<sup>89</sup> For man's works are not everlasting.

<sup>90</sup> "Every branch of knowledge gives life to the one who acquires it. Now, there are many sorts of knowledge, each one of which is helpful. All of wisdom's categories are rungs in the ladder that leads to True Wisdom.... At their end they will flow to God and His goodness" (*The Secret of the Torah*, p.8).

<sup>91</sup> Literally, and he is built and established in understanding.

## CHAPTER 1.

### 1. THE WORDS OF KOHELETH, THE SON OF DAVID, KING IN JERUSALEM.

THE WORDS OF KOHELETH. Scripture writes:<sup>92</sup> *And he spoke three thousand similitudes*<sup>93</sup> (mashal); *and his poems*<sup>94</sup> (shiro) *were a thousand and five* (1 Kings 5:12).

A *mashal* (similitude) refers to something which stands for something aside from itself.<sup>95</sup> Compare, *put forth a riddle, and speak a similitude*<sup>96</sup> (mashal) *unto the house of Israel* (Ezek. 17:2). The *mashal* in the latter verse refers to *the great eagle* (Ezek. 17:3). The great eagle stands for Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>97</sup>

Poetry<sup>98</sup> consists of praises<sup>99</sup> or of things that are yet to come.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Literally, it is written [in Scripture].

<sup>93</sup> Translated according to I.E.

<sup>94</sup> Translated according to I.E.

<sup>95</sup> A *mashal* is not to be taken literally. Literally, which something else is compared to.

<sup>96</sup> Translated according to I.E.

<sup>97</sup> Literally, Nebuchadnezzar is that which is compared to it.

<sup>98</sup> Literally, it is the way of poetry. After explaining the term *mashal* in 1 Kings 5:12 and Ezek. 17:2-3, I.E. goes on to explain the term *shir* (poetry) in 1 Kings 5:12.

<sup>99</sup> Hebrew, *tehillah*. Other versions read *techillah* (first or beginning). That is poetry speaks of that which came first; that is, poetry speaks of the past. In this case, our verse reads: It is the way of poetry to speak of the past. See *Sefer Kohelet im Pirushei Ibn Ezra*, edited by Rabbi Mordecai Sha'ul Goodman (Henceforth, R. Goodman); Mosad Ha-Rav Kook, Israel 2012, page 19, note 3.

Solomon opens the book with *divrei* (the words of)<sup>101</sup> because he wanted to compose a book containing thoughts that came to his mind.<sup>102</sup> *Divrei*<sup>103</sup> does not always have this meaning,<sup>104</sup> for the verse that follows indicates the meaning of *divrei*.<sup>105</sup> It is also possible that the verse itself indicates its meaning.<sup>106</sup> The second verse in this book also indicates the meaning of the first verse.<sup>107</sup>

Kohelet refers to Solomon, for none of the sons of David, who was God's anointed, was a king except for Solomon.<sup>108</sup> He is called Kohelet (gatherer) on account of the wisdom which he gathered.

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<sup>100</sup> Solomon composed poems dealing with the past and the future. In his introduction to the Book of Psalms, I.E. notes that some of the Psalms refer to the past and others to the future.

<sup>101</sup> That is, the book opens with *divrei Shelomoh* (the words of Solomon).

<sup>102</sup> Literally, *Thoughts that arose in the heart*. *Divrei Shelomoh* (the words of Solomon) indicates that these words came from Solomon's own mind and are not prophetic.

<sup>103</sup> That is, *divrei* followed by a proper noun.

<sup>104</sup> At times *divrei* (the words of) has the meaning of "words of prophecy. Cf. *The words* (divrei) of *Jeremiah* (Jer.1:1) which means, the prophetic words of Jeremiah.

<sup>105</sup> At times the verse that follows indicates that the word *divrei* mentioned in the previous verse does not speak of what entered the speaker's mind on his own. For example: Jeremiah 1:2 reads "to whom the word of the Lord came." "To whom the word of the Lord came" indicates that Jeremiah 1:1 which states, "The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests that were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin" refer to words of prophecy. It does not refer to what Jeremiah thought of on his own.

<sup>106</sup> At times, we can ascertain the meaning of *divrei* even without the verse that follows. Cf. "The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah: Now it came to pass in the month Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the castle" (Nehemiah 1:1). It is clear from this verse that the word *divrei* does not refer to prophecy.

<sup>107</sup> In other words, it is clear from verse 2 that *divrei* does not refer to prophecy, for *saith Kohelet* indicates that the words are Solomon's words.

[KING IN JERUSALEM]. The book mentions the place of Kohelet's reign because of its glory. Do you not see that the king of Jerusalem was called *My righteous king* (malki-tzedek) (Gen. 14:18),<sup>109</sup> for Salem is Jerusalem.<sup>110</sup> The following shows this to be the case: *And in Salem also is set His tabernacle, [and His dwelling-place in Zion]* (Ps.76:3).<sup>111</sup> Scripture similarly reads, *Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem* (Josh. 10:1), for<sup>112</sup> he was king of the place of righteousness? The Book of Psalms likewise reads: *after the manner of Malki-zedek* (Ps. 110:4).<sup>113</sup> The latter refers to King David.<sup>114</sup>

## 2. VANITY OF VANITIES, SAITH KOHELETH; VANITY OF VANITIES, ALL IS VANITY.

VANITY OF VANITIES. Kohelet says this regarding the vanities of the world.<sup>115</sup> The word *Havel* (vanity of) is in the construct with *havalim* (vanities).<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Literally, him alone.

<sup>109</sup> Gen. 14:18 speaks of the king *Malki-tzedek* of Salem. I.E. refers to him as the king of Jerusalem. See next note.

<sup>110</sup> I.E. means, Do you not see that the king of Salem was called *My righteous king* (malki-tzedek) (Gen. 14:18) because he was king of Jerusalem, for Salem is Jerusalem, whose glory is God's presence.

<sup>111</sup> God's tabernacle was set in Jerusalem/Zion.

<sup>112</sup> *Adoni-tzedek* was so called because he was king of Jerusalem.

<sup>113</sup> Translated according to I.E.

<sup>114</sup> David was called *Malki-tzedek* because he was king over Jerusalem, the righteous city.

<sup>115</sup> Not everything is vanity. See Midrash Kohelet 1. [The meaning of "What profit hath a man of all his labor which he taketh under the sun?" is:] whatever a man may possess on earth--under the sun-- he must inevitably part with, but it is different if he provides for himself [for what is] above the sun; i.e. what is in heaven."

Even though words that come from the form of *eretz* (earth) (Gen. 1:10)<sup>117</sup> are not found to change their vocalization when in the construct—except for *cheder* (chamber) in *chadar mishkavekha* (thy bed-chamber) (Ex. 7:28), *delet* (door) in *u-segor delatekha* (and shut thy doors about thee) (Is. 26:20)<sup>118</sup> and *chemet* (bottle) in *mesappe'ach chamatekha* (adding them to your bottle)(Hab. 2:15)<sup>119</sup>—*havel* stands by itself, for these words are vocalized with a *pattach*,<sup>120</sup> and *havel* is vocalized with a *tzerei*.<sup>121</sup>

A word in the singular is connected to a word in the plural,<sup>122</sup> in cases where both words have one meaning, for two reasons.

1. To extol [a person or an object]. Compare, *melekh melakhim* (king of kings) (Ezek. 26:7).<sup>123</sup>

2. To denigrate [a person or an object].<sup>124</sup> Compare, *eved avadim* (a servant of servants) (Gen. 9:25).<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Our verse reads: *havel havalim* (vanity of vanities). *Havel* is the construct form of *hevel*.

<sup>117</sup> That is, nouns that are vocalized with two *segolim*.

<sup>118</sup> The lamed of *delatekha* is vocalized with a *kamatz*.

<sup>119</sup> The mem of *chamatekha* is vocalized with a *kamatz*.

<sup>120</sup> These words are vocalized with a *pattach* or a *kamatz* beneath the second root letter when in the construct. It should be noted that I.E. at times refers to the *kamatz* as a *pattach*.

<sup>121</sup> *Havel* is vocalized with a *tzerei* beneath its second root letter. If it followed the usual form for words vocalized *segol segol*, it would have read *hevel havalim*, or *haval havalim* if it followed the less usual form. I.E. further elaborates on the vocalization of *havel* in his comments on 12:8.

<sup>122</sup> As in *havel havalim*.

<sup>123</sup> *Melekh melakhim* means a very great king.

<sup>124</sup> Literally, and the reverse.

*Havel havalim* (vanity of vanities) is similar.<sup>126</sup> *Hevel* is used in our verse in the same manner that it is used in, *Men of low degree are vanity* (hevel), and *men of high degree are a lie; if they be laid in the balances, they are together lighter than vanity* (me-hevel). (Ps. 62:10).<sup>127</sup>

The *mem* placed before the word *hevel* [in (me-hevel) (Ps. 62:10)] means “more than.” It is like the *mem* in front of *mi-kol* (above all) in, *above all that were before me in Jerusalem* (Kohelet 2:7).<sup>128</sup> and the *mem* in front of *mi-kol* (more...than all) in, *I have more understanding than all my teachers* (Ps. 119:99).

The meaning of: *If they be laid in the balances, they are together lighter than vanity* is:<sup>129</sup> If people and vanity will be placed on a scale, then the people will weigh less than vanity.

The phrase *vanity of vanities* is repeated in our verse to indicate that it is so at all times.<sup>130</sup> It is like, *The floods have lifted up, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their voice* (Ps. 93:3).<sup>131</sup> Similarly, *They compass me about, yea, they compass me about* (Ps. 118:11), which means “They compass me about many times.

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<sup>125</sup> *Eved avadim* (a servant of servants) means a lowly slave.

<sup>126</sup> It is a disparagement. It refers to the ultimate vanity.

<sup>127</sup> Ps. 62:10 illustrates the meaning of *havel havalim* for it speaks of people being less important than hevel (vanity). For if people are placed on one side of a scale and vanity on the other side people will weigh less than vanity. These people are really *havel havalim*; they are truly the ultimate *hevel*.

<sup>128</sup> I.E. renders this, *above all that were before me in Jerusalem*.

<sup>129</sup> Literally, and the meaning is.

<sup>130</sup> It is always so.

<sup>131</sup> The floods always lift up their voice.

The psalmist concludes the verse with *all is vanity* so that no one thinks <sup>132</sup> that there are some things in this world that are vanity and other things that are lasting.<sup>133</sup>

### 3. WHAT PROFIT HATH MAN OF ALL HIS LABOR WHEREIN HE LABORETH UNDER THE SUN?

WHAT PROFIT HATH MAN. *Yitron* (profit) is similar in form to *zikhron*. *Yitron* is a noun. It comes from a verbal root whose first letter is not always present.<sup>134</sup> Its form in the *hifil* is proof of this.<sup>135</sup>

The point of the verse is: since everything is vanity, what gain does man have from all of his work?

The meaning of *under the sun* is, passing time.<sup>136</sup> The sun [is employed as a symbol of time] because the sun alone gives birth to time. The day is dependent on the sun. It is day<sup>137</sup> from sunrise till sunset. Night begins from the time the sun sets and lasts until the sun rises. This is so whether the stars and moon are seen or unseen.<sup>138</sup> *Seed time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter* (Gen. 8:22) are similarly determined by the movement of the sun to the north or the south.

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<sup>132</sup> Literally, so that a person does not say in his heart.

<sup>133</sup> Literally, an everlasting root.

<sup>134</sup> Literally, is incomplete. *Yitron* comes from a root whose first letter is a *yod*. The *yod* is dropped in certain conjugations. Its root is *yod, tav, resh*. Such roots are called *peh yods*.

<sup>135</sup> The *yod* of the root *yod, tav, resh* changes into a *vav* in the *hifil*. Compare the word *totiru* (let remain) in, *And ye shall not let remain* (Ex. 12:10).

<sup>136</sup> I.E. renders *What profit hath man of all his labor wherein he laboreth under the sun?* as follows: *What profit hath man of all his labor wherein he laboreth under passing time; that is, while time passes?*

<sup>137</sup> Literally, for it is day.

<sup>138</sup> The moon and stars do not determine the night.

Now even though the moon has tremendous visible influence on rivers, moist plants, and [the human] brain; and Pleiades binds and Orion opens,<sup>139</sup> their influence is insignificant in comparison to that of the sun. They only have a part in many parts.<sup>140</sup>

Now even though there is one sun, its effects vary in accordance with the hundred and twenty changes of the arrangements of the seven moving stars,<sup>141</sup> and the change in all of their movements, because of their motion (around) the apogee of the eccentric sphere.<sup>142</sup> We therefore do not find one heavenly arrangement to be like any other heavenly arrangement even for a moment.<sup>143</sup> The *Sefer Yetzirah*<sup>144</sup> therefore notes: Two stones<sup>145</sup> build two houses<sup>146</sup> (*Sefer Yetzirah* 4:12), [and so forth] until nine.<sup>147</sup> The mouth cannot speak of this nor can the ear hear.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Literally, Pleiades to bind and Orion to open. I.E. alludes to Job 32:38 which reads: *Canst thou bind the chains of the Pleiades, or loosen the bands of Orion?* I.E. in his comments on this verse in Job explains "*to bind the chains of the Pleiades or loosen the bands of Orion* refers to the effect that Orion and the Pleiades have on the ripening of fruit." "Pleiades binds the fruit and Orion draws it out"; that is, Pleiades....gives shape and substance to the fruit in winter, but it is still in a shriveled-up form until summer, when Orion draws it out, giving it the necessary fullness" (*Genesis Rabbah* 10:7, translated with notes, glossary, and indices by H. Freedman, and Maurice Simon, Soncino Press, 1983.)

<sup>140</sup> They have one or two parts in a world of many parts. They play a small role in comparison to that played by the sun.

<sup>141</sup> Even though there is only one sun, it has various effects on earth depending on the arrangement of the stars and planets.

<sup>142</sup> An eccentric sphere is a sphere whose center differs from the center of the earth. The planets travel in eccentric spheres.

<sup>143</sup> The heavenly arrangements are not stable. They keep on changing.

<sup>144</sup> A very early Rabbinic esoteric work. Some consider The *Sefer Yetzirah* to be the oldest surviving Rabbinic work of this genre. The *Sefer Yetzirah*...states that God created the world through numbers, letters, and words. These three are the bases of all the sciences" (I.E. on Ps. 19:5). Rabbi Saadia Gaon wrote a philosophic commentary to this work.

<sup>145</sup> The reference is to the two letters *alef* and *bet* (R. Goodman).

The effort employed in seeking wisdom, so that the spirit of man is enlightened<sup>149</sup> is profitable, for the spirit of man is not under the sun.<sup>150</sup>

#### 4. ONE GENERATION PASSETH AWAY, AND ANOTHER GENERATION COMETH; AND THE EARTH ABIDETH FOREVER.

ONE GENERATION PASSETH AWAY. Kohelet mentions the four elements because everything that is found beneath the sun is created out of these four elements, and to them everything shall return. The following are the four elements: The fire; the resting wind, that is, the air; the water, and the earth. Kohelet mentions all four.

Kohelet begins with the earth, for the earth<sup>151</sup> is like a woman who gives birth.<sup>152</sup> He then mentions the sun because of its great heat, for it is the place of fire and it is the fire that begets.<sup>153</sup> He then mentions the wind and the water.

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<sup>146</sup> Two words, *av, ba*.

<sup>147</sup> "Two stones build two houses, three stones build six houses, four stones build twenty-four houses, five stones build one hundred and twenty houses, six stones build seven hundred and twenty houses, seven stones build five thousand and forty houses. From here on go out and calculate what the mouth is unable to speak, and the ear is unable to hear" (Sefer Yetzirah 4:12). See *The Book of Creation*, translated by Aryeh Kaplan.

<sup>148</sup> The first nine letters give birth to 362,880 permutations (R. Goodman). If the first nine letters give birth to 362,880 permutations, then the number of heavenly bodies give birth to an infinite number of arrangements.

<sup>149</sup> Literally, clarified.

<sup>150</sup> The spirit of man comes from the world which is above the sun.

<sup>151</sup> Literally, she is.

<sup>152</sup> The earth is like a woman. It gives birth to all the living things found on the earth.

Regarding the earth, Kohelet says: all things created from the earth shall return to it. This is similar to for *dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return* (Gen. 3:19).

THE EARTH ABIDETH...However, *One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh.*

The word *dor* (generation)<sup>154</sup> is similar in meaning to the word *gerim* (strangers) (Ex. 22:20).<sup>155</sup> The word *dur* (dwell) in *than to dwell in the tents of wickedness* (Ps. 84:11) is similar.

## 5. THE SUN ALSO ARISETH, AND THE SUN GOETH DOWN, AND HASTETH TO HIS PLACE WHERE HE ARISETH.

THE SUN ALSO ARISETH. The masters of geometry and mathematics have already explained that all created things come in ten sizes.<sup>156</sup>

The sun is the greatest of all of them. There is no other like it. It is the main component of the heavenly apparatus. It is as important as the dot in the science of geometry<sup>157</sup> and the number one in the science of mathematics.<sup>158</sup> The meaning of our verse is: Even though the sun is in motion and rises and sets, it returns to the place that it started out from. The place where it arises today is close to the place

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<sup>153</sup> The fire produced by the sun acts like semen and impregnates the earth.

<sup>154</sup> *Dor* comes from the root *dalet, vav, resh*, which means to dwell. A generation is the time that people or a person dwells on the earth.

<sup>155</sup> *Gerim* comes from the root *gimel, vav, resh*, which means to dwell. *Gerim* refers to people who dwell on the earth for a period of time. Thus, *dor* and *ger* (the singular of *gerim*) are similar in meaning. They both mean “dwell.” According to I.E., the basic meaning of *dor holekh ve-dor ba* (one generation passeth away and another generation cometh) is: those who dwell [upon the earth for a period of time] come and go. Similarly, *gerim* refers to people who dwell on the earth for a period of time.

<sup>156</sup> So Meijler. Literally, ten parts.

<sup>157</sup> The dot plays a major role in geometry. I.E. on Ex. 33:21 tells us that a line connects two points. Geometry is based on the measurement of lines. No dot, no line.

<sup>158</sup> "All sums consist of ones." I.E. on Ex. 33: 21.

that it will arise tomorrow. The sun will rise twice a year in the same place<sup>159</sup> because of its movement to the north and to the south.<sup>160</sup> It will be at the end of the south and the end of the north once a year.<sup>161</sup> The same is the case with the moon and the five moving stars.<sup>162</sup> All the hosts of heaven also rise and set.

Kohelet only mentions the sun.<sup>163</sup> Our verse is similar to *In them hath He set a tent for the sun* (Ps. 19:5), for the latter verse also does not mention the stars.<sup>164</sup>

[AND HASTETH TO HIS PLACE] The meaning of *sho'ef* (hasteth)<sup>165</sup> is similar to the word *shafah* (snuffeth) in *A wild ass...that snuffeth up the wind in her desire* (Jer. 2:24).<sup>166</sup> The sun, as it were, snuffs the wind because of its great desire to return to its place.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> The sun crosses the same point in its travels twice. Once on the way south and once on the way north.

<sup>160</sup> "The declination of the sun changes from 23.5° north to 23.5° south and back again during the course of a year. Declination is the angular distance of a celestial body north or south of the celestial equator." See <https://astronavigationdemystified.com/the-suns-declination-the-equinoxes-and-the-solstices/>

<sup>161</sup> Literally, while it completes a year.

<sup>162</sup> They rise and set.

<sup>163</sup> Out of all the heavenly bodies, it only mentions the sun. Our text should have read: the sun, the moon, and the stars also arise...go down...and hasten to their place where they arise.

<sup>164</sup> "Scripture mentions the sun because it is larger than any other body, and all of the movements of the celestial bodies are tied to it. The sun gives birth to equal and changing time. Day, night, metals, plants, and all life are dependent on the sun. Solomon similarly says, *under the sun*." (I.E. to Ps. 19:5).

<sup>165</sup> I.E. render *sho'ef* as snuffs.

<sup>166</sup> A wild ass snuffs up wind as it runs (Metzudat David).

<sup>167</sup> The sun breathes heavily (snuffs the wind) because it runs to the place where it arises.

**6. IT GOETH<sup>168</sup> TOWARD THE SOUTH, AND TURNETH ABOUT UNTO THE NORTH; IT TURNETH ABOUT CONTINUALLY IN ITS CIRCUIT, AND THE WIND RETURNETH AGAIN TO ITS CIRCUITS.**

IT GOETH TOWARD THE SOUTH. Some <sup>169</sup> say that also this verse refers to the sun.<sup>170</sup> It at times inclines to the north and at times to the south. They explain the word *ha-ru'ach* (the wind) as meaning side.<sup>171</sup> However, this interpretation is incorrect as is shown by the concluding clause of the verse which reads *and the wind (ha'ru'ach) returneth again to its circuits.*<sup>172</sup> The entire verse deals with the wind,<sup>173</sup> for the air at times moves toward the north and at times toward the south. It turns from south to north on the eastern side, and from north to south on the western side. Scripture therefore says that the wind *turneth about continually in its circuit*. It does this until it *returneth again to its circuits* as the sun does, for the sun is the cause of most of the wind's movement. Those who go down to the seas know about the winds. They know that the winds move one way once a year.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Translated literally.

<sup>169</sup> Rashi, Rashbam, Rabbi Yosef Kara.

<sup>170</sup> This verse, like the earlier verse, refers to the sun. This interpretation reads our verse: "The sun goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it turneth about continually on these sides." It interprets "It turneth" as referring to the sun because the previous verse speaks of the sun.

<sup>171</sup> The word *ru'ach* at times means side. See Dan. 8:8. This interpretation renders *sovev sovev holekh ha-ru'ach* (it turneth about continually in its circuit) as "it (the sun) continually goes on all these sides." See Rashbam.

<sup>172</sup> Our verse concludes with, *ve-shav ha-ru'ach*. If we render *ru'ach* as side, then the aforementioned reads "the side returns." This is an impossible reading. *Ve-shav ha-ru'ach* means "and the wind returneth." We thus see that the verse speaks of the wind.

<sup>173</sup> And not only the last clause. All commentators admit that the last clause of the verse speaks of the wind. Hence I.E.'s comment.

**7. ALL THE RIVERS RUN INTO THE SEA, YET THE SEA IS NOT FULL;  
UNTO THE PLACE WHITHER THE RIVERS GO, THITHER THEY GO.**

ALL THE RIVERS RUN INTO THE SEA. Even though the rivers run into the sea, the sea is not full to the point where it passes its boundary and covers the earth,<sup>175</sup> for the very waters that enter the sea return and go to their place [in the sky] an infinite number of times; for a cloud always goes up from the sea to the firmament. They make up most of the clouds. The sea waters go up because of their lightness. The cloud turns into rain. Compare, *He that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth* (Amos 9:6). The waters of the fountains come from rain; all the rivers come forth from the fountains. Do you not see that that in years of famine [when there is an insufficient amount of rain] most of the fountains dry up? Scripture states: *and it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there was no rain in the land* (1 Kings 17:7). This is the meaning of *All the rivers run into the sea*. When the rivers are full of rain water, they empty into the sea.

Solomon does not explain how<sup>176</sup> the waters return to their place, as he does not explain how<sup>177</sup> the sun returns from the west to the east. He does not tell us whether the sun travels above the firmament<sup>178</sup> or on the sides of the firmament. [He similarly does not note] that the earth is a globe in the center of the upper

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<sup>174</sup> The winds blow in the same direction on the same day from year to year. For example, they blow in the same direction on the first of Nisan every year (Meijler).

<sup>175</sup> See Ps. 104:9. "Thou didst set a bound which they should not pass over, that they might not return to cover the earth."

<sup>176</sup> Literally, the cause.

<sup>177</sup> Literally, the cause.

<sup>178</sup> See *Pesachim* 94b: "The wise men of Israel say that during the day the sun goes below the firmament and at night above the firmament, and the wise men of the Gentiles say that during the day the sun goes below the firmament and at night below the ground."

sphere. For these things require proof.<sup>179</sup> However, the main object of the Book of Kohelet<sup>180</sup> is to discuss all things visible to the eye that do not need proof.<sup>181</sup>

The reason why Kohelet mentions these four objects; that is, the sun which is the place of fire, and the wind, the water, and the earth is because all things under the sun (plants, animals, people, fowl, and the fish of the sea) are produced by these objects. Now, if the nature of the sun, the wind, the water, and the earth (which are the source of plants, animals, people, fowl, and the fish) is to return to the place that they started out from,<sup>182</sup> how can their offspring<sup>183</sup> continue forever? If their offspring begin as vanity, they will end up as vanity. If man is vanity, then his work is certainly vanity, for it is an accident<sup>184</sup> when compared to man himself.<sup>185</sup> The same is even more true of man's thoughts, which are like an accident produced by an accident.<sup>186</sup> Compare, *The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity* (Ps. 94:11).

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<sup>179</sup> The path that the sun takes cannot be seen. The veracity of the theories as to the exact path taken by the sun during the day and night have to be backed up by non-visible proofs, as do theories regarding the shape of the earth and its place in the cosmos.

<sup>180</sup> Literally, his book.

<sup>181</sup> Such as the sun rising or the sun setting, which is visible to the eye and does not require proof.

<sup>182</sup> Returning to the place where they started out from indicates permanence.

<sup>183</sup> Which do not return to the place where they started out from. Their existence is thus transient.

<sup>184</sup> An "accident" according to the science of I.E.'s day is something that happens to a substance. For example, a table is painted red. Red is an "accident," for the table can be green, blue, or any color. It thus follows that accidents are not everlasting.

<sup>185</sup> Man is a "substance" relative to man's work; the latter is an "accident."

<sup>186</sup> Man is an accident relative to his source. His thoughts are thus an accident produced by an accident.

**8. ALL THINGS TOIL TO WEARINESS; MAN CANNOT UTTER IT, THE EYE IS NOT SATISFIED WITH SEEING, NOR THE EAR FILLED WITH HEARING.**

ALL THINGS TOIL TO WEARINESS. Some say that the word *yege'im* (toil to weariness) means, cause weariness. However, this is incorrect because *yege'im* is an intransitive verb. It is like the singular *ya'ge'a* (weary) in *when thou wast faint and weary* (Deut. 25:18). If the word *yege'im* had the meaning of “cause weariness,” as they maintain, then the word would read *meyagge'im* which is a *pi'el* with a *dagesh*.<sup>187</sup> Compare, *teyagga* (to make to toil) in *make not all the people toil thither* (Josh. 7:3). In reality, the word *yege'im* describes *ha-devarim* (things).<sup>188</sup> The meaning of *kol ha-devarim yege'im* (all things toil to weariness) is, all things are weary and incomplete.<sup>189</sup> They do not have the power [to last].<sup>190</sup> Therefore, *man cannot utter it*.<sup>191</sup>

After mentioning the four elements<sup>192</sup> which eternally maintain their makeup,<sup>193</sup> [Kohélet notes] that if they<sup>194</sup> move,<sup>195</sup> they end up as they were at first.

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<sup>187</sup> Words in the *pi'el* have a *dagesh* in the middle root letter. I.E. notes this because he wants to emphasize that *yege'im* is not a *pi'el*, for it does not have a *dagesh* in its middle root letter

<sup>188</sup> Our verse reads *kol ha-devarim yege'im*.

<sup>189</sup> No created things have the power to last forever.

<sup>190</sup> They do not last.

<sup>191</sup> A man cannot describe all the changes that are constantly taking place in the world.

<sup>192</sup> Literally, the roots. The four basic elements: wind, water, earth, and fire.

<sup>193</sup> If they are stationary.

<sup>194</sup> The four elements.

<sup>195</sup> Motion indicates change. Change indicates impermanence.

Kohelet says that we know the categories.<sup>196</sup> The particulars, which the categories give birth to, do not maintain their form even for a moment. Hence, no person can count them.<sup>197</sup> Neither is the eye satisfied with seeing them,<sup>198</sup> for the eye only sees the images that are formed in the clear air, and these images<sup>199</sup> do not last for even one moment.<sup>200</sup>

[NOR THE EAR FILLED WITH HEARING] The ear is not filled with hearing the particulars,<sup>201</sup> for hearing also is produced by the entrance [into the ear] of the air which contains the forms of the sounds. Also, these forms<sup>202</sup> do not last [for more than a moment.]<sup>203</sup>

As a result of the above, the eye cannot see all the particulars, nor the ear perceive their number, for as far as people are concerned they are infinite. Hence, only the Creator knows the categories and the particulars, for He created them all.

## **9. THAT WHICH HATH BEEN IS THAT WHICH SHALL BE, AND THAT WHICH HATH BEEN DONE IS THAT WHICH SHALL BE DONE; AND THERE IS NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN.**

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<sup>196</sup> In other words, we earlier mentioned the four elements. I.E. refers to the four elements as the four categories, for all things are made of them. These categories are eternal. See I.E. on verse 4.

<sup>197</sup> For they change every moment.

<sup>198</sup> The eye cannot see all of them.

<sup>199</sup> Formed by the particulars.

<sup>200</sup> Literally, for the eye only sees because it perceives the images that are formed in the clear air, and these images do not last for even one moment.

<sup>201</sup> The ear does not hear all sounds.

<sup>202</sup> Like the forms related to sight.

<sup>203</sup> Hence, there are too many of them for the ear to hear all of them.

THAT WHICH HATH BEEN. The psalmist says regarding the upper creations, *He hath also established them forever and ever; He hath made a decree which shall not be transgressed* (Ps. 148:6).

He says regarding the lower creations:<sup>204</sup> *for His name alone is exalted* (ibid. 13). The meaning of the latter is, they<sup>205</sup> are all vanity.

*That which hath been is that which shall be* refers to the spheres and their hosts, for they are globes that circle round about. Their start is like their end and their end is like their start.<sup>206</sup>

*And that which hath been done is that which shall be done* refers to the categories which are preserved.<sup>207</sup> such as the category man, or the category horse, or the categories of the various living things, and the categories of all plants. The nature of all of the aforementioned comes from the movement of the bodies which are on high. Now, if the bodies on high are eternal, so are the categories [on earth] that are in the form of the arrangement of the [heavenly] hosts.

The meaning of our verse is: Even though I find it impossible to count the individuals that make up a category, the categories themselves are eternal. They are known and numbered. This is the way the world above and the world below exist in the same manner, *and there is nothing new under the sun*.

**10. THERE IS<sup>208</sup> A THING WHEREOF IT IS SAID: 'SEE, THIS IS NEW'--IT HATH BEEN ALREADY, IN THE AGES WHICH WERE BEFORE US.**

THERE IS A THING. The word *yesh* (there is)<sup>209</sup> is mainly used in Hebrew for something that only occurs occasionally.<sup>210</sup> Compare, *And sometimes* (ve-yesh) *the*

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<sup>204</sup> That which is upon the earth.

<sup>205</sup> That which is upon the earth.

<sup>206</sup> They end up where they start. They do so without any change in their makeup.

<sup>207</sup> They are non-transient.

<sup>208</sup> Translated according to I.E.

*cloud was a few days upon the tabernacle* (Num. 9:20), *There is* (yesh) [*a man*] *that scattereth, and yet increaseth* (Prov. 11:24), *and there is* (ve-yesh) *a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his evil-doing* (Kohelet 7:15). [Scripture says the latter because] in most cases *the years of the wicked shall be shortened* (Prov. 10:27).

Now if a person is shown something new, [let him know] *it hath been already, in the ages which were before us.*

The word *olamim* means ages. Similarly, *tzur olamim* (Rock of ages) (Is. 26:4),<sup>211</sup> and *olamim* (ages) in *Thy kingdom is a kingdom for all ages* (Ps. 145:13), and *te'shu'at olamim* (an everlasting salvation) which means, an eternal salvation or [a salvation lasting] many ages (Is. 45:17).

**11. THERE IS NO REMEMBRANCE OF THEM OF FORMER TIMES;  
NEITHER SHALL THERE BE ANY REMEMBRANCE OF THEM OF LATTER  
TIMES THAT ARE TO COME, AMONG THOSE THAT SHALL COME  
AFTER.**

THERE IS NO REMEMBRANCE OF THEM OF FORMER TIMES. Should you say, if a thing which [appears to be] new already existed in previous times, then we would have heard of it, [then know: there is no remembrance of the events that occurred in former times] and the same shall happen to the events of latter times, and those that transpire after the latter times.

Up until this point, Solomon speaks in general.<sup>212</sup> Now he begins to explain all things that enter a person's mind.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Literally, there is.

<sup>210</sup> Literally, something which is found to occur at few times. I.E. renders our verse: There is occasionally a thing whereof it is said: 'See, this is new.'

<sup>211</sup> Translated according to I.E.

<sup>212</sup> Solomon spoke of the world, the categories, men, labor, and so forth.

## 12. I KOHELETH HAVE BEEN KING OVER ISRAEL IN JERUSALEM.

I KOHELETH. The contents of the Book of Kohelet indicate that Solomon composed it at the end of his life. Solomon, as it were, says to the coming generations: I tried all these things in my life. I could try all these things because I was king.

Kohelet says, *I have been king over Israel* because Israel, unlike the Kederites who live in tents,<sup>214</sup> always had prophets and wise men such as the sons of Zerach.<sup>215</sup> Solomon's point is: I was king over a wise and understanding people.

Solomon says *in Jerusalem* because Jerusalem is situated in a place which is prepared to receive wisdom,<sup>216</sup> for it is known that the world is divided into seven sections.<sup>217</sup> It is not possible for those of a pure heart to receive wisdom except in the three middle sections,<sup>218</sup> for the great heat in the first sections<sup>219</sup> or cold in the last sections<sup>220</sup> prevents man's nature from being pure. It is known that the latitude of Jerusalem is thirty-three degrees [north of the equator]. Jerusalem is located in the center of the inhabited world,<sup>221</sup> for it is only possible for people to live [in the

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<sup>213</sup> Solomon now begins to speak of man's inner world. Literally, all things that come upon the heart of man.

<sup>214</sup> See Ps. 120:5.

<sup>215</sup> The sons of Zorach were very wise. See I.E. on Ps. 88:1.

<sup>216</sup> Literally, the wisdom. I.E. might have a specific wisdom in mind.

<sup>217</sup> Or climates.

<sup>218</sup> The seven sections or climates start at the equator and go northward.

<sup>219</sup> In the first two sections above the equator.

<sup>220</sup> The last two sections are close to the north pole.

<sup>221</sup> According to I.E., the inhabited world is located north of the equator. The inhabited world is divided into seven sections or climates. Jerusalem is located in the middle of the inhabited world.

areas that lie] beyond the degree that the sun inclines to the north<sup>222</sup> or to the south.<sup>223</sup>

**13. AND I APPLIED MY HEART TO SEEK AND TO SEARCH OUT BY WISDOM CONCERNING ALL THINGS THAT ARE DONE UNDER HEAVEN; IT IS A SORE TASK THAT GOD HATH GIVEN TO THE SONS OF MEN TO BE EXERCISED THEREWITH.**

AND I APPLIED MY HEART. This verse is most probably connected to the verse which comes after it. That is, Solomon sought to seek out, by employing wisdom, the reason for things<sup>224</sup> and the root of all things, even though it is a sore task to do so, because the man [who does so] is fruitlessly occupied.<sup>225</sup>

The word *la-tur* (to search out) is similar to *mi-tur* (from searching out) in *from searching out the land* (Num. 13:25)<sup>226</sup> and has a similar meaning.

The word *la'anot* (to be exercised) in *la'anot bo* (to be exercised therewith)<sup>227</sup> is similar to the word *inyan* (task) (Kohelet 2:26).<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> The degree from which the sun begins travelling north of the equator.

<sup>223</sup> The degree from which the sun starts its journey from the north towards the equator. See Shlomo Sela, *Astrology and Biblical Exegesis in Abraham ibn Ezra's Thought*, Bar Ilan University, Israel, page 330.

<sup>224</sup> Hebrew, *divrei chefetz*. I.E. identifies *divrei chefetz* with the "upper wisdom" which explains the purpose of things and the reasons they were created as they are. See I.E. on12:10.

<sup>225</sup> For he will not be fully able to comprehend the world. See next verse.

<sup>226</sup> The Biblical text reads: *li-derosh ve-latur* (to seek and to search out). I.E. notes that the word *la-tur* (to seek out) is similar in meaning to *li-derosh* (to search out).

<sup>227</sup> I.E. renders *la'anot* (to be exercised), to be exercised in thought or to be intellectually exercised.

<sup>228</sup> I.E. renders *inyan* (task), idea or thought.

Others say<sup>229</sup> that the word *la'anut* is related to the word *inyuy* (poverty).<sup>230</sup> They say that the word *aniti* (I am impoverished) in *I am greatly impoverished* (Ps. 116:10), and the word *ve-anah* (shall be impoverished) in *But the pride of Israel shall be impoverished to his face*<sup>231</sup> (Hos. 5:5) are similar. However, it is much more correct to connect the word *ve-anah* in Hosea to the word *ta'aneh* (bear witness) in *Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor* (Ex. 20:13). Furthermore, the word *anitiv* (Ps. 116:10) is similar to the word *va-ya'an* (spoke) in *And Job spoke* (Job 3:2). The clause *I said (amarti) in my haste* (Ps. 116:10), which follows *ani aniti*, shows that *aniti* means "I spoke."<sup>232</sup> The word *ya'anem* (shall...humble them) in *God shall hear and humble them* (Ps. 55:20) means shall testify against them or shall answer them.

When Solomon busied himself to study the root of all things, he found that all is vanity and a striving after wind.

[UNDER HEAVEN] *Under heaven* is like *under the sun* (v. 3).<sup>233</sup>

On the other hand, *under heaven* most probably alludes to the upper sphere<sup>234</sup> which contains all the hosts of heaven,<sup>235</sup> and the science regarding the secret of the planets along with [the science of] the forty-eight forms of the sphere.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Literally, some say.

<sup>230</sup> According to this interpretation, *It is a sore task that God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised therewith* means, it is a sore task that God hath given to the sons of men to be intellectually impoverished therewith; that is, man cannot fully understand the way the world works.

<sup>231</sup> Translated according to the opinion which connects the word *la'anut* to the word *inyuy*.

<sup>232</sup> *Amarti* is in parallel to *aniti*. They thus have one meaning.

<sup>233</sup> The meaning of *under the sun* is, passing time (I.E. on v. 3). According to this interpretation, our verse reads: I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom, all things that are done while time passes.

After Kohelet employed wisdom to study the root of all things that are brought into existence by the power of heaven, he found this to be a sore and difficult task. For man's mind is limited, and man cannot count [the heavenly bodies that] beget [offspring on the earth] and certainly not the things that they produce.

There is no number to the troops of heaven.<sup>237</sup> The ancients were only able to recognize 1022 stars.

The fact that Kohelet says *under the heaven* along with *there is a time for everything* (Kohelet 3:1) shows this to be the case.<sup>238</sup> So does the second time *under the heaven* is mentioned in the verse reading *I searched with my heart* (Kohelet2:3).<sup>239</sup>

**14. I HAVE SEEN ALL THE WORKS THAT ARE DONE UNDER THE SUN;  
AND, BEHOLD, ALL IS VANITY AND A STRIVING AFTER WIND.**

I HAVE SEEN. *Re'ut ru'ach* (a striving after wind) means the same as *ro'eh ru'ach* (striveth after wind) in *Ephraim striveth after wind, and followeth after the*

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<sup>234</sup> The eighth sphere. According to this interpretation, our verse reads: I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under the influence of the heavenly bodies.

<sup>235</sup> The fixed stars.

<sup>236</sup> The fixed stars that are embedded in the eighth sphere consists of 48 forms.

<sup>237</sup> The fixed stars.

<sup>238</sup> *There is a time for everything under the heaven* indicates that heaven determines what occurs under heaven; that is, the heavenly bodies determine what happens on earth.

<sup>239</sup> According to I. E., the meaning of *I searched in my heart...till I might see which it was best for the sons of men that they should do under the heaven the few days of their life* is, I searched in my heart...till I might see which was best for the sons of men to do so that their lives will be in keeping with what the heavenly bodies have decreed for them.

*east wind* (Hosea 12:2).<sup>240</sup> *Re'ut ru'ach* (a striving after wind) means, it does not help or satisfy.<sup>241</sup> The term *ru'ach* (wind) is used in the sense of *hevel* (vapor, nothingness)<sup>242</sup> because of its instability, for one cannot hold the wind in one's hand. It is used in this sense in *For they sow the wind* (*ru'ach*) (Hosea 8:7), and *For the wind* (*ru'ach*) *passeth over it*<sup>243</sup> *and it is gone* (Ps. 103:16).<sup>244</sup>

It is possible that the word *re'ut* (striving) means, thoughts. The phrase *rayon ru'ach* (a striving after wind) (v. 17) shows that this is the case.<sup>245</sup> *Re'ut* follows the form of *demut* (2 Kings 16:10) and *rayon* follows the form of *dimyon*. They<sup>246</sup> come from a root that drops the third root letter.<sup>247</sup>

## 15. THAT WHICH IS CROOKED CANNOT BE MADE STRAIGHT; AND THAT WHICH IS WANTING CANNOT BE NUMBERED.

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<sup>240</sup> I.E. connects the word *re'ut* (striving) to the word *ro'eh* (shepherd). The word *ro'eh* means to feed. He renders *Efra'im ro'eh ru'ach* (Ephraim striveth after wind) as, Ephraim feeds on wind (R. Goodman). He interprets *all is vanity and a striving after wind* as, all is vanity and a feeding upon wind.

<sup>241</sup> Feeding upon wind does not satisfy.

<sup>242</sup> Our verse reads *ha-kol hevel u-re'ut u'ach* (all is vanity and a striving after wind). *Hevel* is parallel to *ru'ach* and thus means the same.

<sup>243</sup> The plant. Our verse is to be understood as follows: For the wind (*ru'ach*) passeth over the plant, and it is gone.

<sup>244</sup> It is not clear how I.E. concludes from this verse that *ru'ach* has the meaning of "vapor," for the verse speaks of the effect of the wind upon a plant. It does not speak of the wind being a vapor. (R. Goodman)

<sup>245</sup> I.E. renders *rayon ru'ach* (a striving after wind) (v.17) as, vain thoughts.

<sup>246</sup> The word *re'ut* and *demut*.

<sup>247</sup> The word *re'ut* comes from the root, *resh, ayin, heh*. The word *de'mut* comes from the root, *dalet, mem, heh*.

CROOKED. The word *me'uvvat* (crooked) is a *pu'al*. It is like the word *medubbar* (spoken) (Ps.87:3). There are two roots with one meaning for the word crooked.<sup>248</sup> One does not drop the third root letter<sup>249</sup> and one does.<sup>250</sup>

The word *li-tekon* (be made straight) is intransitive.

Our verse should be interpreted in accordance with the first interpretation<sup>251</sup> that was offered for the preceding two verses.<sup>252</sup>

When Kohelet saw that all [that is done under the sun] was vaporous, he noted<sup>253</sup> that whatever is vaporous cannot be turned into something lasting. For that which is perverted cannot be fixed because its nature is crooked, and a wanting thing cannot be counted among the complete.<sup>254</sup>

According to this interpretation, the word *chesron* (wanting) should be read as if written *ba'al chesron* (wanting thing).<sup>255</sup>

On the other hand, the word *chesron* (wanting) might be an adjective<sup>256</sup> like the words *rishon* (first) (Ex. 12:2) and *acharon* (last)<sup>257</sup> (Is. 30:8).

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<sup>248</sup> *Avah*, from *ayin*, *vav*, *heh*; and *avat*, from *ayin*, *vav*, *tav*.

<sup>249</sup> *Avat*. Our verse.

<sup>250</sup> *Avah*. See Ezek. 21:32,

<sup>251</sup> The first interpretation offered by I.E. for the terms “under heaven” and “under the sun” is, passing time. See I.E. on v. 3.

<sup>252</sup> Our verse should be interpreted in accordance with the first interpretation offered in v. 13 for the phrases under *the sun* (v. 14) and *under heaven* (v. 13). According to this interpretation *have seen all the works that are done under the sun* (v. 14) means, I have seen all things that occur in moving time. They are crooked and cannot be made straight (v. 15).

<sup>253</sup> Literally, realized.

<sup>254</sup> I.E.'s rendering of “And that which is wanting cannot be numbered.” In other words, “wanting” is to be read as, a wanting thing.

<sup>255</sup> This interpretation takes *chesron* to be an abstract noun (R. Goodman).

It is also possible for *chesron* (wanting) to refer back to *me'uvvot* (crooked).<sup>258</sup> Our verse is to be understood as follows: Things that are crooked by their nature cannot be fixed, and things crooked because they are wanting cannot be counted.

According to the second interpretation, [*for under the heaven* in v.13 explains]<sup>259</sup> our verse [which] should be understood as follows: He who is born under a deficient arrangement of the heavenly bodies does not have the strength to perfect<sup>260</sup> his soul. Hence, one who is [born under a wanting arrangement of the heavenly bodies] and occupies himself in investigating the workings of heaven<sup>261</sup> is wasting his time.<sup>262</sup> This is true with regard to most people and most of their activities.<sup>263</sup>

**16. I SPOKE WITH MY OWN HEART, SAYING: 'LO, I HAVE GOTTEN GREAT WISDOM, MORE ALSO THAN ALL THAT WERE BEFORE ME OVER JERUSALEM'; YEA, MY HEART HATH HAD GREAT EXPERIENCE OF WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE.**

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<sup>256</sup> Modifying *ba'al* which should be inserted into the text (R. Goodman).

<sup>257</sup> Translated according to I.E.

<sup>258</sup> Our verse is to be read as if written: *me'uvvot lo yukhal li-tekon, u-me'uvvot chesron lo yukhal le-himmanot.*

<sup>259</sup> According to this interpretation, "under heaven" alludes to the upper sphere, the science regarding the secret of the planets, and the science of the forty-eight forms of the sphere. See I.E.'s comments on v. 13.

<sup>260</sup> Literally, complete.

<sup>261</sup> One who wishes to study astrology and master how the heavens work is wasting his time if he is born under a deficient arrangement of the heavenly bodies. Such a person will not be able to learn how the heavens influence life on earth and predict the future.

<sup>262</sup> If born under a deficient arrangement of the heavenly bodies.

<sup>263</sup> According to I.E., most people are born under a deficient arrangement of the heavenly bodies, and thus lack the ability to master these sciences.

I SPOKE WITH MY OWN HEART. The heart stands for wisdom, intelligence, reason, and to insightful thoughts. The heart stands for these things because the heart is the resting place of the spirit and is the first "chariot"<sup>264</sup> for man's upper soul.<sup>265</sup> The heart is the first organ to be created in the body. It is like a king and the brain is its general.<sup>266</sup>

Similarly, language is called *safah* (lips)<sup>267</sup> because words come from the lips. Scripture therefore reads: *a wise and an understanding heart* (2 Kings 3:12),<sup>268</sup> and *He that getteth a heart*<sup>269</sup> *loveth his own soul* (Prov. 19:8).<sup>270</sup>

The meaning of *'Lo, I have gotten great wisdom, more also than all that were before me over Jerusalem* is: I gathered<sup>271</sup> and learned the wisdom of those who

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<sup>264</sup> The heart is the first resting place of the soul in the body. See I.E. on Gen. 1:1. The heart thus bears the soul. Hence, the metaphor of the chariot.

<sup>265</sup> The soul that comes from heaven. An alternate interpretation is, man's highest soul. According to I.E., there are three souls in the human body; viz., *neshamah*, *nefesh*, and *ru'ach*. The *neshamah* is man's highest soul.

<sup>266</sup> The heart sends instructions to the brain. The literal reading of this passage is: The heart is the resting place of the spirit and it is the first organ to be created in the body. For it is like a king, and the brain is like a general. The heart stands for wisdom, intelligence, understanding, and insightful thoughts because the heart is the first chariot for man's upper soul.

<sup>267</sup> Literally, words are called *safah* (lips). Just as the soul is called "heart" because it rests there, language is called "lips" because it seems to rest in the lips.

<sup>268</sup> *A wise and an understanding heart* means a wise and understanding mind.

<sup>269</sup> Translated literally.

<sup>270</sup> Its meaning is: He that getteth wisdom loveth his own soul.

<sup>271</sup> I gathered wisdom from outside sources.

preceded me, and I added to that wisdom.<sup>272</sup> In addition, *my heart hath great experience of wisdom* which I did not gather.<sup>273</sup>

The word *harbeh* (great) is a noun.<sup>274</sup> The infinitive form of the word is vocalized with a *kamatz* (*harbah*)[beneath the *bet*]. See the word *harbeh* (many) in *for they shall be many* (*harbeh*) (Kohelet 11:8).<sup>275</sup> Also see the word *rekam* (empty) (Gen. 31:42).<sup>276</sup>

The infinitive form of the word is vocalized with a *kamatz*.<sup>277</sup> Compare, *harbah* (multiply) in *harbah arbeh* (I will greatly multiply) (Gen. 3:16).

**17. AND I APPLIED MY HEART TO KNOW WISDOM, AND TO KNOW MADNESS AND INTELIENCE<sup>278</sup>--I PERCEIVED THAT THIS ALSO WAS A STRIVING AFTER WIND.**

AND I APPLIED MY HEART. After I studied the various fields of knowledge<sup>279</sup> and added totem [with my knowledge], I applied my heart to know the principles of folly and intelligence, even though this was a vain thought.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>272</sup> I.E. reads our verse as follows: 'Lo, I have gathered wisdom, and grown great in wisdom, and have added to my wisdom more than all those who were before me over Jerusalem.

<sup>273</sup> I also perceived wisdom on my own.

<sup>274</sup> The cantillation note beneath the word *harbeh* indicates that the word is not connected to the word *chokmah* which follows. Hence I.E.'s comment.

<sup>275</sup> Here, *harbeh* is plural.

<sup>276</sup> *Rekam* is treated as a singular in Deut.16:16 and as a plural in Ex. 23:15.

<sup>277</sup> In other words, *harbah* is an infinitive and *harbeh* is a noun. The two should not be confused.

<sup>278</sup> Translated according to I.E.

<sup>279</sup> Literally, wisdoms.

<sup>280</sup> Kohelet will soon go on to explain why.

*Holelot* (madness) is related to the word *va-yitholel* in *and he acted as if he were mad before them* (1 Sam.21:14).

*Sikhlut* (intelligence) is the opposite of *holelot* (madness).<sup>281</sup>

**18. FOR IN MUCH WISDOM IS MUCH VEXATION; AND HE THAT INCREASETH KNOWLEDGE INCREASETH SORROW.**

FOR IN MUCH WISDOM IS MUCH VEXATION. When Kohelet sought to know that which is rational, he realized that the intelligent person who, through his great wisdom comes to know the world, will always be in a state of sorrow and anger.

He will not take joy in his sons because he realizes that their life will come to an end during his lifetime or after his death.

He will not enjoy his wealth which is like a bird that flies. Furthermore, it is of no avail in a day of calamity.

[He will always be in a state of sorrow and anger] because the day of death is placed before his eyes.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>281</sup> I.E. connects the word *sikhlut* to the word *sekhel* (intelligence), for *sikhlut* is spelled with a *sin*. Rashi and Radak connect *sikhlut* to *sakhal* (fool) which is spelled with a *samekh*, for they claim that the *sin* and the *samekh* interchange.

<sup>282</sup> He constantly sees the day of his death before his eyes. He is always thinking about dying.

## CHAPTER 2

**1. I SAID IN MY HEART: 'COME NOW, I WILL TRY THEE WITH MIRTH, AND ENJOY PLEASURE'; AND, BEHOLD, THIS ALSO WAS VANITY.**

I SAID IN MY HEART. Kohelet<sup>283</sup> speaks to himself regarding the essence of folly.<sup>284</sup>

COME NOW, I WILL TRY THEE WITH MIRTH. If wisdom gives birth to anger<sup>285</sup> then, I will forsake it. I will then occupy myself with mirth and mingling wine.

*Anassekha* (I will try thee) is similar to the word *masakhti* (I have mingled)<sup>286</sup> in *and drink of the wine which I have mingled* (Prov. 9:5). This is so even though *anassekha* (I will try thee) and *masakhti* (I have mingled) come from different roots.<sup>287</sup>

*Anassekha* is a *pi'el*. It is like the words *adabberah* (I will now speak) (2 Sam. 14:15), *va-yenassekh* (but poured) in *but poured it out* (1 Chron. 11:18), and *va-yedabber* (spoke) (Gen. 8:15).<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> Literally, the writer.

<sup>284</sup> The verse refers to back to 1:17: *And I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly.*

<sup>285</sup> As noted in 1:18.

<sup>286</sup> According to this interpretation our verse reads: *I said in my heart: Come now, I will mingle wine and occupy myself with mirth.* ’

<sup>287</sup> *Anassekha* comes from the root *nun, samekh, kaf*. *Masakhti* comes from the root *mem, samekh, kaf*.

<sup>288</sup> All these words are in the *pi'el*

Some say that *anassekha* (I will try thee) comes from the root *nun, samekh, heh*<sup>289</sup> and its *kaf*<sup>290</sup> is a suffix indicating the second person. Its meaning is, I will train you. *Anassekha* is similar to *achavkha* (I will tell thee) in *I will tell thee, hear thou me* (Job 15:17) and *akhannekha* (I have surnamed thee) in *I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known Me* (Is. 45:4).<sup>291</sup>

## 2. I SAID OF LAUGHTER: 'IT IS MAD'; AND OF MIRTH: 'WHAT DOTHTH IT ACCOMPLISH?'

I SAID OF LAUGHTER. I said that the one who inclines to laughter is mad.

I SAID OF MIRTH: 'WHAT DOTHTH IT ACCOMPLISH?' What benefit is there in mirth and what good does it do?

The *lamed* in *u-le-simchah* (and of mirth) is like the *lamed* in *imri li* (say of me) (Gen. 20:13), and the *lamed* in *And Pharaoh will say of the children (le-vene) of Israel* (Ex. 14:3).<sup>292</sup>

## 3. I SEARCHED IN MY HEART HOW TO PAMPER MY FLESH WITH WINE, AND, MY HEART CONDUCTING ITSELF WITH WISDOM, HOW YET TO LAY HOLD ON FOLLY, TILL I MIGHT SEE WHICH IT WAS BEST FOR THE SONS OF MEN THAT THEY SHOULD DO UNDER THE HEAVEN THE FEW DAYS OF THEIR LIFE.

I SEARCHED IN MY HEART. After I saw that wisdom alone gives birth to pain, and that mirth alone brings no benefit, I searched for a way to combine both of them. I pampered my flesh with wine so that I would be happy [and conducted my heart with wisdom].

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<sup>289</sup> The root *nun, samekh, heh* means to try.

<sup>290</sup> The suffix *kha*.

<sup>291</sup> All these words are verbs whose third root letter is a *heh*, which is dropped. These words end with the suffix *kha*, meaning "you" or to "you." According to this interpretation our verse reads: I said in my heart: 'Come now, I will try you with mirth.' See note 6.

<sup>292</sup> The *lamed* usually means "to" Here it means "of."

*My flesh* means "my body."

AND, MY HEART CONDUCTING ITSELF WITH WISDOM. My heart is in place of "my intelligence and my soul."<sup>293</sup> *Noheg* (conducting itself) is a transitive verb. The object of *noheg* is missing.<sup>294</sup> The meaning of *My heart conducting itself with wisdom*, [and<sup>295</sup> *yet to lay hold on folly*] is, my heart conducted its affairs with wisdom and took hold of a little folly; that is, the pleasures of this world. My heart would do so until it would see which the good way is.

#### 4. I MADE ME GREAT WORKS; I BUILDED ME HOUSES; I PLANTED ME VINEYARDS.

I MADE. ME GREAT WORKS. The meaning of *higdalti ma'asai* (I made great works)<sup>296</sup> is, I did great things. Its meaning might also be, I made great (*higdalti*) my wealth (*ma'asai*).<sup>297</sup> Compare, *hath he gotten* (*asah*) *all this wealth* (Gen.31:1).<sup>298</sup>

#### 5. I MADE ME GARDENS AND PARKS, AND I PLANTED TREES IN THEM OF ALL KINDS OF FRUIT.

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<sup>293</sup> *My heart* means, my intelligence or my soul.

<sup>294</sup> *Noheg* means conducting. The word "itself" is not in the text. Our verse reads, *ve-libbi noheg ba-chokhmah*. This literally means "my heart conducting with wisdom." Hence I. E.'s comment.

<sup>295</sup> Translated according to I.E.

<sup>296</sup> Literally, I made great my works. I.E. explains this as meaning, I did great things.

<sup>297</sup> In this case, the root *asah* means to acquire and *ma'asai* (from the *asah*) means "my acquisitions." In other words, the import of *higdalti ma'asai* is "I acquired a great amount of wealth."

<sup>298</sup> The word *asah* can mean "to make or acquire" something. The two interpretations of *higdalti ma'asai* reflect the two meanings of this word.

I MADE ME GARDENS. The word *gan* (garden) is masculine. Compare, *gan na'ul* (a garden shut up) (Song of Songs: 4:12). It is also feminine. Compare, *le-ovdah u-le-shomrah* (to dress it and to keep it) (Gen.2:15).<sup>299</sup>

The plural of *gan* is *gannim* (Song of Songs 4:15) and *gannot* (our verse).

A garden has many different types of trees.

A *pardes* (park) contains only one type of tree. The phrase *pardes rimonim* (a park of pomegranates) (Song of Songs 4:13) is proof of this.

6. I MADE ME POOLS OF WATER, TO WATER THERE FROM THE WOOD SPRINGING UP WITH TREES. I MADE ME POOLS OF WATER, TO WATER. Pools in which the waters coming down from the sky gather.

TO WATER THEREFROM THE WOOD SPRINGING UP WITH TREES. Trees that do not produce fruit such as cedars and cypresses.

7. I ACQUIRED MEN-SERVANTS AND MAID-SERVANTS, AND HAD SERVANTS BORN IN MY HOUSE; ALSO I HAD GREAT POSSESSIONS OF HERDS AND FLOCKS, ABOVE ALL THAT WERE BEFORE ME IN JERUSALEM.

I ACQUIRED MEN-SERVANTS AND MAID-SERVANTS, AND HAD SERVANTS BORN IN MY HOUSE. *U-venei vayit* (and... servants born in my house)<sup>300</sup> means, and those born in my house.

The word *tzon* (flock) refers to lambs and goats. *Draw out and take you a lamb or kid* (*tzon*) (Ex. 12:21)<sup>301</sup> is proof of this.

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<sup>299</sup> The suffix "it" in the words *le-ovdah u-le-shomrah* is a feminine. It refers to the Garden of Eden.

<sup>300</sup> *U-venei vayit* literally means, and members of the house. Hence, I.E.'s comment. According to I.E., our verse should be read: I acquired men-servants and maid-servants. In addition, I owned servants that were born in my house.

<sup>301</sup> The reference is to sheep and goats. See Ex. 12:5.

8. I GATHERED) ME ALSO SILVER AND GOLD, AND TREASURE SUCH AS KINGS AND THE PROVINCES HAVE AS THEIR OWN; I GOT ME MEN-SINGERS AND WOMEN-SINGERS, AND THE DELIGHTS OF THE SONS OF MEN, WOMEN VERY MANY.

I GATHERED. *Kanasti* means, I gathered. It is like the word *kenos* (gather) in *Go, gather together all the Jews* (Est.4:16).

The word *segulah* (treasure) refers to something desirable which is kept for purposes of glorification, such as precious stones that are found in the possession of kings and desirable objects that are found in only one state.<sup>302</sup>

*Shiddah* and *shiddot* refers to women. *And the delights of the sons of men, women very many*<sup>303</sup> indicates that this is so. Furthermore, *Kohelet*<sup>304</sup> mentions all the desires of the world; namely, building, planting, flocks, treasures, and listening to songs. There is no mention of women.<sup>305</sup>

The commentaries are divided regarding the word *shiddah*. The best interpretation is that the word *shiddah* is related to the word *shaddad* (plundered). It refers to the women who were taken captive. They were seized by plunder and taken captive so that the captor would chose from them a female that would satisfy his lust.<sup>306</sup>

A plural follows a singular in *shiddah ve-shiddot* (a woman, and many women).<sup>307</sup> Compare, *racham rachamatayim* (A damsel, two damsels) in *A damsel, two*

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<sup>302</sup> Or one city. In other words, it is a unique object.

<sup>303</sup> Which precedes *shiddah* and *shiddot*.

<sup>304</sup> Up till now.

<sup>305</sup> Thus, *shiddah* and *shiddot* must refer to women, for *Kohelet* would not list the delights of men and leave out women.

<sup>306</sup> Literally, in accordance with his lust.

<sup>307</sup> I.E. renders *shiddah ve-shiddot* (women very many) as “a woman and women.”

*damsels to every man* (Jud. 5:30). *Racham* refers to a person that has a womb<sup>308</sup>. The meaning of *racham rachamatayim* is “one damsel, two damsels.” The reason why Scripture employs *racham rachamatayim* is so the reader should not assume that each man grabbed one woman, for some took two women.

**9. SO I WAS GREAT (VE-GADALTI), AND INCREASED MORE THAN ALL THAT WERE BEFORE ME IN JERUSALEM; ALSO MY WISDOM STOOD ME IN STEAD SO I WAS GREAT.** *Ve-gadalti* is an intransitive verb. Its meaning is: I was great in all that I did.

AND INCREASED. I increased greatness in things of this world. Also my wisdom stood me instead.

**10. AND WHATSOEVER MINE EYES DESIRED I KEPT (ATZALTI) NOT FROM THEM; I WITHHELD NOT MY HEART FROM ANY JOY, FOR MY HEART HAD JOY OF ALL MY LABOR; AND THIS WAS MY PORTION FROM ALL MY LABOR.**

ANDWHATSOEVER MINE EYES DESIRED I KEPT (*atzalti*) NOT FROM THEM. Some say that *atzalti* (I kept) is related to the word *etzel* (near) (Gen. 41:3). The import of *atzalti* is: "I took something which was near (*etzel*) him."<sup>309</sup>

*Atzalti* is a *kal* conjugation. The word *va-yatzel* (and took of) (Num.11:25) is in the *hifil* conjugation.<sup>310</sup> The *aleph* in *va-yatzel* should have been pronounced.

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<sup>308</sup> *Rechem* is the Hebrew word for womb.

<sup>309</sup> *Lo atzalti* means, “I did not take things which were near to anyone. “*Thus ve-khol asher sha'alu enai lo azalti me-hem* means, And whatsoever mine eyes desired I did not take from them. In other words, whatever my eyes desired, I gave them. R. Scherem (Oz *Ve-Hadar*, Israel, 2011, p. 17).

<sup>310</sup> *Atzalti* and *va-yatzel* come from the same root and have similar meanings but they are in different verb forms.

Compare the word *yachazek* (let him take hold)<sup>311</sup> in *let him take hold of My strength* (Is. 27:5) which is related to the word *hechezik* (retained) (Judges 7:8).<sup>312</sup>

The joy of my labor was the reward for my toil. It alone was my portion.

**11. THEN I LOOKED ON ALL THE WORKS THAT MY HANDS HAD WROUGHT, AND ON THE LABOR THAT I HAD LABORED TO DO; AND, BEHOLD, ALL WAS VANITY AND A STRIVING AFTER WIND, AND THERE WAS NO PROFIT UNDER THE SUN.**

THEN I LOOKED. When I looked on all my works, my heart saw that it all was vanity.

**12. AND I TURNED MYSELF TO BEHOLD WISDOM, AND MADNESS AND FOLLY; FOR WHAT CAN THE MAN DO THAT COMETH AFTER THE KING? EVEN THAT WHICH HATH BEEN ALREADY DONE.**

AND I TURNED MYSELF TO BEHOLD WISDOM. Its meaning is: I occupied myself with wisdom and madness; that is, with wine. Wine is referred to as madness because the one who drinks it acts irrationally and crazy.

FOLLY. Folly (*sikhlut*) refers to building and the acquisition of wealth.

FOR WHAT CAN THE MAN DO? *Ki me ha-Adam* (for what can a man do)<sup>313</sup> is similar to *YHVH mah adam va-teda'ehu* (Lord, what is man, that Thou takest knowledge of him?) (Ps. 144:3), and *mah enosh ki tizkerenu* (What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?) (Ps. 8:5). The meaning of the latter<sup>314</sup> is: When I saw

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<sup>311</sup> The word *va-yatzel* should have been vocalized like the word *yachazek* for both words are in the *hifil* conjugation. In other words, *va-yatzel* should have read *va-ya'atzel*.

<sup>312</sup> *Hechezik* is a *hifil*.

<sup>313</sup> Literally, for what is man.

<sup>314</sup> The meaning of What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? *And the son of man, that Thou thinkest of him?*

Your heavens, the moon, and the stars, (ibid. 4)<sup>315</sup> and that the earth stands under one star,<sup>316</sup> I said, what is man, that Thou thinkest of him and have given him greatness and a super-exalted status.

[The meaning of *For what can the man do that cometh after the king? Even that which hath been already done* is:] What power can a man who comes after me, the king, possess, that he should think that he can do something which those coming before him did not do. For anything that the one who comes after me does, [I and] others have already done.<sup>317</sup>

The subject is missing in the last clause of our verse.<sup>318</sup> The verse should have read *et asher kevar asuhu ha-osim* (that which was already done by those who did it),<sup>319</sup> Compare, *va-yomer le-yosef* (and he said to Joseph) (Gen. 48:1),<sup>320</sup> *asher yaledah le-levi* (whom she bore to Levi) (Num.26:59),<sup>321</sup> and many other such cases.

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<sup>315</sup> Ps. 8:4-5 reads: *When I behold Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast established. What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that Thou thinkest of him?*

<sup>316</sup> I.E. refers to the Talmudic statement that the world fits under one star. See *Pesachim 94a* and I.E. to Ex. 23:20 (Short Commentary).

<sup>317</sup> In other words, the person coming after me (the king) will not be able to learn more than I, or those who came before me learned. regarding wisdom, and madness, and folly.

<sup>318</sup> Our clause reads *et asher kevar asuhu*: literally, that which they already have done. The verse does not have a subject. Hence, I.E. says that the verse should be read as if written: *et asher kevar asuhu ha-osim* (that which was already done by those who did it). In other words, "ha-osim" (those who did it) is the subject.

<sup>319</sup> According to I.E., our verse should be understood as follows: What power can a man who comes after me the king possess, that he should think that he can do something which those coming before him [I and the ancients] did not do.

<sup>320</sup> Translated literally. Here too the subject is missing. It does not identify the one who said to Joseph, "your father is ill." See I.E. to Gen. 48:1.

<sup>321</sup> Here too the subject is missing, for Scripture does not state who did the bearing.

Some say that the word *ha-melekh* (the king) is similar to the word *va-yimmalekh* (consulted) in *Then I consulted with myself* (Neh. 5:7). Our verse would then be understood as follows: It asks: What should man do? It answers: Let man pursue counsel<sup>322</sup> and follow all that the earlier ones have done.<sup>323</sup> This interpretation is incorrect.<sup>324</sup>

**13. THEN I SAW THAT WISDOM EXCELLETH FOLLY, AS FAR AS LIGHT EXCELLETH DARKNESS.**

THEN I SAW. Light distinguishes between the various forms. It shows things that are both near and far. It sets all things in their place. Wisdom does the same.

**14. THE WISE MAN, HIS EYES ARE IN HIS HEAD; BUT THE FOOL WALKETH IN DARKNESS. AND I ALSO PERCEIVED THAT ONE EVENT HAPPENETH TO THEM ALL.**

THE WISE MAN. Kohelet compares the wise man to one who is not blind but has eyes (that see) in his head. Such a person can go to any place that he wants to. He will see which path is straight and which is crooked.

BUT THE FOOL WALKETH IN DARKNESS. The fool does not know what will cause him to stumble.

I know this and perceive *that one event happeneth to them all*.<sup>325</sup>

**15. THEN SAID I IN MY HEART: 'AS IT HAPPENETH TO THE FOOL, SO WILL IT HAPPEN EVEN TO ME; AND WHY WAS I THEN MORE WISE?'**

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<sup>322</sup> A person should think before he acts or take counsel with another person regarding his proposed actions.

<sup>323</sup> This interpretation reads our verse as follows: For what should man do? He should act after taking counsel or follow that which hath been already done by those who came before him.

<sup>324</sup> For the word *melekh* means king. It does not mean counsel.

<sup>325</sup> I know that even though the eyes of the wise man are in his head and that the fool walks in darkness, one event (death) happens to them all (v. 16).

THEN I SAID IN MY HEART, THAT THIS ALSO IS VANITY. THEN SAID I.  
This event shall befall all those who come into this world, be they good or evil.

The meaning of *why I was then more wise* is: why did I labor and grow wise in things pertaining to this world?<sup>326</sup> Compare, *wherein I have labored and wherein I have shown myself wise under the sun* (v. 19). Then I said in my heart *that this also is vanity*,<sup>327</sup> [That is, my pursuit of] wisdom also is vanity.

**16. FOR OF THE WISE MAN, EVEN AS OF THE FOOL, THERE IS NO REMEMBRANCE FOR EVER; SEEING THAT IN THE DAYS TO COME ALL WILL LONG AGO HAVE BEEN FORGOTTEN. AND HOW MUST THE WISE MAN DIE EVEN AS THE FOOL!**

FOR OF THE WISE MAN. For everything will cease to exist and will also be forgotten.

Kohelet says *that this* [pursuit of] *wisdom also is vanity* (v. 15) because *of the wise man, even as of the fool, there is no remembrance*. Now even though a person might be remembered for some days or a few years [following his death], in the coming days all will be forgotten.<sup>328</sup> The most severe evil is: the wise man will die even as the fool!

The word *kevar* (seeing that) with the meaning that it has in this book<sup>329</sup> is not found in all of Scripture with this import.<sup>330</sup> It is only so found in this book.

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<sup>326</sup> How to acquire wealth, how to deal in real estate, and the like.

<sup>327</sup> *This*, refers to the pursuit of wisdom.

<sup>328</sup> Now even though a person might be remembered for some days or a few years (following his death) he will ultimately be forgotten.

<sup>329</sup> I.E. will soon discuss the meaning of *kevar* in Kohelet.

<sup>330</sup> Literally, the word *kevar* with this meaning is not found in all of Scripture. It is only so found in this book.

One of the commentators says that the word *kevar* (seeing that) indicates something that happened in the past.<sup>331</sup> When he came across the word *be-she-kevar* (seeing that) in *seeing that in the days to come*,<sup>332</sup> he said that the text should have read *ke-she-kevar* (as was in past time). He maintains that our clause is to be understood as follows: everything will be forgotten in the days to come as it was in past time. However, in reality the proper meaning of *kevar* is "behold."<sup>333</sup>

**17. SO I HATED LIFE; BECAUSE THE WORK THAT IS WROUGHT UNDER THE SUN WAS GRIEVOUS UNTO ME; FOR ALL IS VANITY AND A STRIVING AFTER WIND.**

SO I HATED LIFE. The word *chayyim* (life) in the holy tongue at times is a plural adjective, as in *are alive* (*chayyim*) *everyone of you this day* (Deut. 4:4). The word *chayyim* also appears as a noun and not as an adjective, as in, *Death and life* (*chayyim*) (Prov. 18:21). The word does not occur in the singular when it is a noun. Compare, *ne'urim* (youth) (Is. 54:6), *zekunim* (old age) (Gen. 37:3), *shelamim* (peace-offerings) (Ex. 24:5), *melu'im* (settings) (Ex. 25:7). There are many other examples of the same.

The word *chayyim* in our verse is a noun.

**18. AND I HATED ALL MY LABOR WHEREIN I LABORED UNDER THE SUN, SEEING THAT I MUST LEAVE IT UNTO THE MAN THAT SHALL BE AFTER ME.**

AND I HATED ALL MY LABOR. The word *amal* (labor) in this book in the main refers to physical labor.<sup>334</sup> Compare, *amalta* (labored) in [*Thou hast had pity on the*

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<sup>331</sup> It has the meaning of "already occurred" or the like.

<sup>332</sup> *Seeing that* (*be-she-kevar*) *in the days to come* indicates that *be-she-kevar* (seeing that) refers to something that will happen in the future. It does not refer to something which happened in the past.

<sup>333</sup> According to I.E., our verse is to be understood as follows: For of the wise man, even as of the fool, there is no remembrance forever; for behold, in the days to come all will long ago have been forgotten.

<sup>334</sup> Literally, the word *amal* (labor) in all of this book in the main refers to physical labor.

*gourd,] for which thou hast not labored* (Jonah 4:10). There are a few exceptions [to how *amal* is used in this book]. For example, *amal* (mischief) in *Why dost Thou show me iniquity, and beholdest mischief?* (Hab. 1:3).

**19. AND WHO KNOWETH WHETHER HE WILL BE A WISE MAN OR A FOOL? YET WILL HE HAVE RULE OVER ALL MY LABOUR WHEREIN I HAVE LABOURED, AND WHEREIN I HAVE SHOWN MYSELF WISE UNDER THE SUN. THIS ALSO IS VANITY.**

AND WHO KNOWETH WHETHER HE WILL BE A WISE MAN OR A FOOL? The *heh* which indicates a question<sup>335</sup> is always vocalized with a *chataf pattach* except in cases where a mobile *sheva*<sup>336</sup> follows. In the latter, it is vocalized with a *pattach* like the word *ha-bemachanim* (whether in camps) (Num. 13:19) and the word *ha-yyitav* (*would it have been well-pleasing*) in *would it have been well pleasing in the sight of the Lord?* (Lev. 10:19).<sup>337</sup>

A *dagesh* is always placed in the letter following a *heh* which indicates the direct object.<sup>338</sup>

If an *alef, chet, heh, ayin, or resh*<sup>339</sup> follows a *heh* which indicates question, then the *heh* is vocalized with a *pattach*.<sup>340</sup> We occasionally find the same to be the

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<sup>335</sup> The *heh ha-she'elah*. I.E. deals with the rules dealing with the vocalization of the *he ha-she'elah* because our verse reads *he-chakham yiheyeh* (whether he will be a wise man). The *heh* placed in front of *he-chakham* is a *heh ha-she'elah*.

<sup>336</sup> A *sheva na*.

<sup>337</sup> It should be noted that *ha-yyitav* is an exception to the rule. It is vocalized with a *pattach* even though it is not followed by a mobile *sheva*.

<sup>338</sup> The *heh ha-yedi'ah*

<sup>339</sup> The *alef, chet, heh, ayin, and resh* are gutturals.

<sup>340</sup> By *pattach*, I.E. means a *segol* (*pattach katan*) or a *pattach* (*pattach gadol*).

case when the *heh* which indicates the direct object comes before an *ayin*. However, in most such cases, it is vocalized with a *kamatz*.

The [*heh* in the] word *he-chakham* (whether he will be a wise man) is vocalized with a *segol*<sup>341</sup> because it is followed by two *kematzim* and would be difficult to pronounce if the *he* was vocalized with a *kamatz*.

There is no difference in vocalization between *he-chakham* (the wise man)<sup>342</sup> in *The wise man, his eyes are in his head* (v. 14) and *he-chakham* (whether a wise man) in *whether he will be a wise man*.<sup>343</sup>

In the plural, the *heh* which indicates a question<sup>344</sup> is vocalized with a *pattach*<sup>345</sup> and the *heh* which indicates the direct object is vocalized with a *kamatz*.

**20. THEREFORE I TURNED ABOUT TO CAUSE MY HEART TO DESPAIR CONCERNING ALL THE LABOUR WHEREIN I HAD LABOURED UNDER THE SUN.**

THEREFORE I TURNED ABOUT. *I turned about* as a man turns his face to a different path. I turned to despair. This latter was the reverse of Kohelet's first path.

The word *le-ya'esh* (to despair) is a *pi'el*. It should have had a *dagesh*<sup>346</sup> placed in it. However, it does not have a *dagesh* because the *alef* is one of the gutturals.<sup>347</sup> Compare *ve-no'ash* (will despair)<sup>348</sup> in, *and Saul will despair of me* (1 Sam. 27:1).

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<sup>341</sup> The term used by I.E. is “a small *pattach*.”

<sup>342</sup> The *heh* in *he-chakham* (the wise man) in *The wise man, his eyes are in his head* is a *heh ha-yedi'ah*.

<sup>343</sup> The *heh* in *he-chakham* (whether a wise man) in *whether he will be a wise man* is a *heh ha-she'elah*.<sup>343</sup>

<sup>344</sup> The *heh ha-she'elah*. I.E. refers to it as the *heh-ha-temah*.

<sup>345</sup> Compare, *ha-chakhamim*.

<sup>346</sup> It should have had a *dagesh* placed in its *alef*.

**21. FOR THERE IS A MAN WHOSE LABOR IS WITH WISDOM, AND WITH KNOWLEDGE, AND WITH SKILL; YET TO A MAN THAT HATH NOT LABORED THEREIN SHALL HE LEAVE IT FOR HIS PORTION. THIS ALSO IS VANITY AND A GREAT EVIL.**

FOR THERE IS A MAN For there is a man who labored with all of his wisdom in the affairs of this world and he achieved the desires of his heart that he pursued. There is another person who did not labor for all of this. Now the one who labored for all of these things will leave his portion<sup>349</sup> to someone who did not labor for it.

Our verse relates to what was earlier said, namely; [*And I hated all my labor wherein I labored under the sun, seeing that I must leave it unto the man that shall be after me. and who knoweth whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet will he have rule over all my labor*] wherein I have labored, and wherein I have shown myself wise under the sun (vs. 18-19).

Note: The word *chakhamti* (wherein I have shown myself wise) (v. 19) is an intransitive verb. Its meaning is: I wisely labored.<sup>350</sup>

His heir will take all without laboring for it.

The word *yitnennu* (shall he leave it) probably means, it shall be left to him and given to him,<sup>351</sup> for it is a verb with two objects.<sup>352</sup> It is similar to the word

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<sup>347</sup> Words in the *pi'el* have a *dagesh* placed in the second stem letter.

<sup>348</sup> The word *ve-no'ash* (will despair) in , *and Saul will despair of me*) is a *pi'el*. Its *alef* does not have a *dagesh* because the *alef* is a guttural .

<sup>349</sup> After his death.

<sup>350</sup> I.E. comments thus because he believes that gaining wisdom is not a vanity. Only wisdom used for material advantage is a vanity.

<sup>351</sup> Literally, given to him. This interpretation reads our verse as follows: yet to a man that hath not labored therein shall it be left to him (*yitnennu*) for his portion.

<sup>352</sup> *Yitnennu* (It shall be left to him) refers to the object that shall be given and to the person to whom it shall be given.

*netattani* (thou hast given me) in for *that thou hast given me the southland* (Judges 1:15)<sup>353</sup>

The meaning of *his portion* is the portion allotted to him by heaven. As our Sages of blessed memory said: Children, life, and sustenance do not depend on a person's merit but on the planet's [astrological influences] (Mo'ed Katan 28a)

**22. FOR WHAT HATH A MAN OF ALL HIS LABOR, AND OF THE STRIVING OF HIS HEART, WHEREIN HE LABORETH UNDER THE SUN?**

FOR WHAT HATH A MAN. For what benefit does a man have from all of his labor and many plans,<sup>354</sup> for it is known that the wealthy are in great fear and much anxiety.

**23. FOR ALL HIS DAYS ARE PAINS, AND HIS OCCUPATION VEXATION; YEA, EVEN IN THE NIGHT HIS HEART TAKETH NOT REST. THIS ALSO IS VANITY.**

FOR ALL HIS DAYS ARE PAINS. For all the time that he is awake during the day his affairs cause him pain and anger because things do not always work out according to his plans. Also, at night he finds no rest when he dreams, because most dreams are in accordance with what one thinks during the day.

**24. THERE IS NOTHING BETTER FOR A MAN THAN THAT HE SHOULD EAT AND DRINK, AND MAKE HIS SOUL ENJOY PLEASURE FOR HIS LABOR. THIS ALSO I SAW, THAT IT IS FROM THE HAND OF GOD.**

THERE IS NOTHING BETTER. The one who toils will find nothing better in all of his labor than eating and drinking. The word *rak* (only), or a similar word, is missing from our text.<sup>355</sup> Our verse should be read as follows: There is nothing

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<sup>353</sup> *Translated* according to I.E. *Netattani* (for that thou hast given me) refers both to "the southland" and to "me."

<sup>354</sup> Literally, thoughts.

<sup>355</sup> Our verse literally reads: *There is nothing better for a man that he should eat and drink* (en tov ba-adam she-yochal ve-shatah). Hence I.E.'s comment.

better for a man [other than] only eating and drinking. The same applies to, *for they know not that they do evil* (4:17).<sup>356</sup>

The following is the meaning of *that it is from the hand of God*: the one who gathers money is, as it were, its guardian. He is not authorized to touch it until God gives him permission to do so.

## 25. FOR WHO WILL EAT, OR WHO WILL ENJOY, IF NOT I?

FOR WHO WILL EAT. This is a question.<sup>357</sup> Why shouldn't the person who toils to gather wealth not eat all that he desires, for who else, aside from him, should eat from his money? The meaning of our verse is: Who is fit to eat of it as much as I am?

It is well known that the phrase "except for this "means" everything but this thing alone, which is an exception." The same applies to the word *chute* (aside from).<sup>358</sup> This term is not found [elsewhere] in Scripture.<sup>359</sup> It is only found in the words of our ancients of blessed memory who transmitted the Commandments.<sup>360</sup>

The word *yachush* (will enjoy) means "will hurry"; [that is] will hurry to fulfill all of his desires.<sup>361</sup> Compare, *meherah chushah* (hurry, make speed) (1 Sam. 20:38).

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<sup>356</sup> Kohelet 4:17 reads: *ki enam yode'im la'asot ra*. Literally, for they do not know to do evil. I.E. suggests that the verse be read: *ki enam yode'im rak la'asot ra*: they know nothing, [they know] only to do evil.

<sup>357</sup> The verse raises a question.

<sup>358</sup> Literally, aside.

<sup>359</sup> The word is not found elsewhere in Scripture with the meaning of "aside."

<sup>360</sup> That is, it is only found here and in the words of our ancients of blessed memory.

<sup>361</sup> I.E. reads our verse as follows: For who will eat, or who will rush [to satisfy his desires] if not I?

## 26. FOR WHO WILL EAT, OR WHO WILL ENJOY, IF NOT I?

FOR TO THE MAN. There is a man who is good in the sight of God. God does not allot him toil. On the other hand, God has given him wisdom and knowledge. Furthermore, He has given him joy in the money that another person (a sinner) worked for.<sup>362</sup> Compare, *he*<sup>363</sup> *may prepare it, but the just shall put it on* (Job 27:17).

On the other hand, the meaning of *joy* might be, “joy in his portion,” whether it be a lot or a little.

[BUT TO THE SINNER] To the sinner God has given toil, the toil of being occupied in gathering wealth which he will ultimately give to the man who is good in God's sight. Thus, the person<sup>364</sup> who occupies himself in gathering money is engaged in vanity and a striving after wind.

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<sup>362</sup> In other words, *joy* refers to the enjoyment of the wealth of the wicked mentioned in the last part of the verse.

<sup>363</sup> The wicked person.

<sup>364</sup> That is, the sinner.

## CHAPTER 3

### 1. TO EVERY THING THERE IS A SEASON, AND A TIME TO EVERY PURPOSE UNDER THE HEAVEN.

TO EVERY THING THERE IS A SEASON. The men who weigh things by employing logic<sup>365</sup> say that the "seasons" refer<sup>366</sup> to the word "man" [mentioned in the previous chapter] (2:26).<sup>367</sup> Our verse teaches that man must do things in their season.<sup>368</sup> However, their interpretation is contradicted by what Kohelet notes at the beginning and at the end of his list of things for which there is a season. It is first contradicted by [*there is*] a *time to be born, and a time to die* (v. 2).<sup>369</sup> It is then contradicted by *He (God) hath made everything beautiful in its time* (v. 11).<sup>370</sup>

Some say that the 28 seasons that are mentioned in our chapter<sup>371</sup> correspond to the 28 forms of the stars in the sphere of the constellation in which the moon is seen every month.<sup>372</sup> This interpretation also is nonsense.<sup>373</sup>

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<sup>365</sup> Philosophers. Hebrew *anshei shikkul ha-da'at*.

<sup>366</sup> Literarily, are connected.

<sup>367</sup> The previous verse speaks of man. This verse continues this train of thought. It says that there is a season (a time) for a man to do certain things.

<sup>368</sup> If a person fails to do a certain thing in its proper time, he may never get the chance to do it again. For example, if a woman does not bear children while she can, a time will come when it will be impossible for her to do so.

<sup>369</sup> This begins the list of seasons. It is not in one's hand to determine the time when he will be born. It is similarly not in his hand to determine when his life will come to a natural end.

<sup>370</sup> *He* refers to God and not to man. We thus see that our verse relates to God. It teaches that God has created the world in such a way that *to everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven*.

<sup>371</sup> Literarily, these twenty-eight seasons.

The correct interpretation of our verse is: *there is a season and a time for everything* [that occurs] *under the heaven*.<sup>374</sup> For when the constellation of stars which begets ceases to exist,<sup>375</sup> then so does that which it gives birth to. When the arrangement of the stars that enriches is renewed [then a person will become wealthy].<sup>376</sup> The reverse is also the case.<sup>377</sup> For the seasons are set.<sup>378</sup> When the season comes around,<sup>379</sup> the person moves to what has been prepared for him.<sup>380</sup> A person's movements are like the movements of "the form."<sup>381</sup> Compare, *Surely man*

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<sup>372</sup> The stars in the sphere of the constellations that form the background for the movement of the moon are divided into 28 sections. Each section has a configuration of stars. These sections form the background for the path that the moon takes every month. These configurations influence what happens on earth. See S. Sela, *Astrology and Biblical Exegesis in Abraham ibn Ezra's Thought* (Hebrew), Bar Ilan University, Israel, 1999. p. 310, foot note 46.

<sup>373</sup> This interpretation, like the one that ties verse 1 to the word "man," is nonsense. I.E. rejects this interpretation because he believes that all the stars influence what happens on earth, not only those that form the 28 sections through which the moon travels (R. Mordecai Sha'ul Goodman, *Sefer Kohelet im Pirushei Ibn Ezra*, Mosad Harav Kook, Jerusalem, 2012).

<sup>374</sup> There is a fixed and determined time for everything that will occur under the heaven.

<sup>375</sup> It changes.

<sup>376</sup> If a person is born when the moon is located at the renewal of a constellation producing wealth, he will be wealthy.

<sup>377</sup> If a person is born when the moon is located at the decline of a constellation producing wealth, his wealth will decline.

<sup>378</sup> I.E.'s interpretation of our verse.

<sup>379</sup> When the time that is fixed by the stars comes around.

<sup>380</sup> When the time that is fixed by the stars for something to happen comes, then what is destined to fall upon a person does so.

<sup>381</sup> Hebrew *tzelem*.

*walketh as a mere form* (Ps. 39:7).<sup>382</sup> Therefore, Scripture goes on to say *ach hevel yehemayun* (for vanity they gather an abundance) [ibid]).<sup>383</sup>

The meaning of *yehemayun* (an abundance) (ibid.) is, *they gather wealth*.<sup>384</sup> *Yehmayun* is similar to the word *hamon* (abundance) in *than the abundance of many wicked* (Ps. 37:16), and to the word *hamon* (abundance) in *nor he that loveth abundance, with increase* (Kohelet 5:9). The end of the verse which reads *And knoweth not who shall gather them*<sup>385</sup> (Ps. 39:7) fully proves that *yehemayun* means, they gather wealth.<sup>386</sup>

## 2. 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 BE BORN. Kohelet mentions the beginning and end of man. He also says that the seasons are not only set for people. They are also set for plants.

## 3. A TIME TO KILL, AND A TIME TO HEAL; A TIME TO BREAK DOWN, AND A TIME TO BUILD UP.

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<sup>382</sup> Translated according to I.E. I.E. appears to be referring to the following interpretation of "form" which he offers in Psalms 39:7. He there writes: "The form...refers to the arrangement of the planets with regard to the upper stars. This arrangement does not last for even one moment." I.E. explains that *man walketh as a mere form* means that man's life follows the arrangement (form) of the heavenly bodies, when they change so does his fortune. See *Abraham ibn Ezra's Commentary on the First Book of Psalms*. Translated and annotated by H. Norman Strickman. Boston 2009, p. 291.

<sup>383</sup> Translated according to I.E.

<sup>384</sup> According to I.E. *yehemayun* means, they gather an abundance of wealth.

<sup>385</sup> Their wealth.

<sup>386</sup> I.E. interprets Ps. 39:7 as follows: *Surely man walketh as a mere shadow; surely for vanity they gather wealth (yehemayun); he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them.*

A TIME TO KILL. Its meaning is: a time to wound.<sup>387</sup> *A time to heal* proves this.<sup>388</sup>

A time is also fixed for places that have no plants.<sup>389</sup> Compare, *a time to break down*.

**4. A TIME TO WEEP, AND A TIME TO LAUGH; A TIME TO MOURN, AND A TIME TO DANCE.**

A TIME TO WEEP. A time of[such] worry that the worrier breaks out in tears.

A TIME TO MOURN, AND A TIME TO DANCE. A time to dance with others.<sup>390</sup>

**5. 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 CAST AWAY STONES. Even if an accident occurs,<sup>391</sup> the accident has a fixed time, such as in the case of a person casting away stones that disturb him<sup>392</sup> in his home.

There is also a time to gather, that is, there is a time for his needing stones which were cast away.

A TIME TO EMBRACE. There is even a time set for the lust which is implanted in the heart of a human being [to be satisfied]; namely, there is a time to embrace

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<sup>387</sup> “Kill” is to be taken in the sense of “wound.”

<sup>388</sup> You can't heal a dead person, whereas you can heal a wound.

<sup>389</sup> The stars determine not only the fate of people and plants, but also of things that do not grow, such as stones.

<sup>390</sup> Weeping and laughing are private activities; mourning and dancing are done with others. R. Goodman.

<sup>391</sup> Something unplanned like tripping over stones

<sup>392</sup> Injure him.

the woman who lies in one's bosom and there is a time to distance oneself from her.

*La- chavok* (to embrace) is a *kal*. *Mechabbek* (embracing) is a *pi'el*. They both have the same meaning.<sup>393</sup>

## 6. A TIME TO SEEK, AND A TIME TO LOSE; A TIME TO KEEP, AND A TIME TO CAST AWAY.

A TIME TO SEEK, AND A TIME TO LOSE. A time to lose that which is sought.

A TIME TO KEEP, AND A TIME TO CAST AWAY. A time to cast away that which is kept.

## 7. A TIME TO REND, AND A TIME TO SEW; A TIME TO KEEP SILENCE, AND A TIME TO SPEAK.

A TIME TO REND..., A TIME TO KEEP SILENCE. The word *la-chashot* (to keep silence) is related to the word *he-cheshu* (they kept quiet) (2 Kings 2:3)<sup>394</sup> which is a verb in the perfect. *He-cheshu* is vocalized like the word *he-elu* (they have cast up)<sup>395</sup> in *they have cast dust up on their heads* (Lamentations 2:10).<sup>396</sup> If *he-cheshu* were an imperative, then its *heh* would be vocalized with a *pattach*.<sup>397</sup> The meaning of the verse [in 2 Kings 2:3] is: When Elisha told the sons of the prophets *Yea, I know it; they kept quiet* (*he-cheshu*).<sup>398</sup>

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<sup>393</sup> They basically have one meaning. In reality *la-chavok* means to embrace and *mechabbek* means embracing.

<sup>394</sup> Translated according to I.E.

<sup>395</sup> Both words are vocalized *segol*, *chataf segol*, *shuruk*.

<sup>396</sup> *He-elu* is a third person perfect in the *hifil*. So is *he-cheshu*.

<sup>397</sup> The word would read *ha-chashu*. If *he-cheshu* were an imperative, then the verse in 2 Kings would read *Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace*.

<sup>398</sup> We thus see that *he-cheshu* is a perfect, for the imperative form is out of place in the context of this verse.

[AND A TIME TO SPEAK.] Look, Solomon notes that even speech has its fixed time.

**8. A TIME TO LOVE, AND A TIME TO HATE; A TIME FOR WAR, AND A TIME FOR PEACE.**

A TIME TO LOVE. Also love and hate are dependent on a set time.

**9. WHAT PROFIT HATH HE THAT WORKETH IN THAT HE LABORETH?**

WHAT PROFIT HATH HE? Since all things are dependent on a fixed time and a fixed season, what profit does a person have in all of his toil? For it is possible that a time shall come when what he toiled for is destroyed, his wealth gone, and he is left empty.

**10. I HAVE SEEN THE TASK WHICH GOD HATH GIVEN TO THE SONS OF MEN TO BE EXERCISED THEREWITH.**

I HAVE SEEN. [*Ra'iti* (I have seen) is to be rendered, when I saw. The meaning of our verse is:] When I saw<sup>399</sup> the task which God gave to men to be exercised therewith.

**11. HE HATH MADE EVERY THING BEAUTIFUL IN ITS TIME; ALSO HE HATH SET THE WORLD IN THEIR HEART, YET SO THAT MAN CANNOT FIND OUT THE WORK THAT GOD HATH DONE FROM THE BEGINNING EVEN TO THE END.**

EVERYTHING BEAUTIFUL IN ITS TIME. I recognized that God made everything beautiful in its time: death in old age and everything in its season in accordance with the plan laid out by supernal wisdom.

The word *olam* (world) is not found in all of Scripture meaning anything but time and eternity.<sup>400</sup> Compare, *Elohei olam YHVH* (Is. 40:28) which means, YHVH is

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<sup>399</sup> *Ra'iti* literally means, I saw.

<sup>400</sup> The word *olam* in Scripture always means time or eternity. However, as I.E. goes on to say, it is used in the sense of *world* in Rabbinic literature.

the eternal God; or, YHVH is God from eternity. *U-mi-tachat zero'ot olam* (Deut. 33:27) is similarly to be rendered, and beneath are the eternal arms.

The meaning of *also He hath set the world (olam) in their heart* is, people occupy themselves [with attaining wealth] as if they are going to live forever.<sup>401</sup> Human beings do not understand the work of God from beginning to end because they are occupied [with attaining riches].

There are those who understand the word *olam* in our verse as it is used by the ancient Rabbis of blessed memory.<sup>402</sup> It refers to the desires of this world.<sup>403</sup>

**12. I KNOW THAT THERE IS NOTHING BETTER FOR THEM, THAN TO REJOICE, AND TO DO GOOD SO LONG AS THEY LIVE.**<sup>404</sup>

I KNOW. This verse and the ones that follow<sup>405</sup> until *And moreover I saw* (v. 16) are connected.

[I KNOW THAT THERE IS NOTHING BETTER FOR HIM THAN TO REJOICE] Kohelet has already mentioned that *there is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink* (2:24).<sup>406</sup> Kohelet<sup>407</sup> does not speak of all people. He only speaks about the man whom he has mentioned [in 2:21]; that is, the one

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<sup>401</sup> According to this interpretation, *also He hath set the world (olam) in their heart* means: Also He hath set eternity (*olam*) in their heart, that is, they act as if they were going to live forever.

<sup>402</sup> The Rabbis of the Talmud. In other words, *olam* means world—in our context, the desires of the world.

<sup>403</sup> According to this interpretation, *also He hath set the world (olam) in their heart* means: also He hath set the desires of the temporal world (*olam*) in their heart.

<sup>404</sup> Translated according to I. E. The Hebrew reads *ve-la'asot tov be-chayav*.

<sup>405</sup> Literally, these verses.

<sup>406</sup> In other words, our verse repeats 2:24.

<sup>407</sup> Here and in 2:24.

who toils day and night to gather money. Kohelet says that such a person has only what he eats [from all the wealth that he acquires], for it is possible that he keeps what he has gathered for a person who has found favor in the eyes of God to take.<sup>408</sup> He mentions this<sup>409</sup> a second time<sup>410</sup> because he mentions the seasons. Kohelet's point is: there is a set season for everything; there is a time to acquire wealth, and a time lose it.<sup>411</sup> Nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken away from it (v. 14). Therefore, there is only one thing for the toiler to do. The toiler should rejoice in his portion or in his wealth.<sup>412</sup>

AND TO DO GOOD SO LONG AS THEY<sup>413</sup> LIVE. He should live a good life.<sup>414</sup> On the other hand, its meaning might be: he should do good in his life so that he will receive a good reward upon his death.

### **13. BUT ALSO THAT EVERY MAN SHOULD EAT AND DRINK, AND ENJOY PLEASURE FOR ALL HIS LABOUR, IS THE GIFT OF GOD.**

**BUT ALSO THAT.** Furthermore, that which Kohelet said concerning the enjoyment of pleasure cannot take place if a time for a person to do so has not been prepared for him, by a gift from God when he was first born.<sup>415</sup>

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<sup>408</sup> To inherit. See 2:24. Hence, he should enjoy what he has while he has it.

<sup>409</sup> That a person should enjoy what he has gathered.

<sup>410</sup> In our verse, after already saying this in 2:24.

<sup>411</sup> Literally, a time to ascend to wealth and a time to descend from wealth.

<sup>412</sup> Kohelet gives us two reasons to enjoy what we have. In Chapter 2, he tells us that a person should enjoy his wealth because it is possible that he will give what he has gathered to a person who has found favor in the eyes of God. Hence, he should enjoy what he has while he has it. In our chapter, Kohelet tells us that there is a set season for everything. Hence, the toiler should rejoice in his wealth before the time that he can to do so passes.

<sup>413</sup> Literally, he.

<sup>414</sup> He should enjoy life.

**14. I KNOW THAT, WHATSOEVER GOD DOETH, IT SHALL BE FOR EVER; NOTHING CAN BE ADDED TO IT, NOR ANY THING TAKEN FROM IT; AND GOD HATH SO MADE IT, THAT MEN SHOULD FEAR BEFORE HIM.**

I KNOW. The meaning of *and God hath so made it, that men should fear before Him* is: God made things in such a manner that no one can add to His work or diminish it, so that people should fear Him.<sup>416</sup>

**15. THAT WHICH HATH BEEN LONG AGO IS, AND THAT WHICH IS TO BE HATH ALREADY BEEN; AND GOD SEEKETH THAT WHICH IS PURSUED.**

AND THAT WHICH IS. The works of God remain the same.<sup>417</sup>

*That which hath been long ago is* means, what was in the past exists in the present.<sup>418</sup> There are such things in existence.

The meaning of *and that which is to be hath already been* is: what will be in the future has already been in the past.

[AND GOD SEEKETH THAT WHICH IS PURSUED] Nirdaf (pursued) refers to the present-time.<sup>419</sup> Our verse [earlier referred] to present time by the term *hu* (is).<sup>420</sup> *Hu* is the time between the past and the future.<sup>421</sup>

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<sup>415</sup> I.E. renders our verse as follows: But also, that every man should eat, and drink, and enjoy pleasure—for all his labor is contingent on a gift from God.

<sup>416</sup> There is a limit to what man can do. The realization of this fact leads man to stand in awe of God.

<sup>417</sup> They are fixed. They do not change.

<sup>418</sup> I.E. renders the word *kevar* (is) as behold. See his comments on Kohelet 2:16.

I.E. renders *kevar hu* (is) as, behold (*kevar*), it is now, that is, behold, it exists now.

<sup>419</sup> Literally, standing time. Our verse reads: *That which hath been long ago is, and that which is to be hath already been.* The first part of the verse speaks of the past and the future. The last part

The meaning of *God seeketh that which is pursued* is: God desires that time be pursued,<sup>422</sup> that is, God wishes that time pursue time without a stop. The past turns into the present and the future becomes the past. Time becomes one unit. This is so even though time can be divided into the past, the future and the time<sup>423</sup> that separates them.<sup>424</sup>

The aforementioned can be clarified from considering a circle, each part of which pursues the central dot of the circle.<sup>425</sup> The latter is referred to as the *mutzak*. It is so called, because of the pressure exerted on its place. The outer line, the circumference, of the circle is called the *rachav*. Compare, *into a broad place* (*rachav*), *where there is no straitness* (*mutzak*) (Job:36:16).

The point on the periphery of the circle which was in the east turns into a point in the west. The same is true in the reverse.<sup>426</sup> There is no point on the moving circle where it can be said to begin, for every starting point is an ending point and every ending point is a starting point. The central dot of the circle is the point being pursued.

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of the verse—*And God seeketh that which is pursued*—must speak of the present. I.E. will soon explain the connection between “pursued” and present time.

<sup>420</sup> Our verse opens: *Mah she-hayah kevar hu* (that which hath been long ago is), I.E. believes that the verse should be explained: behold, that which has been long ago is now in existence.

<sup>421</sup> The word *hu* is used in our verse in the sense of (the time that) is now.

<sup>422</sup> Literally, for God asks of time, that it be pursued.

<sup>423</sup> Literally, and what.

<sup>424</sup> The present.

<sup>425</sup> Each point on the circumference of the sphere revolves around the center of the sphere.

<sup>426</sup> The point on the circumference of the circle which was in the west turns into a point in the east.

It thus becomes clear to us that all the work of God remains the same.<sup>427</sup>

**16. AND MOREOVER I SAW UNDER THE SUN, IN THE PLACE OF JUSTICE, THAT WICKEDNESS WAS THERE; AND IN THE PLACE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, THAT WICKEDNESS WAS THERE.**

AND MOREOVER I SAW. And moreover, I saw that in the place where justice should be practiced, there evil is practiced.

[AND IN THE PLACE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, THAT WICKEDNESS WAS THERE]. Scripture repeats itself.<sup>428</sup> Compare, *I see him, but not now; [I behold him, but not nigh]* (Num. 24:17); *Arise, Balak, and hear; [give ear unto me, thou son of Zippor]* (ibid. 18). Most of the prophesies employ such repetition.<sup>429</sup>

**17. I SAID IN MY HEART: 'THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE WICKED GOD WILL JUDGE; FOR THERE IS A TIME THERE FOR EVERY PURPOSE AND FOR EVERY WORK.**

I SAID IN MY HEART. After I wondered [and said to myself], How can evil be found in a world<sup>430</sup> which is a creation of God? [I replied to myself:] I know that God will judge the righteous and the wicked.

[FOR THERE IS A TIME THERE] The word sham (there) hints at the world to come. Compare, and *naked shall I return thither* (shammah) (Job 1:21) where the word shammah (thither) hints at the place of the grave.<sup>431</sup> Now if the word

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<sup>427</sup> Literally, *is on one way*. Nothing changes. See *Kohelet* 1:1-9.

<sup>428</sup> *In the place of righteousness, that wickedness was there repeats in the place of justice, that wickedness was there.*

<sup>429</sup> This is referred to as synonymous parallelism.

<sup>430</sup> Literally, the world.

<sup>431</sup> It refers to the grave.

shammah refers to the ground from which man was taken<sup>432</sup> so does the word *sham*(there)here.<sup>433</sup> Its meaning is, after death.<sup>434</sup>

**18. I SAID IN MY HEART: 'IT IS BECAUSE OF THE SONS OF MEN, THAT GOD MAY SIFT THEM, AND THAT THEY MAY SEE THAT THEY THEMSELVES ARE BUT AS BEASTS.'**

I SAID IN MY HEART. I said in my heart regarding the sons of men, those whom God chose from all the creations of the world. I saw that they consider themselves, in their thoughts, to be beasts.<sup>435</sup>

*Al divrat* means, regarding. Compare, *al divrati malki tzedek* (Ps.110:4). The meaning of the latter is, *regarding [the fact that] (al divrati) you are a righteous king.*

The *lamed* in *le-varam* (may sift them)<sup>436</sup> is like the *lamed* in *imri li*<sup>437</sup> *achi hu* (say of me: He is my brother) (Gen. 20:13).

*Le-varam* follows the form of *ra'am* (he saw them)<sup>438</sup> in *ka'asher ra'am* (when he saw them). It is related to the word *beru* (choose you)<sup>439</sup> in *choose you a man* (1 Sam. 17:8).

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<sup>432</sup> See Gen. 3:19.

<sup>433</sup> In our verse. I.E.'s point is that the word *sham* in our verse refers to the place of man's origin. Job tells us that man shall return to the earth, for man's origin is there; i.e., dust. Our verse similarly tells us that man shall return to "there" (*sham*); i.e., to the dust. He shall then be judged in the world to come (Filwarg).

<sup>434</sup> Literally, after he dies. Our verse literally reads: For there is a time there for every purpose and for every work there. I.E. explains this as follows: For there is a time for every purpose and for every work (to be judged) there (in the grave), that is after one dies.

<sup>435</sup> I.E. reads our verse as follows: I said in my heart regarding the sons of men, those whom God chose: I see that they see themselves as beasts.

<sup>436</sup> According to I.E. *le-varam* means those whom He chose.

<sup>437</sup> The *lamed* here has the meaning of, *because*. *Li* means "of me," or "because of me."

Some say that *le-varam* is an infinitive.<sup>440</sup> Its *resh* should have had a *dagesh* in it.<sup>441</sup> The basic<sup>442</sup> form of the word is *le-vareram*. Compare, *u-le-varer* (and to purify) in and *to purify, and to make white* (Dan. 11:35). However, this is farfetched, for we do not find the middle root letter "swallowed"<sup>443</sup> in the *pi'el* form which receives a *dagesh*.<sup>444</sup>

[THEY MAY SEE THAT THEY THEMSELVES ARE BUT AS BEASTS]

The text [literally] reads *they themselves beasts*. Its meaning is, they themselves are "as beasts."<sup>445</sup>

The same is the case with *when a wild ass's colt is born a man* (Job 11:12);<sup>446</sup> *thy God is a devouring fire* (Deut. 4:24),<sup>447</sup> and *For the Lord God is a sun and a shield* (Ps. 84:12).<sup>448</sup>

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<sup>438</sup> In other words, *le-varam* is the perfect *bara* with a third person pronominal plural suffix (the mem) with a *lamed* prefix.

<sup>439</sup> In other words, *le-varam* means, whom he chose.

<sup>440</sup> It is not a perfect from the root *bet resh heh*, but an infinitive from the root, *bet, resh, resh* meaning to purify or sift. JPS similarly renders: I said in my heart... the sons of men, that God may sift them.

<sup>441</sup> To compensate for the missing *resh*.

<sup>442</sup> Literally, the main.

<sup>443</sup> By "swallowed" I.E. means dropped and assimilated using a *dagesh*. When a letter is dropped a *dagesh* usually compensates for it. I.E. thus points out that the *dagesh* in the *pi'el* does not compensate for a dropped middle letter, for middle letters are not dropped in the *pi'el* form. See next note.

<sup>444</sup> If *le-varam* is an infinitive, then it is in the *pi'el*. However, this cannot be so, for we do not find a middle root letter dropped in the *pi'el* form.

<sup>445</sup> In other words, "beasts" to be understood as if written as beasts, that is as if they were beasts.

<sup>446</sup> Its meaning is: *when as a wild ass's colt is born a man*.

Should a grammarian say: "How can a *lamed* be prefixed to a verb in the perfect?"<sup>449</sup> Such a thing is never found." The answer is: the *bet* and the *lamed* are "brothers."<sup>450</sup> Either one can be used as a prefix. They have the same use. We similarly find *be-hakhin lo david* (that David had prepared for it) (2 Chron. 1: 4).<sup>451</sup> The latter<sup>452</sup> also stands by itself.<sup>453</sup>

**19. FOR THAT WHICH BEFALLETH THE SONS OF MEN BEFALLETH BEASTS; EVEN ONE THING BEFALLETH THEM; AS THE ONE DIETH, SO DIETH THE OTHER; YEA, THEY HAVE ALL ONE BREATH; SO THAT MAN HATH NO PRE-EMINENCE ABOVE A BEAST; FOR ALL IS VANITY.**

FOR THAT WHICH BEFALLETH. This verse speaks of the thoughts of people who have not acquired wisdom and are unintelligent. When these people see that one thing befalls man and beast with regard to life and death they conclude that they all have one breath and that man has no pre-eminence over beast.

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<sup>447</sup> Its meaning is: *thy God is as a devouring fire.*

<sup>448</sup> Its meaning is: *For the Lord God is as a sun and a shield.*

<sup>449</sup> If the word *le-varam* is a perfect, then it is a perfect with a *lamed* prefixed to it. However, the latter is contrary the laws of Hebrew grammar.

<sup>450</sup> The rules governing the *lamed* are the same as those governing the *bet*. Since we find the *bet* used as a prefix to a verb in the perfect, then the same applies to the *lamed*. In other words, since we find the *bet* used as a prefix then one cannot argue that the *lamed* cannot be used as a prefix to a word in the perfect.

<sup>451</sup> *Hakhin* is a perfect.

<sup>452</sup> *Be-hakhin.*

<sup>453</sup> We do not have another instance of a *bet* being prefixed to a verb in the perfect. According to I.E. the use of the *lamed* in our verse and the *bet* in 2 Chron. 1:4.is exceptional.

The word *motar*<sup>454</sup> (pre-eminence) is a noun. It follows the form of *moshav* (a dwelling-house) (Lev. 25:29). *Motar* is a hifil. The silent *vav*<sup>455</sup> is in place of the first letter of the root which is a *yod*.

The word *yitron* (profit) is a noun in the *kal*. Its *nun* is superfluous.<sup>456</sup>

**20. ALL GO UNTO ONE PLACE; ALL ARE OF THE DUST, AND ALL RETURN TO DUST.**

ALL GO. This verse is connected to the verse which is above it. [Our verses are to be understood as follows:] *For all is vanity* because they all go to one place.<sup>457</sup>

**21. WHO KNOWETH THE SPIRIT OF MAN WHETHER IT GOETH UPWARD, AND THE SPIRIT OF THE BEAST WHETHER IT GOETH DOWNWARD TO THE EARTH?**

WHO KNOWETH.<sup>458</sup> It is known that the *heh* which is placed before the direct object is in most cases vocalized with a *kamatz* when followed by the letters *alef*, *chet*, *heh*, *ayin*, and *resh*.<sup>459</sup> The *heh* which introduces a question is always vocalized with a *pattach*.<sup>460</sup>

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<sup>454</sup> Literally, *u-motar*.

<sup>455</sup> The *vav* in *motar* is not sounded.

<sup>456</sup> It is not a root letter. Neither does it serve as a suffix.

<sup>457</sup> Literally, for their place is one.

<sup>458</sup> Our verse reads: *mi yodei'a ru'ach benei adam ha-oleh hi le-malah, ve-ru'ach ha-behemah ha-yoredet hi le-mattah la-aretz*. Some interpret the *hehs* placed before *ha-olah* and *ha-yoredet* as interrogative *hehs*. They thus render our verse: Who knoweth the spirit of man whether it goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast whether it goeth downward to the earth? In other words, the verse asks whether the spirit of man goes upward; that is, whether it is immortal. I.E. rejects this reading. Hence the interpretation which follows.

<sup>459</sup> The first *heh* in *ha-oleh* is vocalized with a *kamatz* and precedes an *ayin*.

The *heh* of *ha-olah* in *whether it goeth upward* is vocalized with a *kamatz*.<sup>461</sup> There is also a *dagesh* in the *yod* which follows the *heh* in *ha-yoredet* (whether it goeth downward). [This is] in accordance with the rule [that a *dagesh* follows] a *heh* which indicates the direct object.<sup>462</sup> Compare, *ha-yoshevet* (that dwellest) (Song of Songs 8:13).<sup>463</sup> If the *heh* were an interrogative *heh*, then it would be vocalized with a *sheva* and a *pattach*, and the *yod* would not have a *dagesh*.

The meaning of our verse is: Who among men knows the difference between the spirit of man [that goeth upward] and the spirit of beasts [that goeth downward to the earth?] The idea being: There will not be found one among a thousand who knows this.

The knowledge of the spirit is very profound. It requires proof.<sup>464</sup> Only the intelligent whose minds have been sifted in the scales of wisdom and its four foundations, three of which are book (*sefer*), *number* (*sefar*), *words* (*sippur*).<sup>465</sup>

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<sup>460</sup> The *heh* which introduces a question is always vocalized with a *pattach* even when it precedes an *alef*, *chet*, *heh*, *ayin*, *resh*.

<sup>461</sup> Hence it is a *heh* which is placed before the direct object. It is not a *heh* which introduces a question. Thus, the meaning of *ha-oleh* is, that goes up and not *whether it goeth upward*.

<sup>462</sup> Thus, the meaning *ha-yoredet* is “that goeth downward,” not “whether it goeth downward.”

<sup>463</sup> The *heh* in *ha-yoshevet* (that dwellest) is vocalized with a *pattach* and is followed by a *dagesh* in the *yod* following the *heh*. Hence, it is a *heh* which indicates the direct object.

<sup>464</sup> The soul cannot be seen. Its existence and description can only be known from intellectual arguments. Not everyone can understand these proofs.

<sup>465</sup> According to the *Sefer Yetzirah* (1:1), God created the world employing three "*sefarim*." These *sefarim* are *sefer*, *sefar* and *sippur*; “book,” “number,” and “words.” “Book” refers to the alphabet, “number” to mathematics, and “words” to speech. Wisdom consists in describing the world employing the alphabet, mathematics, and speech.

[The fourth is] what is combined from the two.<sup>466</sup> [Those who understand these four] and the Torah of our God<sup>467</sup> can understand [this science.]

Observe, the Torah says regarding the various kinds of plants *Let the earth put forth grass* (Gen. 1:11). The earth thus has the power, via God's word, to put forth grass. Now since the producer of the grass [the earth] is a physical entity, from it the grass came and to it shall it<sup>468</sup> return. The offspring of the earth which the earth gave birth to can only exist for a fixed number of days because there is a limit to its growth. When it ceases growing, it reverses course.<sup>469</sup>

Scripture similarly says, *Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures* (ibid. v. 20). The waters thus gave birth to living creatures which swarm, and fowl and fish by the command of God.

Scripture similarly states, *Let the earth bring forth the living creature* (nefesh chayyah) *after its kind* (ibid. 1:24).

The Torah does not state, *Let the earth bring forth a living human being* (nefesh adam). On the contrary, the Torah says *Let us make man in our image, after our likeness* (ibid. v.26). The Torah relates<sup>470</sup> that God created man's body from the earth after which *He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life* (nishmat ru'ach chayyim) (ibid. 2:7).

The word *chayyim* alludes to permanent existence. Man's soul will not cease to exist like that of a beast.

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<sup>466</sup> This is the fourth foundation of wisdom. It's not clear what "the two" refers to. David Rosen identifies them as form and matter (R. Goodman).

<sup>467</sup> I.E. will soon explain what the Torah teaches regarding the soul of man.

<sup>468</sup> Literally, they.

<sup>469</sup> Literally, it goes back.

<sup>470</sup> Literally, mentions.

There is a difference between the words *neshamah* and *nefesh*.<sup>471</sup> We do not find in all of Scripture the term *neshamah* employed, except when speaking of a human being. Compare, *He that giveth breath (neshamah) unto the people upon it* (Is. 42:5). The verse *All in whose nostrils was the breath of(nishmat) the spirit of life...[died.]* (Gen. 7:22) refers only to human beings. At the end of this book Solomon says that spirit of people "shall return to God" (12:7) and not to dust.<sup>472</sup>

**22. WHEREFORE I PERCEIVED THAT THERE IS NOTHING BETTER, THAN THAT A MAN SHOULD REJOICE IN HIS WORKS; FOR THAT IS HIS PORTION; FOR WHO SHALL BRING HIM TO SEE WHAT SHALL BE AFTER HIM?**

WHEREFORE I PERCEIVED. Wherefore I perceived that there is nothing better for those who think that they are like beasts than that that they should rejoice in their life, for they have no other portion.<sup>473</sup> Thus, why should they be occupied in things that they will leave to others?

## CHAPTER 4

**1. BUT 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.**

BUT I RETURNED. In other words, Kohelet says: I changed my mind and my stance regarding my advice to the effect that it is good for man to rejoice [in his life]; for in reality, one cannot enjoy life because of the violence which exists in

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<sup>471</sup> I.E. is commenting on the word *nishmat* in Gen. 2:7.

<sup>472</sup> Kohelet thus teaches the soul is immortal, for unlike the animal soul which was produced by the earth, man's soul comes from God and returns to Him.

<sup>473</sup> They have nothing else.

the world. A person can be a victim of oppression; he may be oppressed by a king, or a judge who takes bribes, or by a thief.

The meaning of *and on the side of their oppressors there was power* is, there is power in the hands of the oppressors, but the oppressed are powerless—they can only cry, and they have no comforter. [Scripture reads: *and they had no comforter*] because it is the custom for comforters to come and console one who mourns for the dead. The mourner is then comforted.

*But they had no comforter* is repeated because of the constant crying<sup>474</sup> and screaming of the oppressed.<sup>475</sup>

## 2. WHEREFORE I PRAISED THE DEAD THAT ARE ALREADY DEAD MORE THAN THE LIVING THAT ARE YET ALIVE.

WHEREFORE I PRAISED THE DEAD. *Sha'be'ach* (I praised)<sup>476</sup> is an adjective.<sup>477</sup> It is similar to *yarei* (fear) in *yarei ani* (I fear) (Dan. 1:10)<sup>478</sup>

The *chet* of *sha'be'ach* is vocalized with a *pattach* because it is a *guttural*.<sup>479</sup>

YET. The word *adenah* (yet) (v. 3) is lacking a *heh*. It (is short for) *adhenah* (until now) (Gen. 44:28).

When Kohelet says that the dead are to be praised more than the living, he speaks of the oppressed. A person<sup>480</sup> will bear anything that comes to him from heaven<sup>481</sup>

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<sup>474</sup> Literally, his crying.

<sup>475</sup> They are not oppressed once, but they are continually oppressed.

<sup>476</sup> Literally, *ve-sha'be'ach*.

<sup>477</sup> Our text reads *ve-shabe'ach ani*. *Sha'be'ach* modifies *ani*. According to I.E., the phrase means, I am a praising person.

<sup>478</sup> The meaning of *yarei ani* according to I.E. is, I am a fearful person.

<sup>479</sup> Words do not usually have their final letter vocalized with a minor vowel. Hence, I.E.'s comment.

<sup>480</sup> Literally, for a person.

except for the oppression that a person who is his equal places upon him. In such a case, he will choose death over life.

**3. BUT BETTER THAN THEY BOTH IS HE THAT HATH NOT YET BEEN, WHO HATH NOT SEEN THE EVIL WORK THAT IS DONE UNDER THE SUN.**

**BUT BETTER THAN THEY BOTH.** The word *aden* (yet) is a compound verb.<sup>482</sup> It is missing a *heh* both from in front of the *nun* and from after the *nun*.<sup>483</sup> It is similar to the word *adenah* (v. 2).<sup>484</sup>

The meaning of our verse is: The deceased who have passed away have already found rest and do not hear the voice of the oppressor. [Kohélet says that] those who were never born are better off than the living and the dead because [ he speaks of those] who, though alive, are physically oppressed—such as prisoners, or captives, or those who suffer economic<sup>485</sup> oppression. As for the dead: even though they now no longer exist, they too suffered from oppression while alive.

Many ask: How can Kohélet say of one who never existed "but better is one who never existed"?<sup>486</sup> The Sages of blessed memory similarly said "Happy is he who was never born."<sup>487</sup>

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<sup>481</sup> A person will bear any decree that heaven places upon him.

<sup>482</sup> It, as I.E. noted in his comments on verse 2, is short for *ad henah*.

<sup>483</sup> For *aden* is short for *ad henah*.

<sup>484</sup> *It like adenah* is short for *ad henah*.

<sup>485</sup> Literally, monetarily.

<sup>486</sup> How can one address a person who never existed?

<sup>487</sup> Eruvin 13:b. I.E.'s point is: How could the Rabbis say "Happy is he" regarding one who was never born? If he never existed, how can he be happy?

In reality, the above does not present any problem, for it is the nature of language to speak in metaphors because of the inability of language [to describe reality].<sup>488</sup> The philosophers similarly say, "Everything either exists or does not [exist]." Now if something exists, how can you say that it does not exist?

**4. AGAIN, I CONSIDERED ALL LABOR AND ALL EXCELLING IN WORK, THAT IT IS A MAN'S RIVALRY WITH HIS NEIGHBOR. THIS ALSO IS VANITY AND A STRIVING AFTER WIND.**

AGAIN, I CONSIDERED. Again, I considered that most of a person's labor and drive to excel in work is due to man's rivalry with his neighbor. He does not want to have less than his neighbor with regard to his dwelling, his clothes, his children, his food, and his good name.<sup>489</sup>

**5. THE FOOL FOLDETH HIS HANDS TOGETHER, AND EATETH HIS OWN FLESH.**

THE FOOL. There are also fools who are lazy and are not envious of their neighbor. They do not engage in labor to sustain themselves. They fold their hands and eat what they have. When they finish [eating what they have], they are left without food. After the fool consumes all the food that he had and does not labor to add to his food supply, it is as if he ate his flesh because he will die of starvation.

**6. BETTER IS A HANDFUL OF QUIETNESS, THAN BOTH THE HANDS FULL OF LABOUR AND STRIVING AFTER WIND.**

BETTER. The verse contains the words of the fool who says: "I am more satisfied with a handful of quietness, than with both hands full of labor and striving after wind." [The fool says:] "People are concerned with the future. They ask

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<sup>488</sup> In other words, the concept expressed by "Happy is he who never was" cannot be fully described in words.

<sup>489</sup> It is worth noting that the objects of envy are provided by I.E. They are not mentioned in the text. One has to wonder whether I.E.'s poverty and other aspects of his life had some bearing on this comment.

themselves, what shall we eat tomorrow? However, they do not know what this day shall bring forth.<sup>490</sup>

## 7. THEN I RETURNED AND SAW VANITY UNDER THE SUN.

THEN I RETURNED. Then I turned from investigating the words of this fool, and I noticed another fool<sup>491</sup> saying the opposite of the first fool.

8. THERE IS ONE THAT IS ALONE, AND HE HATH NOT A SECOND. It is possible that *a second* means a comrade, or a servant, or a woman who is a<sup>492</sup> helpmate. The last possibility is the most correct.

YET IS THERE NO END OF ALL HIS LABOR. Its meaning is, there is no end to his wealth, yet he is not satisfied and has not ceased from his toil. Why doesn't he ask himself: "For whom then do I labor and deny myself all pleasure? Look, I have no heir so that I can be happy that I enriched a son or a brother."

THIS ALSO IS VANITY. Kohelet adds the word "also" to indicate that although both be fools, the first fool's actions are as worthless as that of the second fool.

The wise person will act in accordance with *give me neither poverty nor riches* (Prov. 30:8).<sup>493</sup>

## 9. TWO ARE BETTER THAN ONE; BECAUSE THEY HAVE A GOOD REWARD FOR THEIR LABOR.

TWO ARE BETTER THAN ONE. This refers back to the fool who is alone. Kohelet says: Would it not be better for the one who is alone to have someone join him and help him? For then they would have a good reward for their labors; that is, they will eat and drink.

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<sup>490</sup> Hence the fool says: Why then should I waste my time in toil? Why should I strive after wind?

<sup>491</sup> The other fool is described in the next verse. The first fool is lazy. The second fool spends his entire life in nothing else but working and accumulating wealth.

<sup>492</sup> Literary, his.

<sup>493</sup> He will neither be lazy nor devote one's entire life to acquiring wealth.

**10. FOR IF THEY FALL, THE ONE WILL LIFT UP HIS FELLOW; BUT WOE TO HIM THAT IS ALONE WHEN HE FALLETH, AND HATH NOT ANOTHER TO LIFT HIM UP.**

FOR IF THEY FALL. If one of them gets sick or falls down; [that is,] if he or his friend [gets sick or falls down], his companion shall help him.

The word *iy* (woe) has the same meaning as the word *oy* (woe) (Num. 21:29). It does not appear elsewhere in Scripture. It is only found in this book. Compare, *Woe (iy) to thee, O land* (Kohélet 10:16).<sup>494</sup>

**11. AGAIN, IF TWO LIE TOGETHER, THEN THEY HAVE WARMTH; BUT HOW CAN ONE BE WARM ALONE?**

AGAIN, IF TWO LIE TOGETHER. When bodies are joined they warm up. Compare, *and let her lie in thy bosom, that my lord the king may get heat* (1 Kings 1:2).

**12. AND IF A MAN PREVAIL AGAINST HIM THAT IS ALONE, TWO SHALL WITHSTAND HIM; AND A THREEFOLD CORD IS NOT QUICKLY BROKEN.**

AND IF A MAN PREVAIL AGAINST HIM. *Ve-im yitkefo ha-echad* means, and if a man prevails against him.<sup>495</sup>

The word *yitkefo* (prevail against him) is a transitive verb. It is like *titkefehu* (Thou prevailest against him) in *Thou prevailest forever against him* (Job 14:20). *Yitkefo*

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<sup>494</sup> The Hebrew text of our verse reads: *ve-iylo*. In other words, in our texts *iylo* is one word. Ibn Ezra's text of Kohélet may have read *ve-iy lo* as two words, *ve-iy* followed by the word *lo* (but woe to him). On the other hand, Ibn Ezra may have considered *ve-iylo* to be a compound word made up of *ve-iy* (but woe) and *lo* (to him).

<sup>495</sup> In other words, *ha-echad* (literally "the one".) refers to the attacker, not to the attacked. Hence our verse is to be rendered "and if a man prevails against him." It is not to be translated, "and if a man prevails against him that is alone."

is lacking a *nun* or a *heh*.<sup>496</sup> It is like *yikre'o* (he shall be called)<sup>497</sup> in *and this is his name whereby he shall be called* (Jer. 23:6).

Some say that the *vav* of *yitkefo* is superfluous.<sup>498</sup> However, this is farfetched, for we do not find a superfluous *vav* at the end of a word unless it is a noun, as in *le-mayeno*<sup>499</sup> (into a fountain) in *into a fountain of waters* (Ps. 114:8) and *beno*<sup>500</sup> (the son of) in, *the son of Beor* (Num. 24:3).

AND A THREEFOLD CORD IS NOT QUICKLY BROKEN. If *and he hath not a second* (v. 8) refers to his wife,<sup>501</sup> then the third in the threefold cord refers to his son.<sup>502</sup> Our verse is like *they*<sup>503</sup> *shall not be put to shame, when they speak with their enemies in the gate* (Ps. 127:5).<sup>504</sup>

**13. BETTER IS A POOR AND WISE CHILD THAN AN OLD AND FOOLISH KING, WHO KNOWETH NOT HOW TO RECEIVE ADMONITION ANY MORE.**

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<sup>496</sup> The usual form of a third person pronominal suffix is *nu* or *hu*. Our word should have read *yitkefihu* or *yitkefennu*.

<sup>497</sup> The word should have read *yikre'ennhu* or *yikre'ehu*.

<sup>498</sup> Literally, added. This interpretation believes that the *vav* of *yitkefo* is not a suffix. The word should be interpreted as if written *yitkof* meaning, and if he prevails (or attacks).

<sup>499</sup> The *vav* of *le-mayeno* is superfluous, for the meaning of *le-mayeno* is "into a fountain," not "into his fountain."

<sup>500</sup> The *vav* of *beno* is superfluous, for its meaning is "the son of," not "his son."

<sup>501</sup> Literally, "his helpmate;" that is, *a second* refers to his wife. See I.E. on verse 8.

<sup>502</sup> That is, *a threefold cord* refers to a man, his wife, and his son.

<sup>503</sup> People who have sons.

<sup>504</sup> The verse speaks of people who beget sons. Such people shall not be put to shame when they speak with their enemies in the gate, for their sons will protect them.

BETTER IS A POOR [MISKEN] AND WISE CHILD. After Kohelet finished to explain that the way of life chosen by the fool is vanity, even though it provides the fool with riches, he goes on to say that the way chosen by the wise is the good way, even though the wise man be poor. [The verse should be read in this manner] because the meaning of *misken* is poor. The word *misken* is similar to the word *miskenu* (scarceness) in [*a land wherein thou shalt eat bread*] without scarceness (Deut.8:9). The word *child* is in contrast to *old*, *poor* is in contrast to *king*, and *wise* is in contrast to *foolish*.<sup>505</sup>

The verse speaks of the wise child; that is, a child who grows in wisdom each day. The old king does not know how to avoid injury because he has grown old in foolishness.

#### 14. FOR OUT OF PRISON HE CAME FORTH TO BE KING; ALTHOUGH IN HIS KINGDOM HE WAS BORN POOR.

FOR. It is possible for the wise child to become king, even though he was in prison. The word *surim* (prison) is lacking an *alef*.<sup>506</sup> Compare the word *mallefenu* (Who teacheth us) in *Who teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth* (Job 35:11), which is related to *ve-a'allefkha* (and I will teach thee) in *and I will teach thee wisdom* (ibid. 33:33).<sup>507</sup> This wise child is like Joseph, whose wisdom turned him into a lord. Solomon says, "Don't wonder and ask, 'How did the poor wise child's fortune reverse itself?' for also the old king was born poor."<sup>508</sup> Compare, *And he said: Naked came I out of my mother's womb* (Job 1:21).

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<sup>505</sup> In other words, *misken* stands in contrast to *melekh*. This is further proof that *misken* means poor.

<sup>506</sup> The usual word for prison is *bet asurim*.

<sup>507</sup> In other words, *mallefenu* should have read *me'alfenu*.

<sup>508</sup> A newly born child is considered poor, because he does not own anything at birth. According to I.E.'s interpretation the first half of the verse speaks of the child who became king and the second half of the verse speaks of the old king,

**15. I SAW ALL THE LIVING THAT WALK UNDER THE SUN, THAT THEY WERE WITH THE CHILD, THE SECOND, THAT WAS TO STAND UP IN HIS STEAD.**

I SAW ALL THE LIVING THAT WALK UNDER THE SUN, THAT THEY WERE WITH THE CHILD, THE SECOND. The child who reigned in place of the old king. The child is called *the second* because he came after the old king and reigned in his place.<sup>509</sup>

**16. THERE WAS NO END OF ALL THE PEOPLE; TO ALL THAT WERE BEFORE THEM; ALSO THE LAST ONES DID NOT REJOICE WITH HIM.<sup>510</sup> SURELY THIS ALSO IS VANITY AND A STRIVING AFTER WIND.**

THERE WAS NO END OF ALL THE PEOPLE. Even though he is wise, not all of the living shall rejoice in him,<sup>511</sup> for the laws dealing with the kingdom are harsh.<sup>512</sup>

Scripture adds also, which means “before” *the last ones*<sup>513</sup> to indicate that the same was the case with those who came before them, for they too did not rejoice with the old fool.<sup>514</sup>

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<sup>509</sup> No other king, except for the child, reigned after the old king. Hence, the child is referred to as “second to the king.”

<sup>510</sup> Translated literary.

<sup>511</sup> Those close to the king. The members of the king's court.

<sup>512</sup> The rules dealing with court etiquette are very strict. A slight mistake may result in dire consequences. See I.E.'s comment on verse 17. I.E. reads *There was no end of all the people; to all that were before them* as: A king cannot satisfy everyone; also, the previous generation did not rejoice with their foolish king. Kohelet's point is: wise or not, the king will not be loved by all.

<sup>513</sup> *Also the last ones* means, the same is true of those who came before them.

<sup>514</sup> According to I.E., “him” in *did not rejoice with him* refers to the old foolish king. *Also the last ones did not rejoice with him* indicates that the last ones, like the present ones, did not rejoice with the king.

Some explain that *the child, the second* (v.15) means the next generation.<sup>515</sup> The meaning of the verse is: Kohelet saw the living that walk under the sun. He saw them and their successors who will arise after them. Kohelet saw that those who will inherit them and come after them will be like the present generation is to the generation that preceded them.<sup>516</sup> These and those will not rejoice in the world.

**17. GUARD THY FOOT WHEN THOU GOEST TO THE HOUSE OF GOD, AND BE READY TO HEARKEN: IT IS BETTER THAN WHEN FOOLS GIVE SACRIFICES; FOR THEY KNOW NOT THAT THEY DO EVIL.**<sup>517</sup>

GUARD THY FOOT. Many of the commentaries say that *thy foot* is similar to *his feet* in *dressed his feet* (2 Sam. 19:25).<sup>518</sup> However, the plain meaning of our verse is<sup>519</sup> as follows: Kohelet earlier noted that those who are close to the king will not rejoice in the king because they fear him, The one who comes to the king's palace will take care in his dress and in what he says. After saying this, Kohelet says: And more than this,<sup>520</sup> you must take heed when you go to the house of God.<sup>521</sup>

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<sup>515</sup> According to this interpretation, verses 15-16 are not connected to verses 13-14. They contain a new thought: the present generation and the generation that follows, like this generation and the one that came before it is unhappy with the world. In other words, nothing changes.

<sup>516</sup> Literally, "He saw the living that walk under the sun. They and their successors who will arise after them are like they were to the generation that preceded them."

<sup>517</sup> Literally, *for they know not to do evil*.

<sup>518</sup> *Dressed his feet* means, washed his feet (Radak). Similarly, *Guard thy foot* means, wash your foot. Take care that you are clean when you go to the house of God.

<sup>519</sup> Guard thy foot when thou goest to the house of God.

<sup>520</sup> You should take more care in visiting God's house than you do when visiting the king's palace.

<sup>521</sup> In other words, *guard thy foot*, means "take care."

GUARD THY FOOT WHEN THOU GOEST TO THE HOUSE OF GOD is similar to a person saying: "Such and such a place is dangerous. If you do not know how to take care of yourself, keep<sup>522</sup> your feet from going there."

[AND BE READY TO HEARKEN] The meaning of *and be ready to hearken* is: even though I told you *Guard thy foot* [*when thou goest to the house of God*, know that] the Lord is not distant as is a king of blood and flesh. On the contrary, God is much closer to hear your word, if you call upon Him in truth, than he is to the fools, for they only know to do evil.

[FOR THEY KNOW NOT TO DO EVIL<sup>523</sup>] Our verse is similar to, *There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink* (Kohelet 2:24).<sup>524</sup>

The meaning of our verse is: they do not think properly<sup>525</sup> and do good.<sup>526</sup>

Some say that the meaning of *for they know not to do evil*<sup>527</sup> is: the fools do not even know how to do evil, to which the heart of man inclines.<sup>528</sup> They certainly do not know how to do good.<sup>529</sup>

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<sup>522</sup> Literally, guard.

<sup>523</sup> Translated literally.

<sup>524</sup> Translated literally. According to I.E., *There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink* should be read: "There is nothing better for a man other than (rack) that he should eat and drink." In other words, the word *rak* should be inserted into the verse. Similarly, our verse, which reads *ki enam yode'im la-asot ra* (for they do not know to do evil) should be read as if written *ki enam yode'im rak la-asot ra* (for they only know how to do evil).

<sup>525</sup> Literally, their mind is incorrect.

<sup>526</sup> That is, the meaning of our verse which should be read as if written for " they only know how to do evil" is: they do not think properly and do good.

<sup>527</sup> According to this interpretation the verse is to be taken literally.

<sup>528</sup> Literally, which is close to the desire of man; i.e., which a person instinctively desires. See I.E. on Ps. 101:4.

Some say that the word ra (evil) means will.<sup>530</sup>

## CHAPTER 5

**1. BE NOT RASH WITH THY MOUTH, AND LET NOT THY HEART BE HASTY TO UTTER A WORD BEFORE GOD; FOR GOD IS IN HEAVEN, AND THOU UPON EARTH; THEREFORE LET THY WORDS BE FEW.**

**BE NOT RASH WITH THY MOUTH.** When you are in the house of God, do not rashly utter words before the Lord.

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<sup>529</sup> Which entails effort and training.

<sup>530</sup> These commentators connect the word *ra* to the Aramaic word *ra'avah* which means “will.” They read our verse as follows: They do not know to do the will [of God]. Radak: *Book of Roots*, root, *resh, ayin, heh*.

AND LET NOT THY HEART BE HASTY TO UTTER A WORD BEFORE GOD. [Utter words before God] only if you understand their meaning,<sup>531</sup> for the heart is lost and wanders, for it is occupied with things of this world.<sup>532</sup> It is for this reason that God's anointed<sup>533</sup> says, *therefore hath Thy servant taken heart [to pray this prayer unto Thee]* (2 Sam.7:27).<sup>534</sup>

[GOD IS IN HEAVEN, AND THOU UPON EARTH]. Know that God stands over you. He sees you and hears your words. For God is in heaven. He is in the highest of the highest places. You are on the earth. There is nothing lower than you. *Let thy words be few*, so that you do not put yourself in danger. Act as the High Priest who on the Day of Atonement offered a short prayer [in the Holy of Holies] and then left.

Abraham the author says: I now begin to speak: The glory of the "Place" (*ha-makom*)<sup>535</sup> fills every place (*makom*).<sup>536</sup> A person cannot be on guard in each and every place (*makom*).<sup>537</sup> Therefore a fixed place (*makom*) was prepared for a person to offer his prayer. A person is obligated to honor this place.<sup>538</sup>

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<sup>531</sup> Only if he understands their true meaning. I.E. speaks of a personal prayer. He tells the worshipper to carefully consider what he is praying for.

<sup>532</sup> The heart is occupied with things of this world. It therefore requires special effort to direct it to God. I.E. refers to people who are occupied with things of this world to men who are lost and wander about.

<sup>533</sup> King David.

<sup>534</sup> David carefully considered the wording of his prayer. One of the High Holy Day prayers uttered by the Cantor during the Musaf service reads: " May [those who pray on behalf of the congregation] not err in their language... may they never say a thing against Thy will."

<sup>535</sup> The Rabbis refer to God as *ha-makom* (the Place). *Ha-makom* is usually translated as the Omnipresent. I have rendered it literally because I.E. engages in word play with the term *makom* (place).

<sup>536</sup> God is omnipresent.

<sup>537</sup> A person cannot always be in a state in which it is proper to offer prayer.

A person is also obligated to give thanks and praise to his God every moment,<sup>539</sup> for God's loving kindness is with him every instant and gives him life so that he can enjoy his senses. However, because a person is busy with the affairs of the world, a set time was established for him to pray.<sup>540</sup> The latter are the well-known times: evening, morning, and noon, for whoever has eyes knows when the sun rises,<sup>541</sup> when it inclines,<sup>542</sup> and when it sets.<sup>543</sup>

A person<sup>544</sup> who prays must guard the opening of his mouth.<sup>545</sup> He should imagine himself standing before a king who has it in the power of his hands to give life and take life.<sup>546</sup> It is therefore forbidden for a person to pray and insert in his prayers liturgical poems [henceforth *piyyut* - *singular* or *piyyutim* - *plural*] whose basic meaning he does not know. He should not rely on the original composer of the poem,<sup>547</sup> for there is no person who never sins.<sup>548</sup> It is also possible that the copyist sinned.<sup>549</sup>

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<sup>538</sup> The place set aside for prayer.

<sup>539</sup> A person is not only obligated to pray in a place set aside for Divine worship, he is also obligated to give thanks and praise to God every moment of his life.

<sup>540</sup> Literally, to pray in.

<sup>541</sup> The time set aside for morning prayers.

<sup>542</sup> The time set aside for afternoon prayers.

<sup>543</sup> The time set aside for evening prayers.

<sup>544</sup> Literally, therefore a person.

<sup>545</sup> What his lips utter.

<sup>546</sup> Literally, put to death.

<sup>547</sup> People who recite *piyyutim* without knowing their meaning should not assume that the piyyout that they are reciting is acceptable before God because it was composed by an intelligent and pious man.

Let me state a general rule. The poems of Rabbi Elazar Ha-Kalir,<sup>550</sup> whose rest is glorious, presents four major problems.

**One.** Most of his *piyyutim* consist of riddles and parables.<sup>551</sup>

I will give an example by citing one of his poems. [A *piyyut* opening with the words *Ansikhah Malki*.<sup>552</sup>]

The poem reads: *l-r-i-y* (לראי) *yakpil va-chodashim yakhpil / le-Yom zed purr hippie: u-me-tzion yimlokh*.<sup>553</sup>

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<sup>548</sup> The poet may have made a mistake or composed a poem that is not in keeping with accepted theology. For example, some Rabbis believe that the *piyyut* “*Middat Ha-Rachmim*” (attribute of mercy) should not be recited. This is because it involves praying to an attribute of God which Jewish theology opposes. Others say that *Shalom Alekhem* (the popular Friday eve song) not be chanted because it involves praying to angels rather than God.

<sup>549</sup> A copyist inserted improper words in an otherwise theologically acceptable poem.

<sup>550</sup> Rabbi Elazar Ha-Kalir (c. 570 – c. 640 C.E.) was one of the early paytanim, He composed *piyyutim* for the Sabbath, festivals and fast days. Many of his *piyyutim* have entered the prayer book and are recited till this very day. "Rabbi Elazar Ha-Kalir was a master of the Hebrew language and very creative in his use of Hebrew.... Ha-Kalir made a critical contribution to the development of the Hebrew language by endowing the language with flexibility, thereby paving the way for the development of modern Hebrew. Ha-Kalir was the father of the paytanim, and he dared to do more than any other paytan. (R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Kinot Mesorat HaRav*, edited by R. Simon Posner, pp. 386-387.) Also see: Yahalom, Yosef. *Atz Kotetz* in: *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature*, Hebrew University 1981.

<sup>551</sup> We do not know what they mean. Hence, they should not be used as prayers.

<sup>552</sup> *Ansikhah Malki*, is recited as part of the *malkhiyut* blessings on Rosh Ha-Shanah, during the repetition of the Amidah. See *Machzor Rabba He-Chadash*; Rosh Ha-Shanah; Reprint by Eshkol; Israel; 1994 p. 429.

<sup>553</sup> This *piyyut*, which begins with the words *ansikhah malki*, is recited as part of the *malkhiyut* blessings on Rosh Ha-Shanah, during the repetition of the Amidah. See *Machzor Rabba He-Chadash*; Rosh Ha-Shanah; Reprint by Eshkol; Israel; 1994 p. 429. The *piyyut* reads:

לראי יקפיל . וחדשים יכפיל . ליום זה פור הפיל . ומציון ימלוך .

Some say that the *lamed* of *l-r-i-y*, should be followed by a *yod*.<sup>554</sup> [The word should be read, *liyre'iy* (ליראי) (to the one who fears Me).]<sup>555</sup>

[According to this interpretation] *liyre'iy* (ליראי) (to the one who fears Me) refers to the Messiah.

*Yakpil* (he will fold) means, He will fold, [that is, God will fold] the earth before the Messiah.<sup>556</sup>

*Va-chodashim yakhpil* means, He will fold the months of the year and hasten his coming.<sup>557</sup>

Others say that *l-r-i-y* is to be spelled without a *yod*. It is to be read *liriy* (לראי) (to what I see).<sup>558</sup> [They also say that: *Yakhpil*] means, He will remove.

[According to this interpretation] the word *re'iy* (ראי) is similar to the word *re'iy* (ראי, see) in, *See thy way in the Valley* (Jer. 2:23).<sup>559</sup>

*Va-chodashim Yakhpil* means, He will remove the new. The reference is to the newly introduced idols.<sup>560</sup>

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<sup>554</sup> According to this interpretation, *liyre'iy* should be spelled *lamed, yod, resh, alef, yod*.

<sup>555</sup> According to this interpretation, *liyre'iy* comes from the root *yod, resh, alef* (to fear).

<sup>556</sup> Literally, before him. See Is. 33:4. According to this interpretation *liyre'iy yakpil* means: God will fold the earth, before him that fears Me (the Messiah). In other words, God will hasten the coming of Messiah. He will fold the earth to shorten the way to the Land of Israel for the Messiah.

<sup>557</sup> According to this interpretation *va-chodashim yakhpil* means: God will fold the months of the year for the one who fears Me. In other words, God will make time pass quickly so that the Messiah soon arrives.

<sup>558</sup> According to this interpretation, *re'iy* (ראי) comes from the root *resh, alef, heh* (to see).

<sup>559</sup> In other words, **לראי** is to be read *liriy* (to what I see). *Liriy yakpil* means: He will remove what I see (the idols).

The wise men of this generation interpret *liriy* (לראי) *yakpil* to mean, God will remove the heavens—which are compared to a molten mirror (ראי) (Job 37:18).<sup>561</sup> *Va-chodashim yakhpil*<sup>562</sup> means that God will double the new heavens.<sup>563</sup>

Also this interpretation is incorrect, for the only [possible] meaning of *liriy* (לראי) *yakpil* / *va-chodashim yakhpil* [according to this interpretation] is: God will remove the mirrors and the new mirrors will be doubled (*Va-chodashim yakhpil*). Perhaps the mirrors will very thick. It will be hard to deliver a blow to<sup>564</sup> them.<sup>565</sup>

Is it correct for a person to say that there is no being among the living creatures [that is as exalted] as an *ayir* (a wild ass),<sup>566</sup> for the word *ayir* (a wild ass) means a man in *when a wild ass's colt (ayir) is born a man* (Job11:12)?<sup>567</sup>

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<sup>560</sup> According to this interpretation, *liriy* (לראי) *yakpil* / *va-chodashim yakhpil* means: He will remove what I see (the idols)/He will remove the new (the newly introduced idols).

<sup>561</sup> *Re'iy* (ראי) means a “mirror.” Job 37:18 refers to the heavens as mirrors. The Stone Tanakh notes that ancient mirrors were made from thick burnished metal, rather than glass. The latter was pointed out to me by Dr. Rick Strassman.

<sup>562</sup> This interpretation connects the word *yachpil* to *kefel* (double).

<sup>563</sup> God will create new heaven (Is. 65:17), which will be the double the old heaven.

<sup>564</sup> It will be hard to break them.

<sup>565</sup> I.E. is being sarcastic. He is saying: there is no meaning to a line reading that God will create a thick heaven.

He says that we do not know what this line means. In fact, we can give it a ridiculous meaning.

<sup>566</sup> Would it be correct for someone to say "There is no one among the living creatures who is as distinguished as a wild ass" if he intends to say that there is no being among the living creatures that is as distinguished as man.

<sup>567</sup> I.E.'s point is the following. If Scripture compares two objects to make a point, this does not mean that the two objects are identical. For example, if Scripture compares the birth of a man to the birth of a wild ass, this does not mean that “wild ass” takes on the meaning of “man.”

Is it correct for a person to say, “Happy are the people who worship fire and bow to the sun” because Scripture refers to God, the glorious and awesome, as “fire [and sun]”<sup>568</sup> in *For the Lord thy God is a devouring fire, a jealous God* (Deut.4:24).

Would it be correct for a person to argue that God can<sup>569</sup> be referred to as the sun because Scripture states, *For the Lord God is a sun and a shield* (Ps. 84:12)?

One can argue for using the words "fire" and "sun" for God<sup>570</sup> because these words refer to God<sup>571</sup> in *For the Lord thy God is a devouring fire* (Deut. 4:24) and *For the Lord is a sun* (Ps. 84:12). This is certainly so in view of the fact that these words do not have a *kaf* prefixed to them as does the word *ke-re'iy* (like a mirror)<sup>572</sup> in *strong as a molten mirror* (Job 37:18). Scripture compared the heavens to a mirror only with regard to strength.<sup>573</sup>

Will a person pray, “Blessed art Thou O Lion” because they find that Scripture states *the Lord, ... shall roar like a lion* (Hosea 11:10)? Will such a prayer find favor in the eyes of God?

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Similarly, if Job compares the heavens to a mirror, it does not mean that henceforth that the word “mirror” means the same thing as “heavens.”

<sup>568</sup> Literally, for Scripture states.

<sup>569</sup> Literally, can also.

<sup>570</sup> Ibn Ezra is being sarcastic. He argues that a stronger case can be made for employing the words “fire” and “sun” for God than can be made for employing the term “mirror” for “heavens.” Scripture does not say that the heavens are a mirror; it says that the heavens are like a mirror.

<sup>571</sup> Ibn Ezra argues that a stronger case can be made for employing the words “fire” and “sun” for God than can be made for employing the term “mirror” for heavens. Scripture does not say that the heavens are a mirror; it says that the heavens are like a mirror. Ibn Ezra is, as noted in the above note, being sarcastic.

<sup>572</sup> The word *esh* (fire) in *For the Lord thy God is a devouring fire* and *shemesh* in *For the Lord God is a sun* do not have a comparative *kaf* prefixed to them. That is, Scripture does not read *For the Lord thy God is as a devouring fire*, or *For the Lord God is as a sun*.

<sup>573</sup> It does not mean that the heavens are mirrors. Ibn Ezra's point is that “mirror” cannot be used as a synonym for heaven.

Why should we not learn from King Solomon? There was no man who came after him who was as wise as he. Now the prayer which Solomon uttered<sup>574</sup> is well known. Whoever knows Hebrew understands it. It does not consist of riddles and parables. Similarly, the prayer of Daniel,<sup>575</sup> "who loosened knots" (Dan. 5:12).<sup>576</sup>

All of these people employed only understandable language in their prayers. These men were wise. How much more so must one who prays on behalf of many people<sup>577</sup> that are not [especially] wise, employ understandable language.

All the prayers composed for the weekdays and holy days, which the early Sages<sup>578</sup> composed, do not contain riddles and parables.

What purpose is there in saying that God will double the new heavens? Will there be two heavens?<sup>579</sup> For [according to those who interpret *re'iy* as referring to heaven] the poem says that God will make two heavens.<sup>580</sup>

[The above quoted line from the *piyyut* continues as follows: *le-yom zeh pur hippil / u-me-tzion yimlokh* (God cast lots for this day.<sup>581</sup> He will reign from Zion.)

It is wrong to say that "God cast lots for this day," for the one who casts lots, does not know what the results will be.<sup>582</sup> The poet should have run away from the

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<sup>574</sup> When he dedicated the Temple. See 1Kings 8:22-53,

<sup>575</sup> See Dan. 9:4-19.

<sup>576</sup> Daniel was able to interpret dreams and other signs which were unclear.

<sup>577</sup> A cantor who recites the prayers on behalf of the congregation. Very few, and in many cases none, of the congregants in medieval times had prayer books with the *piyyutim* in them. The cantor inserted them in his recitation of the prayers on behalf of the congregation.

<sup>578</sup> The Rabbis of the Talmud.

<sup>579</sup> What purpose will two heavens serve?

<sup>580</sup> Literally, two of them.

<sup>581</sup> God cast lots to choose when the day of judgment should fall.

phrase "God cast lots," for it is only used in the place [where Scripture speaks] of the enemy of the Jews.<sup>583</sup>

Furthermore, [the line of the piyyut concludes with]: "He will reign from Zion." How can God reign from Zion after He makes the heavens and earth pass away, when Zion is part of the earth?<sup>584</sup>

One of the wise men of the generation said that the poet had to employ the phrase *pur hippil* (He cast lots) because it rhymes with *yakpil* (will destroy).<sup>585</sup>

I answered him:

We do not find the prophets employing rhyme in all their prayers. Why did the poet insist on riding an elephant (*pill*)<sup>586</sup> and then throw it down (*yappil*)?<sup>587</sup> If he

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<sup>582</sup> However, God does. What point is there for God to cast lots if He already knows the outcome?

<sup>583</sup> Scripture tells us that Haman cast lots (*hippil pur*) (Esther 3:7). We should not employ the same phrase in reference to God. It is possible that I.E. uses the word "place" (*makom*) here in an ironic sense; for as noted above, "Place" (*makom*) in rabbinic literature at times refers to God.

<sup>584</sup> The *piyyut* says that God will create a new heaven. This concept is based on Is. 65:17. However, Is. 65:17 also speaks of the earth passing away. How can God reign from Zion, if the earth passes away? Actually, Is. 65:17 says that heaven and earth shall pass away, and then God will create a new heaven and earth.

<sup>585</sup> The line reads: *liriy* (or *liyre'iy*) *yakpil* / *va-chodashim yakhpil* / *le-yom zeh pur hippil* / *u-me-tzion yimlokh*. The poet needed a word that ended in "-*pil*" so that it would rhyme with *yakpil* and *yakhpil*. Hence, the choice of *hippil*. Once he had chosen *hippil*—which is a verb—he needed an object for the verb. He chose *pur* because the Book of Esther reads: *hippil pur* (Esther 3:7). However, I.E. believes that this was a wrong choice, for in the book of Esther it was Haman who cast lots (*hippil pur*). Rabbi Elazar Ha-Kalir obviously did not share I.E.'s point of view. He believed that it was good to give new and clever meanings to Biblical terms.

<sup>586</sup> If, for the purpose of rhyme, the poet sought a phrase that ends with *pill*, why did he choose *pur hippil*? He could have composed a poem whose stitches end in *pill* without using *pur hippil*. Ibn Ezra plays with the word *pil*. *Pil* means an elephant. He asks: "Why did the poet ride on an elephant (*pil*) and (like Haman) cast a lot (*pur*)?" In other words, "Why did the poet employ the phrase *pur hippil*?"

dreamed<sup>588</sup> that he must compose a poem that rhymes with *pil*, and then when he awoke he felt compelled to act in accordance with the meaning of his dream,<sup>589</sup> then he should have written as follows:

*Lochetz yapil* (He will cast down the oppressor into a dark place). *Le-mitnase yappil* (He will throw down the haughty)

*Ve-ramei lev yashpil* (He will lower the arrogant). *Umi-tzion yimlokh* (He will reign from Zion).

**Two.** Rabbi Elazar Ha-Kalir's poems contain Talmudic terminology.<sup>590</sup> It is well known that there are many words in the Talmud that are not in the Holy Tongue.<sup>591</sup>

Now the Rabbis said: the language of Scripture stands by itself, and the language of the Talmud stands by itself.<sup>592</sup>

Who brought this pain; that is, the pain of praying in foreign languages, up on us?<sup>593</sup>

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<sup>587</sup> Why did he employ the phrase *pur hippil*? That is, if Rabbi Elazar felt compelled to rhyme the stiches of the poem with words ending in *-pil*, why did he employ the phrase *pur hippil*? "Throwing *pil* to the ground" is a sarcastic way of saying he should not have chosen the phrase *pur hippil* in order to rhyme something with *-pil*.

<sup>588</sup> If heaven informed the poet in a dream that he had to compose a poem that ends in *-pil*, then he could do so with a phrase other than *pur hippil*.

<sup>589</sup> Literally, in accordance with the interpretation of the dream.

<sup>590</sup> Literally, are mixed with Talmudic terminology.

<sup>591</sup> The Talmud is mainly written in Aramaic. It also contains words of Greek, Latin, and Persian origin.

<sup>592</sup> Biblical Hebrew and Talmudic speech are two different languages.

<sup>593</sup> I.E. was clearly opposed to public prayer offered in non-Hebrew languages, including Aramaic.

Did not Nehemiah chastise those who spoke in the language of Ashdod (Neh. 13:24)? How much more so [would he be opposed] to praying [in the language of Ashdod]?

Why should we not learn from the established prayers<sup>594</sup> which are entirely composed in pure Hebrew?

Why should we pray in the language of the Medes, Persians, Edomites,<sup>595</sup> and Ishmaelites?<sup>596</sup>

**Three:** Even the words that are in the holy tongue [in the *piyyutim* of Rabbi Elazar] contain major mistakes. The word *aniskhah* (I will pour a libation) in *aniskha malki le-fanav* (I will pour a libation my king before him)<sup>597</sup> is an example.<sup>598</sup>

We find a word similar to *aniskhah* in *nasakhti* (I have established)<sup>599</sup> in *va-ani nasakhti malki* (Truly it is I that have established My king) (Ps. 2:6).<sup>600</sup>

*Nasakhti* (I have established) is a *kal*.<sup>601</sup> It follows the form of *nafalti* (I am fallen) (Micah 7:8), and *nadarti* (I have vowed) (2 Sam.15:7).<sup>602</sup> The [first person]

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<sup>594</sup> The prayers handed down by the Talmudic sages.

<sup>595</sup> Christians.

<sup>596</sup> Arabs.

<sup>597</sup> Translated literally.

<sup>598</sup> Translated according to I.E. The *piyyut Ansikhah Malki*, is recited as part of the *malkhiyut* blessings on Rosh Ha-Shanah, during the repetition of the Amidah. See Machzor Rabba He-Chadash; Rosh Ha-Shanah; Reprint by Eshkol; Israel; 1994 p. 429. See note 23.

<sup>599</sup> *Aniskhah* and *nasakhti* both come from the root, *nun, samekh, kaf*.

One can therefore argue that *aniskhah malki* (I will pour a libation for my king) is proper Hebrew for Scripture reads *va-ani nasakhti malki*. If we relate *aniskhah malki* to *va-ani nasakhti malki*, then *aniskhah malki* means "I will cause my king to be established"; or more literally, "I will establish my king." I.E. will later reject this interpretation.

<sup>601</sup> In other words, *aniskha malki* does not mean the same as *nasakhti malki* because *aniskha* is a *kal* and *aniskha* a *hifil*.

imperfect of *nasakhti* is *essokh* or *ensokh*. It follows the form of *eppol* (I will fall)<sup>603</sup> (1 Chron. 21:13) and *eddor* (I will vow).<sup>604</sup>

The [third person perfect] *hifil* form [of the root *nun, peh, lamed*] is *hippil* (he threw down). The [first person] imperfect form [of the root *nun, peh, lamed*] is *appil* (I will throw down). Similarly, in the imperfect [first person], the word *hissikh* (he poured a drink offering)<sup>605</sup> becomes *assikh* (I will pour a drink offering),<sup>606</sup> or *ansikh* if the *nun* is present.<sup>607</sup> Compare, *lanpil* (to fall away)<sup>608</sup> in *ve-lanpil yerekh* (and the thigh to fall away) (Num. 5:22). Thus (according to the rules of Hebrew grammar), the meaning of *ansikhah*<sup>609</sup> *malki* would be, "I will make of him<sup>610</sup> drink offered."<sup>611</sup> Compare, *assikh* (I will pour a drink offering) in *I will not pour their drink-offerings of blood* (Ps. 16:4).<sup>612</sup>

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<sup>602</sup>*Nasakhti, nafalti and nadarti* come from roots that have a *nun* as their first letter. They are first person perfect *kal* forms.

<sup>603</sup> Literally, I will fall.

<sup>604</sup> *Eppol* and *eddor* come from roots that have a *nun* as their first letter. The word *eddor* is not found in Scripture.

<sup>605</sup> *Hissikh* is a *hifil*, from the root *nun. samekh, kaf*.

<sup>606</sup> Translated literally.

<sup>607</sup> The *nun* is usually dropped in the imperfect *kal* form in words whose first root letter is *nun*. Hence I.E.'s comment.

<sup>608</sup> *Lanpil* is an example of a word where the *nun* is not dropped in the *hifil* in a word whose first root letter is a *nun*.

<sup>609</sup> *Ansikha* is a *hifil*.

<sup>610</sup> My king.

<sup>611</sup> For the root *nun, samekh kaf* in the *hifil* means I will make into a drink offering.

<sup>612</sup> Translated according to I.E.

Some say that *nasahkti malki* (Ps. 2:6) means “I anointed my king.”<sup>613</sup> If so, then we have a second error here.<sup>614</sup>

Why didn't Rabbi Elazar say, “I will exalt my king,” or “I will praise or give thanks (to my king),” or “I will sanctify (my king).” He employed the word *aniskhah*<sup>615</sup> only because he wanted to display his wisdom to his audience.<sup>616</sup>

We are obligated to know Hebrew grammar so that we do not err like those who employ the word *zenenu* (feed us)<sup>617</sup> in the [third] blessing recited following a meal.<sup>618</sup> Those who do so do not realize that *zenenu* comes from *zanah* (turn aside).<sup>619</sup> It is like *anenu* (answer us) which comes from the word *anah* (answered).<sup>620</sup> The imperative of *zan* (feed) is *zunenu* (feed us).<sup>621</sup> *Zunenu* is like

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<sup>613</sup> The root *nun, samekh, kaf*, also means to pour. These commentators say that by extension it also means to anoint, for anointing consists of pouring oil upon the head. According to this interpretation *ansikha malki* means “I will anoint my king.”

<sup>614</sup> The first error is that Rabbi Elazar used a *hifil* (*ansikha*) when he should have used a *kal* (*esokh*). The second error is the implication that a human being can anoint God as king (Filwarg, Meijler).

<sup>615</sup> Literally, he only did this.

<sup>616</sup> Literally, his listeners. R. Elazar Ha-Kalir tried to impress people by introducing new words and new forms of words. I.E. was opposed to this when composing religious poetry. "Before Ha-Kalir, the Hebrew language was very rigid. For example, the nouns and verbs were fixed in their form." Posner, S., *R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Kinot Mesorat HaRav* (R. Simon Posner ed.), pp. 386-387.) It should be noted that in medieval France and Germany, Rabbi Elazar Ha-Kalir was held in great esteem, and that commentaries were written on his poems.

<sup>617</sup> Rather than *zunenu*, the accepted reading.

<sup>618</sup> The blessing opens with the word *rachem*.

<sup>619</sup> Thus, *zenenu* means “turn us aside.” This is an improper request. Furthermore, it has nothing to do with a blessing that thanks God for giving us food.

<sup>620</sup> *Anenu* comes from the root *ayin, nun, heh*. Similarly, *zenunu* comes from the root *zayin, nun, heh* meaning “to turn aside.”

*shuvenu*<sup>622</sup> in *shuvenu Elohei yishenu* (Restore us, O God of our salvation) (Ps. 85:5).

[Furthermore, Rabbi Elazar] occasionally uses an imperative in place of a perfect. We find this to be the case when people pray on a fast day, and many say *she-chal anov panekha* (that the humble entreated You). [Now] it is well known that the *shin* prefixed to a word is in place of the word *asher* (who, that, which, for). Compare, *mah she-hayah*<sup>623</sup> *hu she-yihyeh*<sup>624</sup> (that which hath been is that which shall be (Kohelet 1:9). *Chal* (entreat) is an imperative regarding the future.<sup>625</sup> Compare, *chal* entreat) in *Entreat now the favor of the Lord* (1 Kings 13:6).<sup>626</sup> The proper way of saying "that he entreated" is *she-chillah*.<sup>627</sup> Compare the word *chillah* (entreated) in *he entreated the Lord his God* (2 Chron. 33:12).

Additionally, the Holy Tongue in the hands of Rabbi Elazar is like a city with breached walls or without walls, for he employed the masculine for the feminine and the feminine for the masculine. [Thus, one of his poems reads:] *Shoshan emek uyyemah* (the frightened lily of the valley).<sup>628</sup> It is well known that the *heh* in the word *shoshannah* (lily) (2 Chron. 4:5) indicates that the word is a feminine. The

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<sup>621</sup> I.E.'s point is that the word for "feed" comes from the root *zayin, vav, nun*, not *zayin, nun, heh*. This being the case, our blessing should read *zunenu*.

<sup>622</sup> The root of *shuvenu* is *shin, vav, bet*.

<sup>623</sup> *She-hayah* means the same as *asher hayah*.

<sup>624</sup> *She-yihyeh* means the same as *asher yiheyeh*.

<sup>625</sup> It commands a person what to do, in this case "to entreat," now or in the future. Hence, one cannot say *she-chal* when speaking of the past. One cannot command anything be done in the past.

<sup>626</sup> *Chal* is the imperative "entreat," not the perfect "entreated."

<sup>627</sup> That is, to use *chillah* and not *chal* when one wants to say "entreated" in the past tense.

<sup>628</sup> See *Machzor Rabba He-Chadash*; Yom Kippur Second *piyyut*; Musaf; Reprint by Eshkol; Israel; p. 441.

*heh* changes into a *tav* when the word is in the construct.<sup>629</sup> Compare, *shoshannat ha-amakim* (a lily of the valleys) (Song of Songs 2:1). When the *heh* or *tav* is dropped the word is masculine.<sup>630</sup> Compare, *tzedakah* (righteousness) (Gen. 15:6)<sup>631</sup> and *tzedek* (righteously) (Deut. 1:16).<sup>632</sup>

Rabbi Elazar refers to the *shoshan* (lily) as *uyyemah* (frightened).<sup>633</sup> Why did he run away from the biblical verse [which reads *shoshannat ha-amakim* (a lily of the valleys) (Songs of Songs 2:1)]? Why didn't he employ the clause *shoshannat emek uyyemah*? Furthermore, why does he describe the lily as "frightened"? What connection is there between a lily and fright?<sup>634</sup> Can a lily be frightened? The only adjectives applicable to a lily are cut, fresh, or dry.

One of the wise men of this generation said that Rabbi Elazar had to use the term *uyyemah* (frightened)<sup>635</sup> because he wanted his verse to be "rich."<sup>636</sup> I replied: If you call this line "rich" then Rabbi Elazar's *piyyutim* contain rhymes that are so

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<sup>629</sup> I.E. later says that this is the form of the word that Rabbi Elazar should have used, not *shoshan*.

<sup>630</sup> In other words, *shoshan* is the masculine form of *shoshannah*.

<sup>631</sup> *Tzedakah* is feminine.

<sup>632</sup> *Tzedek* is masculine.

<sup>633</sup> *Shoshan* is masculine. *uyyemah* is feminine. Rabbi Elazar thus combined a masculine noun with a feminine adjective, contrary to the rules of Hebrew grammar.

<sup>634</sup> Lilies do not have emotions.

<sup>635</sup> Rather than the masculine *uyyam*.

<sup>636</sup> A verse that employs words that end in three identical sounds (Meijler). The first line of Rabbi Elazar's *piyyut* reads: *Shoshan emek uyyemah, Shabbat shabbaton le-kayyemah* (This God-fearing people, likened to a lily in the valley, observes Yom Kippur as a day of complete rest). *Uyyemah* (fearing) rhymes perfectly with *kayyemah* (observes). Hence, Rabbi Elazar used the word *uyyemah*. The problem is that *shoshan* is masculine. The poem should have read *shoshannat emek uyyemah*.

poor and poverty-stricken that they have to go begging door to door.<sup>637</sup> For [example], he paired<sup>638</sup> *har* (mountain) with *nivchar* (chosen).<sup>639</sup> If he did so because the *heh* and *chet* are gutturals, then he should also pair the *alef* and *ayin*, and the *bet* and the *vav*, for he also pairs the word *levi* (Levite) with the word *navi* (prophet).<sup>640</sup> He should similarly combine the *mem* and the *peh*.<sup>641</sup> There should thus be five types of rhyming [of stich endings], for there are five sources that produce letters.<sup>642</sup>

If Rabbi Elazar combined the *heh* and the *chet*<sup>643</sup> because they are similar when written<sup>644</sup> then he should combine the *resh* and the *dalet*.<sup>645</sup> He should certainly

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<sup>637</sup> If “rich” means “rhyming,” then there are many verses’ endings in Rabbi Elazar's *piyyutim* that are improperly rhymed.

<sup>638</sup> He rhymed a line ending with *heh*, *resh* with a line ending with *chet*, *resh*.

<sup>639</sup> *Har* and *nivchar* are not rich verses, for among other things their consonants do not rhyme perfectly.

<sup>640</sup> Rabbi Elazar wrote a *piyyut* for *parshat ha-chodesh* which reads: *chadashot le-havi, be-yad ish navi, mi-shevet levi* (to bring new things, by the hand of the prophet, from the tribe of Levi). *Levi* is spelled with a *vav*, and *navi* with a *vet*, both are labials. Poem is quoted by R. Goodman p. 63, note 79.

<sup>641</sup> Both letter are labials.

<sup>642</sup> Dentals, guttural, labials, linguals, and palatals. I.E.'s point is that if “rhyme” is determined by the origin of the letter, then we should not only combine similar sounding letters but also those that have a common origin. However, we only rhyme letters that sound the same (Meijler). R. Goodman explains: If rhyme in poetry is based on the origin of letters, then only letters that have the same origin should be combined.

<sup>643</sup> That is, in *har* and *nivchar*.

<sup>644</sup> If one maintains that Rabbi Elazar paired the *heh* and the *chet* because they are similar when written then he should have also balanced the *resh* with the *dalet*.

<sup>645</sup> He never does this.

have done so, because we find *Deuel* (Num. 1:14) and *Reuel* (ibid. 2:14), and *Dodanim* (Gen. 10:4) and *Rodanim* (1Chron. 1:7).<sup>646</sup>

Rabbi Elazar should also pair<sup>647</sup> *mishpatim* (ordinances)<sup>648</sup> with *pittim* (pieces of bread)<sup>649</sup> because they have one origin.<sup>650</sup> Furthermore, the *tet* is found in place of the *tav* in the words *nitztaddak* (clear ourselves) (Gen. 44:16), *hitztayyadnu* (we took for our provision) (Josh.9:12), and *va-yitztayyaru* (and made as if they had been ambassadors) (ibid. 9:4).<sup>651</sup>

Rabbi Elazar also paired<sup>652</sup> *yom* (day) with *pidyon* (for redemption) and *elyon* (most high).<sup>653</sup> The latter is also incorrect. Now even though we find a *mem* in place of a *nun* and a *nun* in place of a *mem*<sup>654</sup> in *chayyin* (his own life) (Job 24:22) and *chittin* (wheat) (Ezek. 4:9), how could the *mem* of *yom*—which is a root letter—interchange with the *nun* of *elyon* or *pidyon* which is not a root letter? For the root of *elyon* is *ayin*, *lamed*, *heh* and the root of *pidyon* is *peh*, *dalet*, *heh*.

Furthermore, what purpose is there to rhyme, aside from the fact that it be pleasant to the ear when it senses that the end of a line rhymes with the end of its

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<sup>646</sup> We thus see that Scripture interchanges the *dalet* and *resh*.

<sup>647</sup> Literally, combine.

<sup>648</sup> *Mishpatim* is spelled with a *tet*.

<sup>649</sup> *Pittim* is spelled with a *tav*.

<sup>650</sup> They are both linguals.

<sup>651</sup> Hence, Rabbi Elazar should match the *tet* and *tav*. However, he does not.

<sup>652</sup> Literally, similarly combined.

<sup>653</sup> In the *piyyut* opening with the words *odekha ki anafta bi*. This *piyyut* is recited in the *shacharit* service on Yom Kippur in the Italian tradition. The pertinent line is quoted by R. Goodman in note 83, p. 104

<sup>654</sup> Literally, and its opposite.

counterpart?<sup>655</sup> Perhaps Rabbi Elazar had a sixth sense,<sup>656</sup> and perceived that the *mem* sounds like the *nun* even though they do not come from one source.<sup>657</sup>

Rabbi Elazar also matched<sup>658</sup> *osher* (wealth)<sup>659</sup> with *asser te-asser*<sup>660</sup> (Thou shalt surely tithe) (Deut. 14:22). This too is incorrect unless the one who prays comes from the tribe of Ephraim.<sup>661</sup>

Some say: We do not question the lion after he dies.<sup>662</sup>

The response to the above is as follows:

God's spirit made all of us. Those who came before us, like us, were made out of clay.<sup>663</sup>

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<sup>655</sup> In other words, why did, Rabbi Elazar match *yom* with *pidyon* when they do not rhyme. The *piyyut* to which I.E. refers to is quoted by R. Goodman, p. 64, note 83.

<sup>656</sup> I.E. is being sarcastic.

<sup>657</sup> The *mem* is a labial. The *nun* is a lingual. They do not sound the same and cannot be matched in a rhyme. However, maybe Rabbi Elazar had a special sense, and to him the *nun* and *mem* sounded the same. I.E. is obviously being sarcastic.

<sup>658</sup> Literally, combined.

<sup>659</sup> Spelled with a *shin*.

<sup>660</sup> Both spelled with a *sin*.

<sup>661</sup> People from the tribe of Ephraim could not distinguish a *shin* from a *sin*. They sounded both as a *sin*. See Judges 12:4-6.

<sup>662</sup> See Gittin 83b.

<sup>663</sup> See Job: 33:4-6: *The spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty given me life.... Behold, I am toward God even as thou art; I also am formed out of the clay.* I.E.'s point is that we are as good as the ancients. They were mere human beings. So are we. Hence, we may differ with them if we can prove that they erred and that we are correct.

We all know that Daniel was a prophet.<sup>664</sup> He was chief prefect over all the magicians and wise men of Babylon. Nevertheless, our Sages of blessed memory said that Daniel erred in his calculations.<sup>665</sup> Now, calculations are simple.<sup>666</sup> Furthermore, Jeremiah the prophet was a contemporary of Daniel.<sup>667</sup>

After the Rabbis offered proof that Daniel erred, did anyone say to the Sages: If Daniel were alive today, would he not point out the mistake of those who claim that he erred?<sup>668</sup>

The Sages said: The merciful God seeks the heart.<sup>669</sup> If this be so, why the need to verbalize prayer?<sup>670</sup> The Book of Psalms says that God knows what is hidden in the heart.<sup>671</sup>

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<sup>664</sup> See I.E. on Dan. 1:17; 8:17.

<sup>665</sup> Jeremiah prophesied that the Babylonian exile would last 70 years. See Jer. 29:10. According to the Talmud, Daniel erred in calculating when the 70 years would come to an end. See Megillah 12a.

<sup>666</sup> Yet, Daniel erred in his calculations.

<sup>667</sup> Jeremiah's prophecy was not an ancient prophecy, for Daniel and Jeremiah lived at the same time. According to I.E., it is strange that Daniel a prophet erred in understanding the words of a contemporary prophet. Nevertheless, the Rabbis say that he did.

<sup>668</sup> In other words, no Rabbi said, "How can we say that Daniel erred? He couldn't have erred. He was a prophet. If Daniel were alive today, he would show that those who accuse him of error are themselves in error."

<sup>669</sup> Sanhedrin 106b. Those who quote the Talmud to the effect that "God seeks the heart" maintain that one need not adhere to the rules of grammar when one prays. Because God knows the intention of the supplicant, if his intentions are correct, a mistake in grammar will not invalidate the prayer.

<sup>670</sup> If God knows what we mean, even when we employ ungrammatical language, and allows us to use improper language, why pray at all? God knows what is in our hearts.

<sup>671</sup> See Ps. 44:22.

Didn't the ancients ordain that we pray on the Day of Atonement: "[Our God and God of our fathers,] be with the mouth of the messengers of Your people, the house of Israel...May they not stumble in their speech"?<sup>672</sup>

Four. All of Rabbi Elazar's *piyyutim* are saturated with midrash and aggadot. However, our wise men said: *A verse never loses its plain meaning.*<sup>673</sup> This being so, one should employ only unambiguous language when he prays.<sup>674</sup> One should avoid employing secrets or parables. One should not pray in a way that is not in keeping with the halakhah,<sup>675</sup> or employ a prayer that can be interpreted in many ways.

Do we not know that the midrash on Song of Songs writes that every time the word Shelomoh (Solomon) is mentioned in Song of Songs, it refers to the Holy One, for the meaning of "Shelomoh" is "the King whose peace (*shalom*) is His"? Now, is it proper for one to pray: "Save me, O King Solomon"?<sup>676</sup>

Now Scripture relates that there were those who asked:<sup>677</sup> *What is the massa of the Lord* (Jer.23:33)?

It is known that the word *massa* at times means a prophecy.<sup>678</sup>

The prophet Jeremiah did not understand what the people speaking to him were saying<sup>679</sup> when they asked him: What is the *massa* of the Lord?<sup>680</sup> [The prophet

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<sup>672</sup> Ashekenazi Yom Kippur *musaf* service.

<sup>673</sup> Shabbat 63a.

<sup>674</sup> Literally, it is proper for one to pray only.

<sup>675</sup> According to halakhah, certain types of prayers are not to be offered.

<sup>676</sup> The intention being, "Save me O God."

<sup>677</sup> Literally, said.

<sup>678</sup> See Nachum 1:1, Chavakkuk 1:1, Malachi 1:1.

<sup>679</sup> Literally, the prophet did not know their secret.

thought that the people asked: What is God's message? However, in reality, the people] employed the word *massa* in the sense of "burden," as in *massa'o* (his burden) in *every one to his service and to his burdenn* (Num. 4:49). [What the people really meant was: O, how burdensome is the word of God!].

The One who knows hidden things<sup>681</sup> told the prophet to tell them: *for every man's own word shall be his burden;*<sup>682</sup> *and would ye pervert the words of the living God, of the Lord of hosts our God?* (Jer.23:36).<sup>683</sup> *Thus shall ye say, everyone to his neighbor, and every one to his brother:*<sup>684</sup> *What hath the Lord answered? and: What hath the Lord spoken?* (ibid.23:35). In other words, employ a word whose meaning is not in doubt.<sup>685</sup>

Similarly, *and shalt call Me no more baali* (Hosea 2:18).<sup>686</sup> [Why not?] Doesn't *the ba'al of her youth* (Joel 1:8) refer to a man?<sup>687</sup> The prophet says, *and shalt call Me no more baali*, because the word *ba'al* might mistakenly be taken to refer to an idol. The prophet says that a word<sup>688</sup> that might mistakenly be taken to refer to an

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<sup>680</sup> Literally: The prophet Jeremiah did not know the secret of those saying to him: What is the burden of the Lord?

<sup>681</sup> God. God knew what they meant. They meant that God's word was a burden. However, Jeremiah thought that they were asking: What is God's message?

<sup>682</sup> What they say will be their burden, for they referred to God's word as a burden.

<sup>683</sup> Would you pervert the words of the living God by referring to it as a burden?

<sup>684</sup> They should not employ the word *massa* when asking: What has God spoken?

<sup>685</sup> Do not employ the word "burden" when you speak of God's word, for the word "burden" is vague. It can refer to God's message in a positive way, or it can refer to God's word as a burden. Hence do not ask: What is God's burden? Ask: What is God's message?

<sup>686</sup> The prophet Hosea says that in the future Israel "shall not call Me *ba'ali* but shall refer to Me by the term *ishi* (my man (Hosea 2:18)." This can be taken to mean: You shall not longer call Me "my *ba'al*." *Ba'al* is the name of an idol. It also means "husband."

<sup>687</sup> Why shouldn't Israel refer to God as "my *ba'al*" when *ba'al* also means "husband"?

<sup>688</sup> Literally, even a word.

idol shall not be used with reference to God. Hence, the prophet states *thou shalt call Me no more banal but shall call Me ishi* (my man) (Hosea 2:18).

Rabbi Saadiah Gaon avoided the four pitfalls<sup>689</sup> mentioned above in his two supplications.<sup>690</sup> No composer ever composed supplications equal to his formulations. His compositions employ the language of Scripture and follow the rules of grammar. They do not contain riddles, parables, and midrashic interpretations.

There was a wise man in France. He, too, composed a prayer.<sup>691</sup> It opens with: "O Lord: Give ear to my words." His composition contains errors.

One of them is:<sup>692</sup> "You created worlds; they have no boundaries."<sup>693</sup> Now that which has no boundaries cannot be created.<sup>694</sup>

The wise man wrote:<sup>695</sup> "Your Name is in You, in You is Your Name." If the poet knew the [true] meaning of the word *shem* (name), [composing such a line] would not have entered his mind.<sup>696</sup> Furthermore, once the poet said, "Your Name is in

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<sup>689</sup> Literally, things.

<sup>690</sup> The two supplications are found in the Siddur of Rabbi Saadiah Gaon, p. 47-87. R. Goodman, p. 66; note 110.

<sup>691</sup> Literally, a request.

<sup>692</sup> Literally, one of them reads.

<sup>693</sup> Literally, You enlarged worlds, they have no boundaries.

<sup>694</sup> Hence, it is wrong for one to say: "You created worlds, they have no boundaries."

<sup>695</sup> Literally, he says.

<sup>696</sup> According to I.E., the word *shem* is connected to the word *sham*, "there." The word *shem* means that the one whom we call, so-and-so is there; that is, the name takes the place of the subject. This being the case, one cannot say, "Your name is in You," for a name is not something that is in a person—it merely indicates the person. See I.E. on Job 23:7.

You," he implied "In You is Your Name."<sup>697</sup> For what difference is there between: "peace be unto you and unto you be peace"; "Re'uven are you, you are Re'uven"; *take them alive* (1 Kings 20:18), and *alive take them* (ibid); *the Lord bless thee and keep thee*, and *the Lord keep thee from all evil* (Ps. 121:7).<sup>698</sup> This is not the manner of prayer. It is the manner of mockery.

Another wise man joined two words and made them into one.<sup>699</sup> He made up the word *avarmil*. The meaning of *avarmil* is, "I will explain a word (*ava'er millah*)," or "I will clarify a word (*avarer millah*)." <sup>700</sup> He did the opposite of what he said. He did not explain the word [that he intended to explain] and he did not speak clearly. He mixed up the Hebrew tongue in his use of language. I cannot [bother to] explain one out of the thousands of errors made by the *payyotanim*.<sup>701</sup>

In my opinion, a person should not employ these poems in his prayers. He should pray using the fixed liturgy, [and] keep his words to a minimum so that he is not punished when judged

## 2. FOR A DREAM COMETH THROUGH A MULTITUDE OF BUSINESS; AND A FOOL'S VOICE THROUGH A MULTITUDE OF WORDS.

FOR A DREAM COMETH THROUGH A MULTITUDE OF BUSINESS. It is known that a dream which deals with many things<sup>702</sup> results from a mixture of foods [eaten before the onset of sleep] and the overwhelming power of one of the

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<sup>697</sup>“Your Name is in You" implies "In You is Your Name." The question arises: why did the poet repeat himself?

<sup>698</sup> The clauses merely repeat themselves.

<sup>699</sup> Literally, made them one in his mouth.

<sup>700</sup> In other words, *avarmil* is a combination of *ava'er millah* or *avarer millah*.

<sup>701</sup> What point would there be noting one error, when there would be thousands more to list?

<sup>702</sup> Literally, it is known when a dream is mixed with many things.

four elements.<sup>703</sup> Such a dream cannot be interpreted. It does not predict anything good or evil, for it is a vain dream. A fool who issues a multitude of words is compared to such a dream.<sup>704</sup> Whoever speaks a lot, brings sin.<sup>705</sup> This is certainly so in the place set aside to always mention there the Name of the Most High.<sup>706</sup>

**3. WHEN THOU VOWEST A VOW UNTO GOD, DEFER NOT TO PAY IT, FOR HE HATH NO PLEASURE IN FOOLS; PAY THAT WHICH THOU VOWEST.**

WHEN THOU VOWEST A VOW UNTO GOD. Just as I instructed<sup>707</sup> you to be careful with your words in the house of God,<sup>708</sup> I instruct<sup>709</sup> you to take heed in all places and at all times that you mention the name of God. If you vow a vow to the Lord keep the words uttered by your lips. Do not be one of the fools, for God has no pleasure in them.

**4. BETTER IS IT THAT THOU SHOULDEST NOT VOW, THAN THAT THOU SHOULDEST VOW AND NOT PAY.**

BETTER IS IT THAT THOU SHOULDEST NOT VOW. Compare, *But if thou shalt forbear to vow, [it shall be no sin in thee]* (Deut. 23:23).

**5. SUFFER NOT THY MOUTH TO BRING THY FLESH INTO GUILT, NEITHER SAY THOU BEFORE THE MESSENGER, THAT IT WAS AN**

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<sup>703</sup> Literally, the four roots: fire, air, water, and earth. See I.E. on 1:4. All things are made from a mixture of these four elements. When one of the four overpowers the others, there is an imbalance. This imbalance results in a dream with many elements.

<sup>704</sup> The words of a fool who issues a multitude of words is compared to the nonsense seen in a nonsensical and uninterruptable dream.

<sup>705</sup> Ethics of the Fathers 1:1

<sup>706</sup> See I.E. on verse 1.

<sup>707</sup> Literally, commanded.

<sup>708</sup> See I.E. on Verse 1.

<sup>709</sup> Literally, commanded.

ERROR; WHEREFORE SHOULD GOD BE ANGRY AT THY VOICE, AND DESTROY THE WORK OF THY HANDS?

SUFFER NOT THY MOUTH. Why should your mouth give birth to guilt and [bring] evil<sup>710</sup> upon your flesh; that is, upon your body. [This is what will happen] if you do not keep<sup>711</sup> what your mouth uttered.

Know that the ways of a man are before God.<sup>712</sup> God counts all of his steps.<sup>713</sup> One of the angels who serve God is appointed to record in a book all the words that come out of a person's mouth. Do not tell the angel that you uttered the vow in error.

AND DESTROY. *Ve-chibbel* means “and destroy.” Compare, *mechabbelim* (that destroy)<sup>714</sup> in *that destroy the vineyards* (Song of Songs 2:15).

The word *chibbel*<sup>715</sup> is also found to mean “gave birth.”<sup>716</sup> Compare, *yechabbel* (he gives birth to) in *Behold, he gives birth to iniquity* (Ps. 7:15)<sup>717</sup> and *chibblatekha* (she gave birth to you) and *chibbelah* (she gave birth to) in, *there*

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<sup>710</sup> In other words, the word *chet* (guilt) is here to be rendered, evil. *Suffer not thy mouth to bring thy flesh into guilt* is to be interpreted, suffer not thy mouth to bring evil upon thy flesh. I.E. renders thus because *to bring thy flesh into guilt* is ambiguous.

<sup>711</sup> Literally, pay.

<sup>712</sup> See Prov.5:21

<sup>713</sup> See Job 31:4.

<sup>714</sup> Translated literally.

<sup>715</sup> Literally, it.

<sup>716</sup> Literally, to give birth.

<sup>717</sup> Translated according to I.E. The wicked person gives birth to iniquity.

*your mother gave birth to you ,there the one who gave birth to you, brought you forth* (Song of Songs 8:5).<sup>718</sup>

It is possible that *chibbel* comes from the word *chavalim* (throes) in *pangs and throes shall take hold of them* (Is. 13:8). It is so called because of the throes of giving birth.<sup>719</sup>

We also find *chibbel* used in a third way. It is used for the mast of a boat. Compare, *or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast* (*chibbel*) (Prov.23:34).<sup>720</sup> All the ropes (*chavalim*) are connected to it.<sup>721</sup> *Chibbel* [in Prov. 23:34] is an adjective.<sup>722</sup> It is like the word *itter* (left-handed)<sup>723</sup> in *a man left-handed* (Judges 3:15).

## 6. FOR THROUGH THE MULTITUDE OF DREAMS AND VANITIES THERE ARE ALSO MANY WORDS; BUT FEAR THOU GOD.

FOR THROUGH THE MULTITUDE. The word *ve-rov* (through the multitude) is similar to the word *be-rov* (through a multitude) in *through a multitude of business* (v. 2).<sup>724</sup>

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<sup>718</sup> Translated according to I.E. According to this interpretation, the word *chibbel* has two meanings: 1) to destroy, and 2) to give birth.

<sup>719</sup> In this case, *chibbel* does not mean “gave birth,” but rather “experienced birth pains” or “travailed.” Thus, Song of Songs 8:5 should be rendered: *there thy mother was in travail with thee; there was she in travail and brought thee forth*).

<sup>720</sup> Literally, "We also find *chibbel* used in a third way, in *or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast* (*chibbel*) (Prov. 23:34). *Chibbel* refers to the mast of a boat."

<sup>721</sup> *Chibbel* is connected to the word *chevel* (rope).

<sup>722</sup> It is not a verb like *chibbel* in our verse and the similar word in Songs of Songs 8:5. It is an adjective describing a mast; meaning “roped.” R. Goodman.

<sup>723</sup> *Chibbel* is vocalized like *itter*. *Itter* is an adjective. I.E. comments thus because *chibbel* looks like a verb. Indeed, it is a verb in our verse.

<sup>724</sup> I.E. renders *For through the multitude of dreams and vanities there are also many words; but fear thou God* as follows: a dream that contains a multitude of items and many things is a vain

BUT FEAR THOU GOD in all things.<sup>725</sup> On the other hand, the meaning of our verse is: See many dreams and things of no value. Also speak many words; but fear God. The meaning of the latter is, you are permitted to speak about anything<sup>726</sup> except [in a place] where there is mention of God ].<sup>727</sup>

7. IF THOU SEEST THE OPPRESSION OF THE POOR, AND THE VIOLENT PERVERTING OF JUSTICE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS IN THE STATE, MARVEL NOT AT THE MATTER; FOR ONE HIGHER THAN THE HIGH WATCHETH, AND THERE ARE HIGHER THAN THEY.

IF THOU SEEST THE OPPRESSION OF THE POOR.<sup>728</sup> Perhaps you will think that no one is listening<sup>729</sup> to what you say, because you see violence committed in public and no one comes to the aid of the victim.<sup>730</sup>

Kohelet speaks of a poor person because people are obligated to help him. However, the poor person is oppressed [and no one helps him].<sup>731</sup>

[AND THE VIOLENT PERVERTING OF JUSTICE<sup>732</sup> ] The word *gezel*<sup>733</sup> (violent perverting) is in the construct [with *mishpat* (justice)].<sup>734</sup> Compare, *ve-*

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dream; but fear thou God.” In other words, do not worry about the dream, *but fear God in all things*.

<sup>725</sup> Speak and see many things, but fear God. That is, see and speak many things, but do not rebel against God.

<sup>726</sup> Your multitude of dreams and the vanities which you have seen.

<sup>727</sup> You can speak about vain things outside the House of God. However, be very careful of what you say when you are in the House of God. Yonah ben Shelomo Filwarg, *Benei Reshelf*, Petrokov, 1900.p. 35.

<sup>728</sup> Literally, a poor person.

<sup>729</sup> Literally, watching.

<sup>730</sup> It thus appears that God is not aware of what happens on earth.

<sup>731</sup> Literally, Behold, he is oppressed.

*geder* (and the stone wall)<sup>735</sup> in *and the stone wall thereof was broken down* (Prov. 24:31). When *gezel* and *geder*<sup>736</sup> are in the absolute, they are vocalized *gader*<sup>737</sup> (a fence) as a *fence being on this side* (Num. 22:24) and *gazel*<sup>738</sup> (robbery) in *or of robbery* (Lev. 5:21).

[IN THE STATE] Kohelet mentions the state because he wants to emphasize that the injustice [that he speaks of] is committed before the eyes of all and not in the wilderness.

MARVEL NOT AT THE MATTER. Do not say: Why does God decline to help the oppressed?

Know that there is a "watcher" who sees this violence. There is more than one "watcher." Each one is higher than the high one [below it]. There are many watchers. No one knows their number, for there are higher beings above those of lower status.<sup>739</sup>

The one who knows the secret of God<sup>740</sup> knows that the "higher than the high" watchers number fifty-five.<sup>741</sup> I cannot explain this.<sup>742</sup>

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<sup>732</sup> Hebrew: *ve-gezel mishpat*.

<sup>733</sup> Vocalized *tzerei, segol*.

<sup>734</sup> *Ve-gezel* is connected to *mishpat*.

<sup>735</sup> *Geder* is in the construct.

<sup>736</sup> Literally, when these words.

<sup>737</sup> Vocalized *kamatz, tzerei*.

<sup>738</sup> Vocalized *hamatz tzerei*.

<sup>739</sup> There are high watchers, there are higher watchers above them, and there are higher watchers above the latter.

<sup>740</sup> The secret that God rules/regulates the universe via the heavenly bodies. See Meijler, *Ezra Le-havin*, Kohelet, p.168.

**8. BUT THE PROFIT OF A LAND EVERY WAY IS A KING THAT MAKETH HIMSELF SERVANT TO THE FIELD.**

**BUT THE PROFIT OF A LAND.** After Kohelet completes his charge regarding the fear of God, he goes back to teaching about earthly affairs. He discusses work which is worthwhile; that is, work that will provide a livelihood and which does not entail sin. He says that working the ground is superior to other occupations in every way. For even a king, a man who has no one above him in status, makes himself a servant to the field, for from it comes his livelihood.

**9. HE THAT LOVETH SILVER SHALL NOT BE SATISFIED WITH SILVER; NOR HE THAT LOVETH ABUNDANCE, WITH INCREASE; THIS ALSO IS VANITY.**

**HE THAT LOVETH SILVER.** The soul of *he that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver.*

**NOR HE THAT LOVETH ABUNDANCE, WITH INCREASE.** There are some people who love to gather money, garments, and various types of merchandise, but do not desire<sup>743</sup> to acquire the produce of the ground.<sup>744</sup>

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<sup>741</sup> There are 48 combinations of the fixed stars in the heavens (see Shlomo Sela, *Abraham Ibn Ezra and the Rise of Medieval Hebrew Science*, Brill, 2003, p. 212). There are also five planets, and the sun and the moon, which are an additional seven. The sum of all these is 55. These heavenly bodies execute God's will. See Meijler, *Ezra Le-havin*, Kohelet, p.168.

<sup>742</sup> According to Meijler, I.E. believes that God arranged the stars in such a way that punishment would naturally follow a sinful act. However, this punishment does not always occur immediately after the sin has been committed. The execution of the punishment is dependent upon various heavenly arrangements. However, the sinner will be ultimately punished. "I cannot explain this" either means, I am not permitted to explain this; or, I do not know the precise workings of the system.

<sup>743</sup> Literally, love.

<sup>744</sup> The Hebrew reads *lo tevu'ah* (nor increase). *Tevu'ah* refers to the produce of the ground. I.E. renders our verse "neither shall he that loveth abundance of gold and silver be satisfied with the produce of the ground."

THIS ALSO IS VANITY. This also (*gam*) refers back to *He that loveth silver*.<sup>745</sup>  
*He that loveth silver* refers to one who only gathers gold and silver.<sup>746</sup>

Others say that the meaning of *nor he that loveth abundance, with increase* is: he that loves a multitude [of things] will not possess the produce of the ground.<sup>747</sup>  
They explain that the term *abundance* refers to the acquisition of male and female slaves and many servants. The meaning of *he that loveth abundance* is: he loves an abundance of servants before him.<sup>748</sup>

**10. WHEN GOODS INCREASE, THEY ARE INCREASED THAT EAT THEM;  
AND WHAT ADVANTAGE IS THERE TO THE OWNER THEREOF, SAVING  
THE BEHOLDING OF THEM WITH HIS EYES?**

WHEN GOODS INCREASE. *Rabbu* (increase) comes from a double root.<sup>749</sup> It is a perfect [in the kal]. We also find the word *rabbu* (increase) which is a [pi'el] plural imperative from a root that drops its third letter.<sup>750</sup> Compare *rabbah* (increase)<sup>751</sup> in *Increase thine army and come out* (Judges 9:29).<sup>752</sup>

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<sup>745</sup> The goals of one who loves silver and of one who loves abundance are both vanity.

<sup>746</sup> The point of the verse is: he that loves only gold and silver, but not produce of the ground, is practicing vanity, for one cannot eat gold and silver.

<sup>747</sup> The meaning of our verse is: He will spend all his money acquiring various things will not have any money left to buy food.

<sup>748</sup> The meaning of our verse is: He will spend all of his money acquiring slaves and servants and will not have any money left to buy food.

<sup>749</sup> Its root is *resh, bet, bet*.

<sup>750</sup> That is, it comes from the root *resh, bet, heh*. I.E.'s point is that there are two similar words derived from different roots with two different meanings. One means “increased” (past tense) and the other “increase” (an imperative).

<sup>751</sup> From the root *resh, bet, heh*.

<sup>752</sup> *Rabbah* is a singular, *rabbu* is plural. Both words are *pi'el* imperatives and come from the root *resh, bet, heh*.

ADVANTAGE. *Kishron* (advantage) means “good.” Compare, *and the thing seems good* (ve-khasher) *before the king* (Est. 8:5).<sup>753</sup> [The meaning of our verse is:] Since those who consume the goods [that are] before him are many, what good will he derive from his goods? His only joy will be looking at them.

**11. SWEET IS THE SLEEP OF A LABORING MAN, WHETHER HE EAT LITTLE OR MUCH; BUT THE SATIETY OF THE RICH WILL NOT SUFFER HIM TO SLEEP.**

SWEET IS THE SLEEP OF A LABORING MAN. It is known that the rich person is in fear day and night because he worries that the king, gangsters, or thieves will take his money.

BUT THE SATIETY OF THE RICH. *Satiety* (sava) refers to monetary satiation. The person spends time at night thinking of ways to satiate himself with wealth.

The word *satiety* might refer back to the word *eat*.<sup>754</sup> Compare, [*Hast thou found honey? Eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be satiated*<sup>755</sup> *therewith, and vomit it* (Prov. 25:16).<sup>756</sup>

THE SLEEP OF A LABORING MAN. The word *shenat* (sleep of) is vocalized with a *pattach* as is the rule with all such words in the construct. However, the word *shenat* (sleep) in *I will not give sleep* (*shenat*) *to mine eyes* (*le-enai*) (Ps. 132:4) is vocalized with a *kamatz*, for the *lamed* placed in front of *enai* (mine eyes) [which precedes *shenat*] breaks the connection.<sup>757</sup>

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<sup>753</sup> Translated literally.

<sup>754</sup> In other words, *satiety* means “satisfied with food.”

<sup>755</sup> Translated literally.

<sup>756</sup> According to this interpretation, *But the satiety of the rich will not suffer him to sleep* is, the overeating of the rich disturbs their sleep.

<sup>757</sup> In other words, *shenat* is not in the construct with *enai*.

Rabbi Moshe Ha-Kohen the Sephardi<sup>758</sup> whose souls rests in Eden, says that the reason that the word *shenat* [in Ps. 132:4] is vocalized with a *kamatz* is because the word *shenat* (sleep)<sup>759</sup> is short for *shenati* (my sleep).<sup>760</sup> The same applies to *nachalat* (heritage)<sup>761</sup> in *yea, I have a goodly heritage* (Ps. 16:6), and the word *zimrat* (song) in *The Lord is my strength and song* (Ex.15:2; Ps.118:14).<sup>762</sup> *Nachalat* (in Ps. 16:6) and *zimrat* (Ex. 15:2; Ps.118:14) are [like *shenat* in Ps. 132:4] also vocalized with a *kamatz*.<sup>763</sup>

## 12. THERE IS A GRIEVOUS EVIL WHICH I HAVE SEEN UNDER THE SUN, NAMELY, RICHES KEPT BY THE OWNER THEREOF TO HIS HURT.

THERE IS A GRIEVOUS EVIL. The word *cholah* (grievous) is most probably related to the word *nachlah* (grievous) in *My wound is grievous* (Jer. 10:19).<sup>764</sup> The word *cholah* comes from a root<sup>765</sup> that drops its third letter.<sup>766</sup>

The meaning of *ra'ah* [*cholah*] is “a grievous evil.”<sup>767</sup> It is similar to *va-choli ra'ah hu* (and it is an evil disease) (Kohelet 6:2).

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<sup>758</sup> A tenth century grammarian and Bible commentator.

<sup>759</sup> In Ps. 132:4.

<sup>760</sup> The word *shenat* in Ps 132:4 is properly vocalized with a *kamatz*, for it is not in the construct.

<sup>761</sup> *Nachalat* is vocalized with a *kamatz*. However, it appears to be a construct. Hence, it should have been vocalized with a *pattach*. Rabbi Moshe thus explains that *nachalat* is short for *nachalati*; hence, it is not a construct and that is why it is vocalized with a *kamatz*.

<sup>762</sup> *Zimrat* is vocalized with a *kamatz*. However, it appears to be a construct. Hence, it should be vocalized with a *pattach*. Rabbi Moshe therefore explains that *zimrat* is short for *zimrati*, which is not a construct and thus is correctly vocalized with a *kamatz*.

<sup>763</sup> *Nachalat* and *zimrat* are vocalized with a *kamatz*, for like *shenat* they are not in the construct.

<sup>764</sup> *Nachalah* comes from the root *chet, lamed, heh*.

<sup>765</sup> Literally, a verb.

<sup>766</sup> Literally, comes from a verb whose third letter is not whole.

The word *cholah* might also follow the form of *tovah* (good) (Gen.15:15). In this case, it comes from a root whose middle letter is a *vav*.<sup>768</sup> It is related to the word *yachul* (whirl) in [*Behold, a storm of the Lord is gone forth in fury, yea, a whirling storm;*] *it shall whirl upon the head of the wicked* (Jer. 23:19).<sup>769</sup>

[RICHES KEPT BY THE OWNER THEREOF TO HIS HURT.] Kohelet is still speaking about what he earlier mentioned—that is, working the land is more valuable than silver.<sup>770</sup>

**13. AND THOSE RICHES PERISH BY EVIL ADVENTURE; AND IF HE HATH BEGOTTEN A SON, THERE IS NOTHING IN HIS HAND.**

AND THOSE RICHES PERISH BY EVIL ADVENTURE. [The riches perish] by an evil occurrence [which they] brought on to their possessor. The point of the verse is, if he had lost only his wealth and [this loss] did not give birth to evil, then it would only be a semi-evil.<sup>771</sup>

**14. AS HE CAME FORTH OF HIS MOTHER'S WOMB, NAKED SHALL HE GO BACK AS HE CAME, AND SHALL TAKE NOTHING FOR HIS LABOR, WHICH HE MAY CARRY AWAY IN HIS HAND.**

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<sup>767</sup> *Ra'ah cholah* is to be interpreted as if written *be-choleh ra'ah*. I.E. interprets our verse as follows: There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun: riches kept by the owner thereof to his hurt.

<sup>768</sup> It comes from the root *chet, vav, lamed* and means "whirl," or "rest upon."

<sup>769</sup> According to this interpretation, *ra'ah cholah* means "whirling evil." This interpretation renders our verse: There is a whirling evil which I have seen under the sun; that is, I have seen a whirling evil befall people.

<sup>770</sup> For the riches spoken of in our verse relate to silver and the like.

<sup>771</sup> Our verse speaks of riches perishing due to something evil which befalls the rich man.

AND SHALL TAKE NOTHING FOR HIS LABOR. The *bet* of *va-amalo* is in place of a *mem*.<sup>772</sup> Compare the *bet* in *ba-basar* (of the flesh) in *And that which remaineth of the flesh and of the bread* (Lev. 8:32).<sup>773</sup>

**15. AND THIS ALSO IS A GRIEVOUS EVIL, THAT IN ALL POINTS AS HE CAME, SO SHALL HE GO; AND WHAT PROFIT HATH HE THAT HE LABORETH FOR THE WIND?**

AND THIS ALSO IS A GRIEVOUS EVIL. To all who are born into this world, for they were born naked and naked they shall all go out of the world. Now, *what profit hath he that he laboreth for the wind?*

**16. ALL HIS DAYS ALSO HE EATETH IN DARKNESS, AND HE HATH MUCH VEXATION AND SICKNESS AND WRATH.**

ALL HIS DAYS ALSO HE EATETH IN DARKNESS. He does not eat during the day when there is light; he eats in darkness.<sup>774</sup> That is, he is so occupied [during the day] with his business and toil in gathering money that he does not eat before nightfall. He is full of vexation and sickness of soul; he is full of fear.

**17. BEHOLD THAT WHICH I HAVE SEEN: IT IS GOOD, YEA, IT IS COMELY FOR ONE TO EAT AND TO DRINK, AND TO ENJOY PLEASURE FOR ALL HIS LABOR, WHEREIN HE LABOURETH UNDER THE SUN, ALL THE DAYS OF HIS LIFE WHICH GOD HATH GIVEN HIM; FOR THIS IS HIS PORTION.**

BEHOLD THAT WHICH I HAVE SEEN. This is the third verse [dealing with the enjoyment of one's possessions].<sup>775</sup> The meaning of our verse is: Since a person

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<sup>772</sup> In other words, the *bet* prefixed to *amalo* has the meaning of a *mem*; that is, "from."

<sup>773</sup> Here, too, the *bet* has the meaning of "from."

<sup>774</sup> Days is to be taken in the sense of "time." Our verse is to be understood as follows: He eats in darkness all the time.

<sup>775</sup> The other two are Kohelet 2:24 and 3:12.

will leave the world as he came (*ummat she-ba*) (v. 15), Kohelet<sup>776</sup> concluded that there is nothing better for a person who is occupied in gathering money than eating, drinking, and being happy.

**18. EVERY MAN ALSO TO WHOM GOD HATH GIVEN RICHES AND WEALTH, AND HATH GIVEN HIM POWER TO EAT THEREOF, AND TO TAKE HIS PORTION, AND TO REJOICE IN HIS LABOR--THIS IS THE GIFT OF GOD.**

AND TO TAKE HIS PORTION. The reference is to the portion which he will carry away.<sup>777</sup>

**19. FOR LET HIM REMEMBER THE DAYS OF HIS LIFE THAT THEY ARE NOT MANY; FOR GOD ANSWERETH HIM IN THE JOY OF HIS HEART.**

FOR ...THEY ARE NOT MANY. There is a commentator who explains the verse as follows: If the good that he has will not last for long,<sup>778</sup> let him recall the [past] days of his life wherein he enjoyed pleasure.<sup>779</sup> He will experience joy in recalling those days.<sup>780</sup>

However, according to my opinion, our verse is to be understood as follows: Let him remember that the days of his life are not many.<sup>781</sup> [According to this

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<sup>776</sup>Literally, I.

<sup>777</sup> He does not consume his riches and wealth at one time. He leaves some for the future.” See I.E. on v. 19: Scripture reads [*to eat*] *thereof* (mi-mennu) (v. 18), for it is unfit for him to overindulge in it.

<sup>778</sup> For the good years fly by.

<sup>779</sup> Our verse states *ki lo harbeh yizkor et yemei chayyav* (for let him remember the days of his life that they are not many). The verse literally reads: “For not many, let him remember the days of his life.” This interpretation renders our verse: If the days of his happiness not be many, then let him remember the days of his life when he enjoyed pleasure.

<sup>780</sup> Literally, He will have in recalling them joy of heart.

<sup>781</sup> Our verse reads: *ki lo harbeh yizkor et yemei chayyav*. This interpretation rearranges the words in our verse as follows: *yizkor ki lo harbeh yemei chayyav*: Let him remember that the days of his life will not be many.

interpretation] the word *et* is superfluous.<sup>782</sup> Compare *et* in *and when there came a lion or a bear* ((ve-et ha-dov) (1 Sam.17:34).<sup>783</sup>

FOR GOD ANSWERETH HIM. The meaning of *ma'aneh* (answereth) is “provides.” Compare, *I will provide* (e'eneh), *the heavens, and they shall provide* (ya'aneh) *the earth* (Hosea 2:23).<sup>784</sup>

Others say: *ma'aneh* is related to *anah* (answer). The meaning of *ki Elohim ma'aneh* (for God answereth) is, God will answer the one who asks and seeks. The Lord will answer him in accordance with his request. Similarly, *and money answereth* (ya'aneh) *all things* (Kohelet 10:19).<sup>785</sup>

*Ma'aneh* (answereth) is a *hifil*. It follows the form of *ma'aleh* (causeth to ascend) in *Who causeth the vapors to ascend* (Ps. 135:7). The meaning of our clause is: God will help him in his joy, for God gave him [wealth and riches] and the power to enjoy them.<sup>786</sup> Scripture reads [*to eat*] *thereof* (mi-mennu) (v. 18), for it is unfit for him to overindulge in it.<sup>787</sup>

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<sup>782</sup>Our verse reads *ki lo harbeh yizkor et yemei chayyav*. *Et* is usually placed before the direct object. However, according to this interpretation, *yemei chayyav* is not the object, for the verse is to be read as if written *yizkor ki lo harbeh yemei chayyav*.

<sup>783</sup> Here, too, *et* is placed before the subject (ha-dov). We thus see that at times *et* is placed before the subject. However, it need not be placed there, in which case it is superfluous. Thus, our verse, *ki lo harbeh yizkor et yemei chayyav* should be read as if written without the *bet*: *yizkor ki lo harbeh yemei chayyav*.

<sup>784</sup> Translated according to I.E.

<sup>785</sup> Money fulfills all requests.

<sup>786</sup> Literally, to eat thereof.

<sup>787</sup> *Thereof* (mi-mennu) implies part of it, but not all of it. Hence, I.E.'s comment.

## CHAPTER 6

### 1. THERE IS AN EVIL WHICH I HAVE SEEN UNDER THE SUN, AND IT IS HEAVY (VE-RABBAH) UPON MEN.

THERE IS AN EVIL. The word *rav*<sup>788</sup> has four meanings in the holy tongue.

One. *Rav* is used in the sense of “many.”<sup>789</sup> Compare, *rav* (more) in *To the more* (la-rav) *thou shalt give the more inheritance* (Num. 26:54).

Two. *Rav* is used in the sense of “strive.”<sup>790</sup> Compare, *rav* (striveth) in *that striveth with his Maker* (Is. 45:9).

Three. *Rav* is used in the sense of “shooting.” It has the same meaning as *roveh* (shooting) in *roveh kashet* (shooting the bow) (Gen. 21:20).<sup>791</sup> However, *rav* (shooting) [unlike *roveh*<sup>792</sup>] comes from a double root.<sup>793</sup>

*Rav* is like *rabbim* (archers)<sup>794</sup> in *Call together the archers against Babylon* (Jer. 50:29). *All them that bend the bow*(ibid) which follows [*Call together the archers*] shows,<sup>795</sup> that *rabbim* means archers.<sup>796</sup>

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<sup>788</sup>Our verse reads: *ve-rabbah hi al ha-adam* (and it is heavy upon men). *Rabbah* is the feminine form of *rav*. Hence, I.E. goes on to explain the meaning of *rav*. In so doing, he also explains the meaning of the word *rabbah*.

<sup>789</sup> Literally, the opposite of few. *Rav* meaning “many” comes from the root *resh, bet, heh*.

<sup>790</sup>*Rav* meaning “strife” comes from the root *resh, yod, bet*.

<sup>791</sup>Translated literally.

<sup>792</sup>*Roveh* comes from the root *resh, bet, heh*.

<sup>793</sup> *Rav* (shooting) comes from the root *resh, bet, bet*, whereas *roveh* comes from the root *resh, bet, heh*. There are thus two roots for the Hebrew word for shooting. See I.E. on Gen. 21:20.

<sup>794</sup>*Rabbim* comes from the root *resh, bet, bet*.

*Rabbim* follows the form of *dallim*<sup>797</sup> (poor) (Is. 10:2) and *rakkim*<sup>798</sup> (tender) (Gen. 33:13). The perfect verb form of *rakkim* is *rakh* (was tender).<sup>799</sup> Compare, *rakh* (tender) in *because thy heart was tender* (2 Chron. 34:27).

*Rav* is similarly used in the sense of “shooting” in *and He shot forth (rav) lightnings and discomfited them* (Ps.18:15). The first part of the verse which reads, *And He sent out His arrow, and scattered them* (ibid) shows that *rav* means “shot.”

Four. *Rav* is used in the sense of “great.”<sup>800</sup> Compare *rav* (great) in *a savior and a great one (rav)*,<sup>801</sup> *and he will deliver them.* (Is 19:20); *rav* (exalted) in *to all the exalted (rav) of his house* (Esther 1: 8); and *rav* (great) in *the city of the great (rav) king* (Ps. 48:3). The great king refers to David as *in the city where David encamped* (Is. 29:1).<sup>802</sup>

Some say that "the great king" [in Ps. 48:3] refers to God. However, this is incorrect, for there is no emphatic *heh* before the words *melekh* (king) and *rav* (great).<sup>803</sup> If the reference were to God, our text would read *ha-melekh*<sup>804</sup> *ha-rav*.

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<sup>795</sup> I.E. employs the word *yoreh* for “shows.” He is probably engaging in wordplay, for *yoreh* also means “shoots.”

<sup>796</sup> Literally, "that which comes after, indicates its meaning."

<sup>797</sup> From the root *dalet, lamed, lamed*.

<sup>798</sup> From the root, *resh, kaf, kaf*.

<sup>799</sup> Similarly, the perfect verb form of *rabbim* is *rav*.

<sup>800</sup> *Rav* in the sense of *great* comes from the root, *resh, bet, bet*.

<sup>801</sup> Translated literally.

<sup>802</sup> The meaning of *in the city where David encamped* is: the city where the great king [David] encamped.

<sup>803</sup> Ps. 48:3 reads: *melekh rav*. If it referred to God, it would read *ha-melekh ha-rav*. Compare *ha-melekh ha-kadosh*,

The plural of *rav* (great) [in the construct] is *rabbei*. Compare, *and the chief officers of the king* (ve-rabbei ha-melekh) (Jer. 41:1).

The feminine of *rav* is *rabbah*. Hence, our text reads *ve-rabbah hi al ha-adam* (and it<sup>805</sup> is heavy upon men).<sup>806</sup>

**2. A MAN TO WHOM GOD GIVETH RICHES, WEALTH, AND HONOR, SO THAT HE WANTETH NOTHING FOR HIS SOUL OF ALL THAT HE DESIRETH, YET GOD GIVETH HIM NOT POWER TO EAT THEREOF, BUT A STRANGER EATETH IT; THIS IS VANITY, AND IT IS AN EVIL DISEASE.**

A MAN TO WHOM GOD GIVETH RICHES, WEALTH, AND HONOR. Some say that *nekhasim* (wealth) means “possessions.” The words *chaser* (lacks) [in our verse],<sup>807</sup> and the word *maleh* (full) [in] (Kohelet 1:7) are used in a similar way.<sup>808</sup> They are both intransitive verbs, even though they require elaboration.<sup>809</sup> In other words, if one says that so-and-so is wanting, he has to explain what that person lacks. He has to explain that the person is lacking wisdom, wealth, or status. Can you not see that Scripture reads: *Do I<sup>810</sup> lack (chasar) madmen (meshugga'im) (1*

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<sup>804</sup> Reading *ha-melekh* rather than *la-melekh*. R. Goodman.

<sup>805</sup> The evil, *ra'ah* is feminine

<sup>806</sup> I.E. renders our clause: “and it is a great evil upon men.”

<sup>807</sup> Translated according to I.E. I.E. reads our clause as follows: *so that his soul lacks (chaser) nothing of all that he desires.*

<sup>808</sup> Literally, in one way. They are followed by an explanation of what they contain, or what they are lacking. See next note.

<sup>809</sup> Literally, they need connection. Intransitive verbs do not require explanations. For example, the statement “I am sleepy” does not require any amplification. Neither does the statement “I am hungry.” However, the verbs “lacking” (*chaser*) and “full” (*maleh*) require explanation because “I am lacking” can mean “I am lacking sleep,” or “I am lacking food.” Similarly, the verb *maleh*. I.E. thus points out that *chaser* (lacks) and *maleh* (full) are intransitive even though, unlike other intransitive verbs, they require amplification.

<sup>810</sup> *Achish*, the king of Gat.

Sam.21:16).<sup>811</sup> *Chasar* is in the construct [with a word that tells us what is lacking]. The meaning of *chasar meshugga'im ani* is “Do I lack madmen?”<sup>812</sup> Scripture similarly reads, *meleh yamim* (full of days) (Jer. 6:11).<sup>813</sup> Also [here the phrase] “so that he lacks nothing” is followed by “that his soul desires.”<sup>814</sup>

When the root *chet, samekh, resh* comes in the *hifil*<sup>815</sup> or *pi'el*,<sup>816</sup> then it is transitive. Compare, *va- techasserehu* (yet Thou hast made him but little)<sup>817</sup> in *Yet Thou hast made him but little lower than the angels* (Ps. 8:6). The meaning of *va- techasserehu me'at me-elohim* (yet Thou hast made him but little lower than the angels) is, You placed him a little lower than the angels. [*Va- techasserehu is a pi'el*]. The one who says that *chaser* (wanteth) has two objects<sup>818</sup> errs.<sup>819</sup>

We find the root *chet, samekh, resh* in the *hifil* in *hechsir* (did not cause a lack)<sup>820</sup> in *and he that gathered little did not cause a lack* [in what was gathered] (Ex. 16:18).

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<sup>811</sup> Scripture explains what the king of Gat ironically asks about what he lacks.

<sup>812</sup> The literal meaning of *chasar meshugga'im ani* is "I lack madmen." Hence, I.E.'s comment that, “I lack madmen” is to be understood as. “Do I lack madmen?”

<sup>813</sup> *Meleh* is in the construct with *yamim*. *Yamim* tells us what *meleh* (full of) is referring to.

<sup>814</sup> “So that he lacks nothing that his soul desires” is I.E.'s paraphrase of *so that he wanteth nothing for his soul*. I.E.'s point is that an explanatory term (*for his soul*) follows the term *chaser*.

<sup>815</sup> *Hifil* is the causative form.

<sup>816</sup> Literally, the heavy forms.

<sup>817</sup> *Va-techasserehu* is a *pi'el*.

<sup>818</sup> That is, it is causative, it refers to the one who acts and to what is acted upon. In other words, *chaser* (wanteth) is to be rendered "cause to want," that is he denies the good from his soul.

<sup>819</sup> For *chaser* is intransitive. The causative form of the verb is as I.E. goes on to show *hechsir*.

<sup>820</sup> Translated literally by I.E.

The meaning of *hechsir* is, he did not cause a lack. Observe. *Hechsir* is a verb which is transitive [and causative]. It is like *hedif* (did not cause an increase) (ibid.).<sup>821</sup>

**3. IF A MAN BEGET A HUNDRED CHILDREN, AND LIVE MANY YEARS, SO THAT THE DAYS OF HIS YEARS ARE MANY, BUT HIS SOUL HAVE NOT ENOUGH OF GOOD,<sup>822</sup> AND MOREOVER HE HAVE NO BURIAL; I SAY, THAT AN UNTIMELY BIRTH IS BETTER THAN HE.**

IF A MAN BEGET A HUNDRED CHILDREN. If a man beget many children.<sup>823</sup> It is the style of the holy tongue to employ ten, a hundred, and a thousand [ to illustrate a point] because these numerals conclude a set of numbers.<sup>824</sup>

Don't you see that after the number ten is reached,<sup>825</sup> we begin with one.<sup>826</sup> The same applies to the number 7 (11:2).<sup>827</sup> I will explain it in its place.

AND LIVE MANY YEARS. And reach old age.

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<sup>821</sup> Translated literally by I.E. *Hedif* (he did not cause an increase) is transitive and causative.

<sup>822</sup> He does not enjoy his wealth.

<sup>823</sup> In other words, the numbers ten, a hundred and a thousand are not always to be taken literally

<sup>824</sup> Kohelet employs the number ten, because ten is the end of the ones. One hundred concludes the tens. One thousand concludes the hundreds. Ten may stand for many ones, a hundred for many tens, and a thousand for many hundreds.

<sup>825</sup> Literally, completed.

<sup>826</sup> Ten concludes the ones. Eleven is 10+1, 12 is 10+2. There are no new singular numbers.

<sup>827</sup> It, too, is not always to be taken literally.

SO THAT THE DAYS OF HIS YEARS ARE MANY. His days are more than the normal lifespan.

AND MOREOVER HE HAVE NO BURIAL. [He does not have] shrouds in which the dead are buried.<sup>828</sup>

AN UNTIMELY BIRTH. *Nefel* (untimely birth) refers to the product of a woman's miscarriage.<sup>829</sup>

**4. FOR IT COMETH IN VANITY, AND DEPARTETH IN DARKNESS, AND THE NAME THEREOF IS COVERED WITH DARKNESS.**

FOR IT COMETH IN VANITY, AND DEPARTETH IN DARKNESS. His name needs to disappear and not be mentioned.<sup>830</sup>

**5. MOREOVER IT HATH NOT SEEN THE SUN NOR KNOWN IT; THIS HATH GRATIFICATION RATHER THAN THE OTHER.**

MOREOVER IT HATH NOT SEEN THE SUN. The reference is to the untimely birth.<sup>831</sup> Kohelet says: Behold, the untimely birth who did not see the light of the world and did not know anything [about the world] would be content, for he did

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<sup>828</sup> I.E. renders *kevurah* (burial) as "shrouds." I.E. does so because he probably believed that an unburied body was unheard of in Jewish society and thus would not serve to illustrate his point.

<sup>829</sup> Literally, the word *nefel* is related to the word *nafal* (fell). *Nefel* might have been taken to refer to someone who falls; that is, who fails. Hence, I.E.'s comment that it refers to an untimely birth.

<sup>830</sup> This is what people say about the person spoken of in v. 3. People say his name is best forgotten (Meijler; Goodman). According to I.E., v.4 does not refer to the untimely birth mentioned at the end of v.3. Rather, it refers to the person dealt with in v.3. I.E. renders vv. 3-4 as follows: "If a man beget a hundred children and live many years, so that the days of his years are many, but his soul has not enough of good—and moreover he has no burial shrouds—I say that an untimely birth is better than he. For he cometh in vanity, and departeth in darkness; that is, people say that such a person's name should disappear and not be mentioned."

<sup>831</sup> Mentioned at the end of v. 3.

not toil in the things of this world. However, the rich man<sup>832</sup> who saw the light of this world and knew [the ways of world] had no rest. He only knew toil without compensation and pleasure in both worlds.

**6. YEA, THOUGH HE LIVE A THOUSAND YEARS TWICE TOLD, AND ENJOY NO GOOD;<sup>833</sup> DO NOT ALL GO TO ONE PLACE?**

YEA, THOUGH. The word *ve-illu* (yea, though) is similar to the word *ve-illu* (but if)<sup>834</sup> in *But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen* (Est.7:4).<sup>835</sup>

There is a commentator who says that the word *va-illu* is a combination of *im* (if) and *lu* (perhaps).<sup>836</sup>

**7. ALL THE LABOR OF MAN IS FOR HIS MOUTH, AND YET THE APPETITE IS NOT FILLED.**

ALL THE LABOR OF MAN IS FOR HIS MOUTH. Kohelet is amazed at the fool who [toils and] enjoys no good (v. 6). Is not the goal of all toil to provide food so that a man eats and does not die?

[AND YET THE APPETITE IS NOT FILLED.] The meaning of *not filled* is "not satisfied." [Its import is:] If a person had all the wealth in the world and all of its wheat, [his appetite would not be satisfied].

The word *gam* (and yet)<sup>837</sup> [which precedes *nefesh* (appetite) also] refers to the mouth which is not filled,<sup>838</sup> for the food immediately leaves it.<sup>839</sup>

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<sup>832</sup>Spoken of in v. 2. (R. Goodman)

<sup>833</sup> According to I.E., the meaning of *and enjoy no good* is, he does not enjoy his wealth. See his comments on the next verse.

<sup>834</sup> In other words, *illu* means "if," "perhaps."

<sup>835</sup> According to I.E., our verse should be understood to mean: "even if he lives a thousand years."

<sup>836</sup> *Illu* is a combination of two words, each of which means "if." Thus, *illu* means "if."

**8. FOR WHAT ADVANTAGE HATH THE WISE MORE THAN THE FOOL?  
OR THE POOR MAN THAT HATH UNDERSTANDING, IN WALKING  
BEFORE THE LIVING?**

FOR WHAT ADVANTAGE HATH THE WISE MORE THAN THE FOOL? If the wise man seeks money without end, and his appetite, like the appetite of the fool, is not filled, what advantage does he have?

The meaning of *or the poor man that hath understanding [in walking before the living?]* is: Why should the poor man who is intelligent and has understanding walk in the ways of fools as [the masses of] the living does?<sup>840</sup>

The term *chayyim* (living) here is an adjective.<sup>841</sup> It is like the word *chayyim* (alive) in *But ye that did cleave unto the Lord your God are alive*<sup>842</sup> *every one of you this day* (Deut. 4:4).

**9. BETTER IS THE SEEING OF THE EYES THAN THE THOUGHTS<sup>843</sup> OF  
THE SOUL;<sup>844</sup> THIS ALSO IS VANITY AND A STRIVING AFTER WIND.**

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<sup>837</sup> Literally, also. Our verse literally reads: All the labor of man is for his mouth, and also the appetite is not filled.

<sup>838</sup> I.E. reads our verse as follows: All the labor of man is for his mouth, and also (*gam*) the appetite is not filled; that is, the desires of the mouth and also those of the appetite are not filled.

<sup>839</sup> Literally, descends from it.

<sup>840</sup> Literally, parallel to the living. That is, like people. In other words, why should the person of understanding act like most people?

<sup>841</sup> It modifies *anashim* (people), even though the word *anashim* is not in the text. In other words, our text should be understood as if written, *anashim chayyim* (living people).

<sup>842</sup> According to I.E., the meaning of *chayyim* (are alive) is “are living (*chayyim*) people.” Thus, *chayyim* is an adjective. See I.E. on 2:17.

<sup>843</sup> Translated according to I.E.

<sup>844</sup> Translated Literally. Hebrew *nefesh*,

BETTER IS THE SEEING OF THE EYES. Kohelet says: What advantage does the wise man have in walking in the ways of fools whose soul (nefesh) [that is, desire]<sup>845</sup> is never filled, when what is found in front of him, what the eyes see, is sufficient for him?

Another interpretation:<sup>846</sup> *Better is the seeing of the eyes [than walking in the ways of the soul<sup>847</sup> (nefesh)] are the words of the living (v. 8).*<sup>848</sup> It is similar in meaning to *And what advantage is there to the owner thereof, saving the beholding of them with his eyes? (5:10).*<sup>849</sup>

**10. WHATSOEVER COMETH INTO BEING, THE NAME THEREOF WAS GIVEN LONG AGO, AND IT IS FOREKNOWN WHAT MAN IS; NEITHER CAN HE CONTEND WITH HIM THAT IS MIGHTIER THAN HE.**

WHATSOEVER COMETH INTO BEING, THE NAME THEREOF WAS GIVEN LONG AGO. This refers back to *the poor man that hath understanding* (v. 8). The point of our verse is: It is sufficient for the poor person [*that hath understanding*] that he was given a name, and that he was known as so-and-so. Why should he follow his desire<sup>850</sup> to be like another person, when it is impossible for him to ever reach the level of that person?

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<sup>845</sup> This interpretation renders *nefesh* as desire or appetite.

<sup>846</sup> This interpretation renders *nefesh* as soul rather than desire.

<sup>847</sup> The soul, according to this interpretation, applies to man's intelligence rather than to his desires. The living people, who are fools, say: Indulging in what the eyes see; that is, the pleasures of this world, is better than developing one's soul.

<sup>848</sup> The fools mentioned at the end of the previous verse.

<sup>849</sup> *The beholding of them with his eyes* means: enjoying what one sees.

<sup>850</sup> Literally, the wandering of his soul. See v. 9.

[NEITHER CAN HE CONTEND WITH HIM THAT IS MIGHTIER THAN HE.]  
It is unfit for an intelligent person to quarrel with someone stronger than he is. It is therefore not right for him to seek what the living (v. 8)<sup>851</sup> seek and do the same so that he be like them.<sup>852</sup>

**11. SEEING THERE ARE MANY WORDS THAT INCREASE VANITY,  
WHAT IS MAN THE BETTER?**

SEEING THERE ARE MANY WORDS THAT INCREASE VANITY. Aside from a person's aspiration regarding the pleasures of the world expressed by the wish to gather wealth, [there are also desires] for power and sexual satisfaction. All of these yearnings and their counterparts increase vanity; that is, they add to the vanity of man. It is enough [for him] that he is vanity. [Why should add to his vanity?]

Also this verse<sup>853</sup> refers to *the poor man that hath understanding* (v. 8) and knows that he should guard himself from all vanity. For what advantage does he derive from it?

**12. FOR WHO KNOWETH WHAT IS GOOD FOR MAN IN HIS LIFE, ALL  
THE DAYS OF HIS VAIN LIFE WHICH HE SPENDETH AS A SHADOW?  
FOR WHO CAN TELL A MAN WHAT SHALL BE AFTER HIM UNDER THE  
SUN?**

FOR WHO KNOWETH WHAT IS GOOD FOR MAN IN HIS LIFE. Also this verse<sup>854</sup> refers to *the poor man that hath understanding* (v. 8) and is aware that no man knows what is good for him in his life—whether it be wealth or poverty—and that the days of his vain life are few in number. He should consider his days as a

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<sup>851</sup> The fools. See I.E. on v. 8.

<sup>852</sup> The point is that a person cannot compete physically or financially with those mightier than he.

<sup>853</sup> Like v. 10.

<sup>854</sup> Like v.11.

shadow and not follow the desires of the heart [and gather wealth] which he will leave [for others]. For what he leaves will not benefit him. Furthermore, he does not know what will be done with his money after his death.

The meaning of *which he spendeth as a shadow* is that his mind <sup>855</sup> should dwell on the following: Just as a shadow does not maintain itself for a moment, so is it with his days, which are the most important aspect of life. <sup>856</sup> This is certainly the case with what occurs in those days, be it good or bad, be it wealth of riches or poverty.

Another interpretation of our verse will be found in my comments on *A fool also multiplieth words* (Kohelet 10:14).<sup>857</sup>

## CHAPTER 7

### 1. A GOOD NAME IS BETTER THAN PRECIOUS OIL.

A GOOD NAME. Also this verse is connected to the earlier verses, <sup>858</sup> for [the point of this verse is that] the glory of the good name of the poor man—who knows that his deeds are good—is greater than precious oil and other <sup>859</sup> pleasures.

*The day of death [is better] than the day of one's birth* because on the day of one's birth no-one knows what he will be—whether he will be good or evil. However,

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<sup>855</sup> The mind of the poor man mentioned in verse 8.

<sup>856</sup> Life consists of days. It consists of time.

<sup>857</sup> I.E. interprets our verse as being the words of the fool. The fool says, “I will enjoy life, *For who knoweth what is good for man in his life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow? For who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?*”

<sup>858</sup> Kohelet 6: 9, 12 speak of the poor man mentioned in 6:8. So does our verse. See I.E. 6: 9, 12.

<sup>859</sup> Literally, more.

[if] he is called by [a good] name on the day of his death, it then becomes known that he was<sup>860</sup> a good man.

It is possible that the day of death is [better than the day of birth] because the person who has a good name finds rest and good reward [after his death]. Furthermore, he no longer toils, for *man is born to toil*<sup>861</sup> (Job 5:7).<sup>862</sup>

Some say that the meaning of *ve-yom ha-mavet [mi-yom hivvaledo]* (and the day of death than the day of one's birth) is that one should think of the day of one's death from the day he is born.<sup>863</sup> The point made by this commentator is basically correct. However, it has nothing to do with this verse.<sup>864</sup>

## 2. IT IS BETTER TO GO TO THE HOUSE OF MOURNING, THAN TO THE HOUSE OF FEASTING.

IT IS BETTER TO GO [to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting] because person will then see what the end of all men is; namely, he will see that all people ultimately die. He will lay this to his heart while still alive.

## 3. VEXATION IS BETTER THAN LAUGHTER; FOR BY THE SADNESS OF THE COUNTENANCE THE HEART MAY BE GLADDENED.

VEXATION IS BETTER THAN LAUGHTER. The philosophers<sup>865</sup> have already explained that there are three souls in man.<sup>866</sup>

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<sup>860</sup> Literally, is called.

<sup>861</sup> Hebrew, *amal*.

<sup>862</sup> In other words, the meaning of *a good name is better than precious oil; and the day of death than the day of one's birth* is: The day of death is better than the day of birth for the person who has a good name.

<sup>863</sup> The literal meaning of *ve-yom ha-mavet mi-yom hivvaledo* is: and the day of death from the day of one's birth. Hence, this interpretation.

<sup>864</sup> The idea expressed by this commentator is correct.

<sup>865</sup> Literally, the men who prove things.

The first is a botanical soul;<sup>867</sup> that is, just as there is among the various plants, herbs, and trees a power which you may call “soul” (or whatever you wish) which causes the body of the plant to develop, to be high, and wide,<sup>868</sup> so is the case with human beings.<sup>869</sup> This soul grows in strength until a specific time. This soul lusts for and needs food.

The second is an animal soul. This soul possesses the five senses and the ability to move from place to place. This soul, too, is found in man.

Man alone has a third soul, called the *neshamah*. This soul speaks<sup>870</sup> and has the ability to distinguish between truth and falsehood. It possesses wisdom.

The second soul is intermediary between the first and third soul.

God planted intelligence in man. This intelligence is referred to as the "heart."<sup>871</sup> This intelligence serves to fulfill the desire of each soul in its time.<sup>872</sup> It also helps a person to observe the commandments. It explains their makeup.<sup>873</sup>

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<sup>866</sup> See *the Secret of the Torah* 7:4, p. 96. Also see Solomon ibn Gabirol's *Mekor Chayyim* 5:13, and Ch. 1 of Maimonides' introduction to *Pirkei Avot*. Man's three souls are first mentioned by Plato in Book 4 of *The Republic*.

<sup>867</sup> Literally, a plant soul.

<sup>868</sup> Literally, it (the power) makes it high and makes it wide.

<sup>869</sup> There is a power in human beings which controls growth. This power is referred to as the plant or botanical soul.

<sup>870</sup> The power of speech comes from this soul.

<sup>871</sup> “Heart” in Scripture often refers to intelligence.

<sup>872</sup> Intelligence teaches how and when to employ the powers of the various souls.

<sup>873</sup> I.E. wrote *Yesod Mora* to explain the makeup of the *mitzvot*. He there explains that there are positive and negative commandments. Some are rational commandments that God placed in the heart of every human being, others whose meaning is difficult to fathom.

This commentary on the Book of Kohelet<sup>874</sup> is not prepared to speak on the secret of the soul, for this secret is very profound. One who possesses understanding can only ascertain the truth after reading many books. These books are too numerous for me to mention. If it were not necessary for me to mention the [three] parts of the soul in order to explain [certain] verses,<sup>875</sup> then I would not have alluded to these things in general, and certainly not mentioned its specific parts.

The major reason that the Book of Kohelet<sup>876</sup> requires interpretation is that people have great difficulty with some of the things<sup>877</sup> that Solomon said in this book. Among the difficulties that we find in this book is that in many places Solomon says a thing and its opposite. It is for this reason that the wise men of Israel, may their memories be blessed, said: The Sages wanted to hide the Book of Kohelet because his words contradict each other.<sup>878</sup>

[For example, Solomon states:] *Vexation is better than laughter* (our verse). Solomon then says the opposite; namely, *for anger resteth in the bosom of fools* (v 9).

Similarly, Solomon states: *For in much wisdom is much vexation* (1:18). He then says its opposite; namely, *Therefore remove vexation (ka'as) from thy heart* (11:10).

Similarly, Solomon states: *It is comely for one to eat and to drink, [and to enjoy pleasure]* (5:17). He then says its opposite; namely, *It is better to go to the house of mourning, [than to go to the house of feasting]* (v. 2).

Similarly, Solomon states: *So I commended mirth* (8:15). He then says its opposite; namely, *I said of mirth: 'What doth it accomplish?'* (2:2).

Similarly, Solomon states: *For what advantage hath the wise more than the fool?* (6:8). He then states its opposite: *Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly* (2:13).

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<sup>874</sup> Literally, the book.

<sup>875</sup> Literally, the verses.

<sup>876</sup> Literally, this book.

<sup>877</sup> Literally, some very difficult things.

<sup>878</sup> *Shabbat 30b*.

Similarly, Solomon states: *Wherefore I praised the dead* (4:2). He then states its opposite: *for a living dog is better than a dead lion* (9:4).

Similarly, Solomon states: *For there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave* (9:10). He then states its opposite: [*God will judge the righteous and the wicked,*] *for there is a time there for every purpose* (3:17).

Similarly, Solomon states: *but it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow* (8:13). He then states its opposite: *and there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his evil-doing* (v. 15).

Similarly, Solomon states: *yet I know that it shall be well with them that fear God* (8:12). He then states its opposite: *there are wicked men, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous* (8:14).

One who carefully searches will find many other similar examples in this book. We all know that the least among the wise will not compose a book in which he contradicts himself.

[As a result of the above,] one of the commentators was compelled to explain that the word *Kohelet* (1:1) is related to the word *kehilat* (congregation of) in *the congregation of Jacob* (Deut 33:4).<sup>879</sup> This commentator says that Kohelet's students composed this book and each one expressed his own opinion in it.<sup>880</sup>

However, the above is incorrect, for the book says *And besides that Kohelet was wise* (12:9). We thus see that “Kohelet” refers to one person. Furthermore, the book says, *Kohelet sought to find out words of delight* (12:10).<sup>881</sup> The clinching proof is: *I Kohelet have been king over Israel in Jerusalem* (1:12).

Now it is certain that Solomon would not contradict himself being that Scripture bears testimony that no king that will reign after him will be as wise as he (1Kings

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<sup>879</sup> This commentator renders *kehilat ya'akov* as, “the collection of the descendants of the children of Jacob.”

<sup>880</sup> According to this interpretation *Kohelet* means a collection.

<sup>881</sup> This, too, shows that the word “Kohelet” refers to a single individual, not to a collection of individuals.

3:12). On the contrary, all his words *are all plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge* (Prov. 8:9).

I will now briefly explain them.

The three souls [that are in the human body]<sup>882</sup> are called by one name [*neshamah*] because they are united.<sup>883</sup> Hence, the *neshamah* is [also] called *ru'ach* (spirit)<sup>884</sup> and *nefesh* (soul). I will refer to the souls by their names<sup>885</sup> so that I will not have to dwell at length on each one of them.<sup>886</sup>

The part of the soul which seeks eating, enjoyment and sexual lust will be referred to by the term *nefesh*. The term *ru'ach* (spirit) will apply to that aspect of the soul that seeks to dominate and to attain high status. The aspect of the soul which consists of wisdom will be referred to as *neshamah*.

Rabbi Saadiah Gaon of blessed memory also divided the souls into three groups.<sup>887</sup>

It is known that when the *nefesh* grows in strength, the *neshamah* weakens and lacks the power to stand up to it because the body and all of its impulses help the

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<sup>882</sup> According to I.E., there are three powers in the human body *nefesh*, *ru'ach*, and *neshamah*. I.E. says that if one wishes, he may refer to these powers as “souls,” and thus speak of three souls in the body. See *The Secret of the Torah*, 7:4 p. 26.

<sup>883</sup> Each soul needs the other to properly function in the body.

<sup>884</sup> The *neshamah* is at times referred to as the *ru'ach* even though, strictly speaking, they refer to different powers.

<sup>885</sup> Literally, I will give the souls’ names.

<sup>886</sup> Literally, “Even though the three souls are called by one name because they are united, for the *neshamah* is called *ru'ach* (spirit) and *nefesh* (soul). I will therefore give names to them so that I will not have to dwell at length on each one of them.” Since the word “*neshamah*” can refer to either the *neshamah*, *ru'ach*, or *nefesh*, I.E. would be forced to explain what part of the *neshamah* he is referring to each time he mentions the word *neshamah*. Hence, I.E. says that he will use a specific name for each part of the *neshamah* that he speaks of.

<sup>887</sup> *Sefer Ha-Emunot Ve-Hade'ot* 6:3.

*nefesh*. Therefore, a person who spends his time in eating and drinking will never become wise.<sup>888</sup>

[On the other hand,] when the *neshamah* unites with the *ru'ach*,<sup>889</sup> they overcome the *nefesh*. The eyes of the *neshamah* are then opened a little and it can understand the science of the bodies [that are in heaven and the earth].<sup>890</sup> However, it cannot know the "upper" sciences<sup>891</sup> because of the power of the *ru'ach*, which seeks to rule. The *ru'ach* gives birth to vexation.<sup>892</sup> This is the meaning of, *Vexation is better than laughter*.<sup>893</sup>

[VEXATION IS BETTER THAN LAUGHTER; FOR BY THE SADNESS OF THE COUNTENANCE THE HEART MAY BE GLADDENED.]

The meaning of *be-ro'a* (by the sadness of) in, *For by the sadness of the countenance the heart may be gladdened* is "by the worry of." *Be-ro'a* is similar to *ra'im* (worried) in, *Why are your faces worried?* (Gen. 40:7).

"Heart" refers to the intellect.

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<sup>888</sup> A person who spends his time in satisfying his physical desires by eating and drinking will never become wise because that person is strengthening his *nefesh* to the detriment of his *neshamah*.

<sup>889</sup> The soul which seeks to dominate.

<sup>890</sup> The natural sciences that deal with the stars, planets, and the bodies found on earth. So, R. Goodman.

<sup>891</sup> The metaphysical world.

<sup>892</sup> Literally, and it is it, which gives birth to vexation. According to I.E., vexation, the domain of the *ru'ach* (which seeks to dominate), stimulates a person to act and to achieve.

<sup>893</sup> The vexation of the *ru'ach* is better than the joy of the *nefesh*. For the vexation of the *ru'ach* helps the *neshamah* overcome the happiness of the *nefesh*, which consists of satisfying bodily pleasures.

After the *neshamah*, with the help of the *ru'ach*, overpowers the *nefesh*, the *neshamah* has to occupy itself with wisdom. Wisdom will help the *neshamah*<sup>894</sup> overcome the *ru'ach*, so that the *neshamah* controls the *ru'ach*.<sup>895</sup>

The meaning of *Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry* (v. 9) and the import of *for anger resteth in the bosom of fools* (v. 9) is: Fools are always angry. It (anger) never leaves them. However, wise people are angry only when the situation calls for it.

*For in much wisdom is much vexation* (1:18) is similar in meaning to *neither make thyself over wise* (v. 16). Its meaning is: The attainment of a great amount of wisdom causes a person to be very angry at the vanities of the world and at people. [If a person will overly focus on the vanities of the world,] he will leave society<sup>896</sup> and waste away (v. 16),<sup>897</sup> and die prematurely. We thus read: [*Be not righteous overmuch; neither make thyself over wise.*] *Why shouldest thou destroy*<sup>898</sup> *thyself?* (v. 16).

It is therefore good for a person to weigh his words and affairs in just scales and to give to each soul what it needs in its proper time.<sup>899</sup>

The meaning of *Therefore remove vexation from thy heart* (Kohelet 11:10) is: “Do not allow the *ru'ach* (spirit) to rule over you.”

Kohelet similarly states and *put away evil from thy flesh* (ibid).

"Evil" refers to lust, for if a person eats each and every food that he lusts for, he will bring evil upon his flesh. Similarly, if he overindulges in sexual activity he will bring illness upon his flesh. The meaning of “flesh” is body.

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<sup>894</sup> Literally, it.

<sup>895</sup> Literally, so that it will be under its hand.

<sup>896</sup> Literally, he will leave the place where people live

<sup>897</sup> Translated according to I.E.

<sup>898</sup> Literally, waste.

<sup>899</sup> Rabbi Judah Ha-Levi makes a similar point in the Kuzari 3: 2-5).

*Therefore remove vexation from thy heart and put away evil from thy flesh* (11:10)<sup>900</sup> notes<sup>901</sup> that a person should employ all of his might to weaken the *ru'ach* (spirit) which is the source of vexation,<sup>902</sup> and the *nefesh* (soul) which is the source of lust.<sup>903</sup>

The message of *It is good, yea, it is comely for one to eat and to drink* (5:17) is directed at the fool who toils to gather money and does not derive any pleasure from his wealth.

*It is better to go to the house of mourning [than to go to the house of feasting]* (v.2) speaks the truth.<sup>904</sup>

The meaning of *For what advantage hath the wise more than the fool?* (6:8) is: “What advantage hath the wise more than the fool if he imitates the fool whose appetite is never filled?”<sup>905</sup>

*Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly* (2:13) speaks the truth. So too does, *So I commended mirth* (8:15).<sup>906</sup> For those who toil in things of the world, and do not seek wisdom and are happy, are to be praised above those who [toil in things of the world and do not seek wisdom and] worry because of vanities.<sup>907</sup>

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<sup>900</sup> Literally, this verse.

<sup>901</sup> Literally, he mentions in this verse.

<sup>902</sup> Literally, which is the master of vexation.

<sup>903</sup> Literally, which is the master of lust.

<sup>904</sup> It does not contradict anything that Kohelet says elsewhere in his work.

<sup>905</sup> See I.E. on 6:8.

<sup>906</sup> These two verses do not contradict each other.

<sup>907</sup> In other words, *So I commended mirth* means “I commended mirth to those who toil in things of the world and do not seek wisdom.” At least they do not seek and worry over vanities.

*I said of...mirth: 'What doth it accomplish?'*(2:2) speaks the truth.<sup>908</sup>

*Wherefore I praised the dead* (4:2) relates to those who are oppressed.<sup>909</sup>

*For a living dog is better than a dead lion* (9:4) is what people say.<sup>910</sup> The same also applies to the following later statement by Scripture: *Yea also, the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart* (9:3).<sup>911</sup>

Likewise,<sup>912</sup> *for there is no work, nor device, [ nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest]* (9:10)<sup>913</sup> is what people say.<sup>914</sup>

*[I said in my heart: 'The righteous and the wicked God will judge,] for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work* (3:17) is the truth.<sup>915</sup>

*But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow* (8:13) speaks of the majority of cases.

*And there is a wicked man [that prolongeth his life in his evil-doing]* (v. 15) speaks of what is found in a few instances.<sup>916</sup>

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<sup>908</sup> It is so. It needs no explanation.

<sup>909</sup> It does not refer to ordinary people. It refers to those who suffer. Kohelet is not saying that death is preferable to life.

<sup>910</sup> This is not the opinion of Kohelet.

<sup>911</sup> Kohelet 9:3 speaks of what men say.

<sup>912</sup> Like Kohelet 9:4.

<sup>913</sup> There is no judgment after death. (R. Goodman).

<sup>914</sup> This is not the opinion of Kohelet.

<sup>915</sup> This is Kohelet's true opinion.

<sup>916</sup> Thus, there is no contradiction between Kohelet 8:13 and 7:15.

I have already mentioned at the beginning of this book <sup>917</sup> that the Divine wisdom <sup>918</sup> does not hold back a lot of good because of a little evil. <sup>919</sup>

We find the same in the Book of Proverbs. <sup>920</sup>

*But he that gathereth little by little shall increase* (Prov. 13:11) speaks the truth. However, *There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth* (ibid. 11:24) speaks of the minority of cases.

We also find in the Book of Proverbs statements such as *Answer not a fool according to his folly* (Prov. 26:4) and its opposite, *Answer a fool according to his folly* (ibid. 26:5). <sup>921</sup>

We find the same with the prophets and also in the Torah, which is the main [book of Scripture]. For example, the Torah states: *Howbeit there shall be no needy among you* (Deut. 15:4). It then says, *For the poor shall never cease out of the land* (ibid. 15:11). They are all true. <sup>922</sup>

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<sup>917</sup> The reference is to I.E. 'introduction to Kohelet.

<sup>918</sup> Literally, supernal wisdom.

<sup>919</sup> I.E.'s point is that God is just. However, what is good for the majority of people may cause discomfort for a few. See I.E. on Ps. 94:15: "God's justice (*mishpat*) is combined with the right (*ha-tzedek*) with regard to the whole. However, at times there is a lack of righteousness regarding the parts. I will give you an example. When it rains, there is 'righteousness and loving kindness to all of the [people of the] world' who need water. Nevertheless, there are a few individuals, part of the whole, for whom the rain is not an act of righteousness, for the large amount of rain causes them damage." Also, see p. 4 of I.E.'s introduction to Kohelet.

<sup>920</sup> We find apparent contradictions in Proverbs.

<sup>921</sup> According to the Talmud, one verse applies to secular matters and the other to words of Torah.

<sup>922</sup> According to I.E.'s comments on Deut. 15:4-6, v. 4 applies to when most of Israel observes God's law, and v. 11 applies when the reverse is the case.

**4. THE HEART OF THE WISE IS IN THE HOUSE OF MOURNING; BUT THE HEART OF FOOLS IS IN THE HOUSE OF MIRTH.**

THE HEART OF THE WISE. After noting that *It is better to go to the house of mourning, [than to go to the house of feasting]* (v .2) Kohelet says that even when the wise of heart do not go to the house of mourning, the house of mourning is in their hearts.

**5. IT IS BETTER TO HEAR THE REBUKE OF THE WISE, THAN FOR A MAN TO HEAR THE SONG OF FOOLS.**

IT IS BETTER TO HEAR THE REBUKE OF THE WISE. It is better and will be of more use for a man who is not wise, to hear the rebuke of the wise directed at him [than for such a man to hear the song of fools].

Now if the rebuke of the wise is beneficial, how much more so are his words of wisdom?

The point of our verse is: The rebuke of a wise man who is angry gladdens the soul and is of greater benefit than listening to the song of fools.

**6. FOR AS THE CRACKLING OF THORNS UNDER A POT, SO IS THE LAUGHTER OF THE FOOL; THIS ALSO IS VANITY.**

FOR AS THE CRACKLING OF THORNS UNDER A POT [*KI KHE-KOL HA-SIRIM TACHAT HA-SIR*]. *Sirim* means “thorns.” It is related to the word *sirim* (thorns) in: *Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns* (ba-sirim) (Hosea 2:8). The meaning of the aforementioned verse is: *He (God) will place thorns and prickles on her way.*<sup>923</sup>

The word *sir* (pot) means the same as the word *sir* (pot) in *when we sat by the flesh-pots* (sir ha-basar) (Ex. 16:3).

The words *sir* (pot) and *sirim* (thorns) are employed in the same clause. They do not have the same meaning. Kohelet employs them to enhance his language.<sup>924</sup>

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<sup>923</sup> On the way of the unfaithful woman. The unfaithful woman represents Israel.

<sup>924</sup> Literarily, it is pure language.

Compare, [And he had thirty sons] that rode on thirty ass colts (ayarim), and they had thirty cities (ayarim) (Judges 10:4).<sup>925</sup>

Kohelet concludes the verse with *this also is vanity*.<sup>926</sup> This refers to the song of the fools (v. 5), their laughter, and their joy (v. 4). All of the aforementioned have no meaning. Their song, their laughter, and their joy, like *the crackling of thorns*, consists of noise and shouts.

## 7. SURELY OPPRESSION TURNETH A WISE MAN INTO A FOOL; AND A GIFT DESTROYETH THE UNDERSTANDING.

SURELY OPPRESSION TURNETH A WISE MAN INTO A FOOL. Kohelet notes that it is good for a wise man not to occupy himself with laughter. He mentions that [in addition to laughter] there is something else that will turn a wise man into a fool; that is, oppression.<sup>927</sup>

[AND A GIFT<sup>928</sup> DESTROYETH THE UNDERSTANDING]. The word *devar* should have been placed before *mattanah* (gift) because *vi-ye'abbed* (destroyeth) is masculine.<sup>929</sup>

Our verse is similar in meaning to *but he that hateth gifts (mattanot)*<sup>930</sup> *shall live* (Prov. 15: 27).

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<sup>925</sup> Here, too, Scripture employs in the same verse two words that sound the same but have different meanings so as to beautify the verse.

<sup>926</sup> Literally, he says this also is vanity.

<sup>927</sup> If a wise man oppresses another, he will lose his sense of judgment.

<sup>928</sup> A bribe.

<sup>929</sup> However, *mattanah* is feminine. Our verse reads: *vi-ye'abbed et lev mattanah* (and... destroyeth the understanding). The verse should have read: *vi-te'abbed et lev mattanah*, for *mattanah* is feminine. Hence, I.E. comments that our text should be read as if written: *vi-ye'abbed et lev devar matannah*. *Devar* is masculine. Thus, it is proper for *vi-ye'abbed* to govern it. *Devar* means "a thing." *Devar mattanah* means "a thing which is a gift." *Vi-ye'abbed et lev devar matannah* means: a thing which is a gift destroys understanding.

<sup>930</sup> Gifts refers to bribes.

Our verse is also similar to *till unrighteousness (avlatah) was found (nimtza) in thee* (Ezek. 28:15).<sup>931</sup>

**8. BETTER IS THE END OF A THING THAN THE BEGINNING THEREOF;  
AND THE PATIENT IN SPIRIT IS BETTER THAN THE PROUD IN SPIRIT.**

BETTER IS THE END OF A THING THAN THE BEGINNING THEREOF.  
Kohelet says that it is fit for a wise man not to love gifts (v. 7). He should consider the end result of all things that he does. For the end result is what counts.<sup>932</sup>

Can you not see that a wise man [who is ill] initially consumes medicine which is bitter because it will ultimately be of value? He will refrain from eating sweet things which initially taste good but are ultimately harmful.<sup>933</sup>

Kohelet tells the wise man to be patient in spirit. *Erekh* (patient) is an adjective. It follows the form of *yeled* (child) (4:13), *helekh* (a traveler) in *And there came a traveler* (2 Sam.12:4), and *yeter* (excellency) in *the excellency of dignity* (Gen. 49:3).

**9. BE NOT HASTY IN THY SPIRIT TO BE ANGRY; FOR ANGER RESTETH  
IN THE BOSOM OF FOOLS.**

BE NOT HASTY (*AL TEVAHEL*). *Tevahel* means “to be hasty.” Compare, *va-yavhilu* (and hastened) in *and hastened to bring Haman* (Est. 6:14).

I have already explained the meaning of this verse in my comments on *Vexation is better than laughter* (v. 3).

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<sup>931</sup> Here, too, the word *devar* must be inserted into the text. Ezek. 18:15 reads: *ad nimtza avlatah bakh* (till unrighteousness [avlatah] was found [nimtza] in thee). *Avlatah* is feminine. *Nimtza* is masculine. *Nimtze'ah* is feminine. Thus, our verse should have read *ad nimtze'ah avlatah bakh*. Hence, I.E. comments that our verse should be read as if written: *ad nimtza devar avlatah bakh*. In this case *nimtza* governs *devar*, which is masculine. According to I.E., *ad nimtza avlatah bakh* should be rendered: “till an unrighteous thing was found in thee.”

<sup>932</sup> Literally, is the main thing.

<sup>933</sup> Literally, bad.

**10. SAY NOT THOU: 'HOW WAS IT THAT THE FORMER DAYS WERE BETTER THAN THESE?' FOR IT IS NOT OUT OF WISDOM THAT THOU INQUIREST CONCERNING THIS.**

SAY NOT THOU. Kohelet is still warning and charging the wise man to be happy with his lot, even if he be poor,<sup>934</sup> as stated in the earlier verse: *or the poor man that hath understanding, in walking before the living?* (6:8).<sup>935</sup> Kohelet then goes on to say that the poor person should not occupy himself with acquiring money, but only with attaining that which sustains him (6:9). He should not be angry, because the fool has more money than he has. He should be patient in spirit (v. 8).<sup>936</sup> He should not ask, “What happened?” as do the fools if they lose their money.<sup>937</sup> The fools say that the world was turned upside down.<sup>938</sup> The one who understands, knows that the days are the same, so are the upper arrangements.<sup>939</sup> However, those who receive their influence<sup>940</sup> change, each one according to his portion.

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<sup>934</sup> R. Goodman's version reads: Kohelet is still warning and charging the wise man—it is possible that all of the earlier verses are connected—to be happy with his lot, even if he be poor, as stated in the earlier verse which reads *or the poor man that hath understanding, in walking before the living?*

<sup>935</sup> See I.E.'s interpretation of 6:8.

<sup>936</sup> The wise man should be patient in spirit and should not be angry because the fool has more money than he has.

<sup>937</sup> Literally, their greatness.

<sup>938</sup> I.E. interprets our verse as: The fools believe that the arrangement of the stars has changed, and thus, so has his luck.

<sup>939</sup> The arrangement of the stars that appears each day is always the same for that day. Thus, a sudden change in one's luck is not to be attributed to a change in the arrangement of the stars. See I.E.'s comment on the next verse.

<sup>940</sup> That is, people change. See I.E. on Deut. 31:16: "We know that God is One. Change comes from the recipient. God does not change His works." In other words, God does not change but people do.

**11. WISDOM IS GOOD WITH AN INHERITANCE, YEA, A PROFIT TO THEM THAT SEE THE SUN.**

WISDOM IS GOOD WITH AN INHERITANCE. If it's possible for the wise man to have an inheritance, then he is doing well.<sup>941</sup> It is even better [to have an inheritance] before those who see the sun,<sup>942</sup> for people will respect him for his wealth.<sup>943</sup>

**12. FOR WISDOM IS A DEFENSE, EVEN AS MONEY IS A DEFENSE; BUT THE EXCELLENCY OF KNOWLEDGE IS THAT WISDOM PRESERVETH THE LIFE OF HIM THAT HATH IT.**

FOR WISDOM IS A DEFENSE, EVEN AS MONEY IS A DEFENSE.<sup>944</sup> When wisdom is combined with an inheritance<sup>945</sup> the wise man will find protection in the shade provided by wisdom and in the shade provided by silver. However, there is a difference between the shade provided by wisdom and the shade provided by silver, for the shade provided by wisdom preserves the one who has it.<sup>946</sup> For wisdom is the form<sup>947</sup> of the supernal soul<sup>948</sup> that does not die when the body dies.

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<sup>941</sup> Literally, then it is well with him. The inheritance will provide for his needs.

<sup>942</sup> In other words, people.

<sup>943</sup> According to I.E. the meaning of our verse is. It is good for a wise man to have an inheritance, because it will provide for his needs. Moreover, people will respect him for his wealth.

<sup>944</sup> Literally, For in the shade of wisdom and in the shade of silver. I.E. renders this phrase: When wisdom is combined with an inheritance, then the wise man will find protection in the shade provided by wisdom and in the shade provided by silver.

<sup>945</sup> Literally, then.

<sup>946</sup> It provides eternal life.

<sup>947</sup> That is, the essence.

<sup>948</sup> Man's supernal soul consists of the wisdom which he acquires. See Ibn Ezra on 7:12. "Wisdom is the form of the supernal, which does not perish when the body dies."

### 13. CONSIDER THE WORK OF GOD; FOR WHO CAN MAKE THAT STRAIGHT, WHICH HE HATH MADE CROOKED?

CONSIDER THE WORK OF GOD. The wise man who does not have an inheritance or silver will be happy with his wisdom. He will not be angry because of his poverty, for that which was decreed for him was decreed at the six days of creation.<sup>949</sup> Those who understand the working of the heavens<sup>950</sup> will understand this. This is the meaning of *which God in creating had made* (Gen. 2:3). The meaning of the latter is: God put in all of the things that He had created the ability to produce things in accordance with the first forms [of the heavenly bodies]<sup>951</sup> at the time of a person's birth.<sup>952</sup> The one who was born under a perverse [heavenly] arrangement<sup>953</sup> with regard to money or anything else has no recourse.<sup>954</sup>

### 14. IN THE DAY OF PROSPERITY BE JOYFUL, AND IN THE DAY OF ADVERSITY CONSIDER; GOD HATH MADE EVEN THE ONE AS WELL AS THE OTHER, TO THE END THAT MAN SHOULD FIND NOTHING AFTER HIM.

IN THE DAY OF PROSPERITY BE JOYFUL. Why should the wise man who has an inheritance and silver be happy with something that does not last?

The wise man is, at it were, being told: In the day of prosperity be happy and joyful, but you must consider that a day of adversity will come.<sup>955</sup>

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<sup>949</sup> It was decreed during the 6 days of creation that a person born under a certain arrangement of the stars would have a given fate. Now, the arrangement of the stars does not change.

<sup>950</sup> Astrology, the arrangement of the celestial bodies and their influence upon earth.

<sup>951</sup> The arrangement of the heavenly bodies at creation. R. Goodman

<sup>952</sup> There is nothing new under the sun. Things happen according to the original arrangement of the heavenly bodies.

<sup>953</sup> A bad heavenly arrangement.

<sup>954</sup> Literally, has no fixing.

<sup>955</sup> I.E. reads our verse as follows: In the day of prosperity be joyful but consider the day of adversity. According to I.E., our verse speaks sarcastically.

Our verse is similar to: *Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; [and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth,] and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know thou, that for all these things [God will bring thee into judgment] (11:9). The point of our verse is: Do not be joyful in the day of prosperity [for the day of adversity will surely come].*<sup>956</sup>

**15. ALL THINGS HAVE I SEEN IN THE DAYS OF MY VANITY; THERE IS A RIGHTEOUS MAN THAT PERISHED IN HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND THERE IS A WICKED MAN THAT PROLONGETH HIS LIFE IN HIS EVIL-DOING.**

**THERE IS.** The word *yesh* (there is) means there are a few times.<sup>957</sup>

The meaning of *that perished in his righteousness* is that he perished because of his righteousness. An example being one who is always fasting.

The meaning of *ma'arikh be-ra'ato* (that prolongeth in his evil) is that the wicked man prolongs his life because of his evil-doing. He eats and drinks, makes merry, and indulges in what gives the body pleasure.<sup>958</sup>

**16. BE NOT RIGHTEOUS OVERMUCH; NEITHER MAKE THYSELF OVERWISE; WHY SHOULDEST THOU DESTROY THYSELF?**

**BE NOT RIGHTEOUS OVERMUCH.** If you pray from morning until evening, and you always fast, and the like, [cease doing so].

**WHY SHOULDEST THOU DESTROY THYSELF?** *Tishomem* (destroy thyself) means to “remove yourself from the way of people who live in the inhabited

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<sup>956</sup>According to I.E., the point of 11:9 is: Do not rejoice, O young man, in thy youth...for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.

<sup>957</sup> There occasionally is.

<sup>958</sup>*Ma'arikh be-ra'ato* literally means “that prolongeth in his evil.” Thus, the verse as written reads: “There is a wicked man that prolongeth in his evil.” The words “his life” are not in the text. Hence, I.E.’s comment that our text should be interpreted as if written "that prolongeth his life in his evil,"

world”<sup>959</sup> like the errants<sup>960</sup> who live in the Lands of the Christians and the Muslims.<sup>961</sup> Similarly, [do not act like this] if you seek to make yourself over wise.

The word *tishomem* (destroy thyself) is in the *nifal*.<sup>962</sup> Some say that the *dagesh* in the *shin* of *tishomem* does not compensate for the missing *nun* of the *nifal* but rather does so for the missing *tav* of the *hitpa'el*.<sup>963</sup> The word should have read *tishtomem*. They say this because we do not find double root-letters in the *nifal* that maintain both stem letters<sup>964</sup> However, we do find this to be the case<sup>965</sup> in the *hitpa'el* form in verbs whose middle root letter is dropped<sup>966</sup> Compare, *ve-tikkonen* (and established) in *tibbaneh ve-tikonen* (be built and established) (Num. 21:27).<sup>967</sup>

## 17. BE NOT OVERMUCH WICKED, NEITHER BE THOU FOOLISH; WHY SHOULDEST THOU DIE BEFORE THY TIME?

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<sup>959</sup> According to this interpretation *tishomem* is related to the word *shemamah*, a wasteland. *Lamah tishomem* literally means “Why should you become a wasteland?” That is, why should you act as if you were living in a wasteland?

<sup>960</sup> Some editions read: the hermits. See R Goodman.

<sup>961</sup> Christian monks and Muslim holy men would separate from society and live in the desert.

<sup>962</sup> *Tishomem* comes from the root *shin, mem, mem* (to waste). The *dagesh* in its *shin* compensates for the missing *nun* of the *nifal* conjugation.

<sup>963</sup> In other words, *tishomem* is not a *nifal* but a *hitpa'el*. According to this interpretation, the phrase *lammah tishomem* should be rendered: Why should you destroy yourself?

<sup>964</sup> In words that come from a double root—like *shin, mem, mem*—one of the root letters is dropped in the *nifal*. Thus, the root *shin, mem, mem* in the *nifal* should be *tisham* not *tishomem*.

<sup>965</sup> We find the third root letter to be doubled in the *hitpa'el*.

<sup>966</sup> Literally, not whole.

<sup>967</sup> *Tikkonen* comes from the root *kof, vav, nun*. This opinion believes that the root of *tishomem* is *shin, vav, mem*. It is thus like *tikkonen* whose root is *kof, vav, nun*. In both cases, the third root letter is doubled in the *hit'pael* (R. Goodman).

BE NOT OVERMUCH WICKED (*AL TIRSHA*). For much "wickedness" brings a person to danger. Hence, Kohelet adds, "Why shouldst thou die before thy time?" Note the following: The word "wicked" [in our verse] means to be occupied with things of this world.<sup>968</sup>

Kohelet says: Occupy yourselves with things of this world only until your needs are satisfied.<sup>969</sup> [He adds:] "Neither, be thou foolish," for foolishness brings about premature death.

**18. IT IS GOOD THAT THOU SHOULDEST TAKE HOLD OF THE ONE; YEA, ALSO FROM THE OTHER WITHDRAW NOT THY HAND; FOR HE THAT FEARETH GOD SHALL DISCHARGE HIMSELF OF THEM ALL.**

IT IS GOOD. I have already partially explained the makeup of the sections of the soul in my comments on the verse reading *vexation is better than laughter* (v. 3). The intelligent person will give to each part of his soul its portion in its proper time.<sup>970</sup> He has no need to search out what he should do. He should only walk in the path of the Torah of our God and not turn aside from it to the right or to the left. He should observe the commandments which result in his living in both worlds. This is the way Kohelet closed his book.<sup>971</sup> *For he that feareth God shall truly*<sup>972</sup> *discharge himself of them all.*<sup>973</sup>

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<sup>968</sup> "Wicked" in our verse refers to being overly occupied with things of this world. We can paraphrase this verse as follows: Be not overmuch wicked by occupying yourself in mundane affairs. I.E. renders thus because Kohelet seems to be saying that it is fine to indulge in a little wickedness.

<sup>969</sup> Such involvement with things of this world is not called "wicked."

<sup>970</sup> This is I.E.'s interpretation of: *It is good that thou shouldst take hold of the one; yea, also from the other withdraw not thy hand.*

<sup>971</sup> See Kohelet 12:13.

<sup>972</sup> The word "truly" is I.E.'s addition to the text.

<sup>973</sup> I.E.'s interpretation of: *for he that feareth God shall discharge himself of them all* means all those who fear God will observe all of the commandments.

## 19. WISDOM IS A STRONGHOLD TO THE WISE MAN MORE THAN TEN RULERS THAT ARE IN A CITY.

WISDOM IS A STRONGHOLD. Kohelet goes on<sup>974</sup> to explain that there is nothing higher than wisdom because he earlier said *neither make thyself overwise* (v. 16). He earlier warned that one should not be totally occupied with wisdom. He should give a portion to his body so that he will live (v. 16). He now says that wisdom has more power and strength than the might of many rulers.

Kohelet employs the number 10, because 10 is the last of the single numbers.<sup>975</sup> Ten is the first of the two-digit numbers, for everything above ten consists of "ones."<sup>976</sup>

Now, since the most important parts of anything are the head, the middle, and the end, the *alef*<sup>977</sup> in the holy tongue marks the beginning of the numbers, and *yod* the end.<sup>978</sup>

The *heh* and the *vav* are intermediary.<sup>979</sup>

The letters *alef*, *heh*, *vav*, and *yod* serve as vowel letters.<sup>980</sup>

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<sup>974</sup> Literally, goes back,

<sup>975</sup> The last of the numbers 1-10. Literally, the end of the numbers.

<sup>976</sup> There are no new numbers above ten. All numbers above ten employ the numbers 1-10; e.g., 11 employs a 1 and a 1, 23 a 2 and a 3, 45 a 4 and a 5, etc.

<sup>977</sup> *Alef* stands for 1.

<sup>978</sup> *Yod* stands for 10.

<sup>979</sup> The *heh* stands for 5 and the *vav* for 6.

<sup>980</sup> Literally, they serve to prolong. Hebrew, *otiyot... le-Meshach*. Leo Pijies renders this as *litera protractionis*. Leo Pijies, *Die Grammatikalische Terminologie Des Abraham Ibn Ezra*, Basel, 1950. p.77. These letters serve as vowels. Hence, one of them, whether visible or not, accompanies and prolongs every word. The *yod* is sounded in every *chirik* and *tzerei*. The *vav* in every *cholam* or *shuruk*. The *alef* and *heh* in every *pattach*, or *kamatz*.

There is no letter or vowel that is not accompanied [by one] of these four letters.<sup>981</sup>

The *alef* and the *yod* are numbers that maintain themselves [as if surrounded] by a wall.<sup>982</sup>

The *heh* and *vav* are circular numbers.<sup>983</sup>

These four numbers<sup>984</sup> have a great secret in them which is tied to the glorious and awesome name of God<sup>985</sup> which is not an adjective.<sup>986</sup> This name<sup>987</sup> is made up of these four letters.

The meaning of *more than ten rulers that are in a city* is, more than ten rulers who gather in one place and have one mind.

Some say that the ten rulers allude to the spheres. One sphere has been added.<sup>988</sup> What they say is incorrect.

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<sup>981</sup> Hebrew, *nimshakh immo*. I.E.'s point is that one of these letters is sounded in every letter.

<sup>982</sup> The numbers 1 (*alef*) and 10 (*yod*) do not disappear when squared. One multiplied by 1 is 1. Ten multiplied by 10 is 100. In both cases, the identical original number is found in its square: 1 in 1x1, and 10 in 10x10.

<sup>983</sup> When squared, they do not disappear, although other numbers appear with them. Five multiplied by 5 is 25, 6 multiplied by 6 is 36.

<sup>984</sup> *Alef, heh, vav, yod*.

<sup>985</sup> They spell out God's name: YHVH or its variant EHYH (spelled *alef, heh, yod, heh*).

<sup>986</sup> It is a noun, unlike the other names of God—e.g., Elohim—which are adjectives. See I.E. on Ex. 3:15.

<sup>987</sup> YHVH or its variant EHYH.

<sup>988</sup> Nine spheres surround the earth. The tenth is in a category by itself. This is the sphere of the first intellect, also known as *kissei ha-kavod*, the Throne of Glory, which encompasses the other spheres. See I.E. on Ps. 8:4 and Ex. 3:15. I.E. at times speaks of nine spheres and at other times of ten.

**20. FOR THERE IS NOT A RIGHTEOUS MAN UPON EARTH, THAT DOETH GOOD, AND SINNETH NOT.**

FOR THERE IS NOT A RIGHTEOUS MAN UPON EARTH. Kohelet goes back to his earlier statement *be not righteous overmuch* (v. 16).<sup>989</sup> The meaning of our verse is: Know that you cannot avoid sinning, for there is no man who does not sin by doing something wrong [in act,] in speech, or in thought. The Book of Proverbs includes sinning in thought among the seven abominations that God hates. Proverbs states: [God hates:] *A heart that deviseth wicked thoughts* (Prov. 6:18).<sup>990</sup>

The meaning of *that doeth good* is “that always does good.”

The meaning of *and sinneth not* is “and never sins.”

**21. ALSO TAKE NOT HEED UNTO ALL WORDS THAT ARE SPOKEN, LEST THOU HEAR THY SERVANT CURSE THEE.**

ALSO TAKE NOT HEED UNTO ALL WORDS THAT ARE SPOKEN. Kohelet tells the wise man: If you want to be at ease, do not pay attention to everything that people say. Even if the one who curses you is your servant, [pay no attention] for if you pay heed to everything that people say, you will become angry and the light of the wisdom of your soul will grow dark.

**22. FOR OFTENTIMES ALSO THINE OWN HEART KNOWETH THAT THOU THYSELF LIKEWISE HAST CURSED OTHERS.**

OFTENTIMES. The plural of the word *pa'am* (time) in the holy tongue always has a masculine form.<sup>991</sup> However, the word itself is always a feminine.<sup>992</sup> There is one

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<sup>989</sup> Kohelet now explains why a person should not be *righteous overmuch*.

<sup>990</sup> Hence I.E. includes sins of the mind along with sins committed by the body.

<sup>991</sup> The plural of *pa'am* is *pe'amim*. *Pe'amim* is the form used in our verse for “times.”

<sup>992</sup> Our verse reads: *pe'amim rabbot* (oftentimes). *Rabbot* (often) is feminine. Thus, our verse treats *pe'amim* as a feminine. I.E. points out that this is the case in all of Scripture with one exception.

exception. The word *pa'am* uttered by Samson when he said: *Ach ha-pa'am ha-zeh* (only this once) (Judges 16:28).<sup>993</sup>

The meaning of our verse is: Do not pay any attention to the words of those who insult and curse, for you know that you cursed others verbally<sup>994</sup> and in your thoughts.

**23. ALL THIS HAVE I TRIED BY WISDOM; I SAID: 'I WILL GET WISDOM'; BUT IT WAS FAR FROM ME.**

ALL THIS HAVE I TRIED BY WISDOM. All that I have told you, I tested by employing wisdom. I thought that I would acquire additional wisdom.<sup>995</sup> I found that this was far and beyond [me].<sup>996</sup> Our verse is similar to: *neither make thyself over wise* (v. 16).

[*I said: I will get wisdom; but it was far from me,*] for it is very difficult for a man to fully know that which occurred in the past.<sup>997</sup> [I similarly discovered that] the future,<sup>998</sup> too, is exceedingly deep.<sup>999</sup>

Another interpretation [for: *I said: "I will get wisdom" but it was far from me; that which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out? is:*] I sought wisdom and I found that it was far and beyond [me]. Nevertheless, I mastered it and grew wise.

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<sup>993</sup> *Ha-pa'am ha-zeh* is masculine.

<sup>994</sup> Literally, with your mouth.

<sup>995</sup> Wisdom beyond that which I taught you.

<sup>996</sup> I.E.'s explanation of "I said: *I will get wisdom; but it was far from me.*"

<sup>997</sup> Literally, "for it is very difficult for a man to really know the essence of that which occurred in the past." I.E. believes that "far off" refers to the past. This interpretation believes that, *I will get wisdom but it was far from me* refers to knowledge of the past.

<sup>998</sup> That which is far off in the future

<sup>999</sup> I.E.'s paraphrase of "that which is far off, and exceeding deep; who can find it out?"

## 24. THAT WHICH IS FAR OFF, AND EXCEEDING DEEP; WHO CAN FIND IT OUT?

[THAT WHICH IS FAR OFF.] The meaning of *that which was far off*<sup>1000</sup> is: [I could only not master] that which was far off [from me].<sup>1001</sup>

The meaning of *and exceeding deep, who can find it out?* is: it is possible [for an intelligent] man to seek and find that which is in existence.<sup>1002</sup>

*And exceeding deep, who can find it out? (Prov. 20:5)* is similar in meaning to *Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out (Ibid.)*.<sup>1003</sup>

## 25. I TURNED ABOUT AND APPLIED MY HEART<sup>1004</sup> TO KNOW AND TO SEARCH OUT, AND TO SEEK WISDOM AND THE REASON OF THINGS, AND TO KNOW WICKEDNESS TO BE FOLLY, AND FOOLISHNESS TO BE MADNESS.

I TURNED ABOUT. I turned about my face<sup>1005</sup> and the thoughts of my heart<sup>1006</sup> to know if wisdom<sup>1007</sup> and the reason of things—that is, beliefs<sup>1008</sup> based on knowledge<sup>1009</sup>--can be joined with wickedness, folly, foolishness, and madness.<sup>1010</sup>

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<sup>1000</sup>Translated according to I.E.

<sup>1001</sup> I could not master that which happened in the past.

<sup>1002</sup> Literally, a thing which has not passed.

<sup>1003</sup> In other words, a man of understanding will understand difficult things. This interpretation reads our verse as follows: I said: “*I will get wisdom but it was far from me*; that is, I said: “*I will learn what happened in the past* (in time far off) but it was far from me. However, I was able to master that which exists, though it is exceeding deep.

<sup>1004</sup> Literally, I turned about and to my heart.

<sup>1005</sup> Our verse literally reads: “I turned about, and my heart.” “I turned about” is short for “I turned about my face”; that is, my attention.

**26. AND I FIND MORE BITTER THAN DEATH THE WOMAN, WHOSE HEART IS SNARES AND NETS, AND HER HANDS AS BANDS; WHOSO PLEASETH GOD SHALL ESCAPE FROM HER; BUT THE SINNER SHALL BE TAKEN BY HER.**

AND I FIND MORE BITTER THAN DEATH THE WOMAN. Kohelet found that lust blinds the eyes of the wise, perverts their minds,<sup>1011</sup> and swallows their wisdom.<sup>1012</sup>

The word *motze* (find) is a *po'el*.<sup>1013</sup> It follows the form of *kore* (calleth) (Is. 40:3).<sup>1014</sup> However, the word *motze* (causeth to ascend) in *Who causeth the vapors to ascend* (Ps. 135:7) is a *hifil*. It, too, is a *po'el*.<sup>1015</sup> It should have read

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<sup>1006</sup> “My heart” is short for “the thoughts in my heart.” In other words, I turned about and my heart” is to be interpreted as: “I turned about my face (my attention) and the thoughts of my heart.”

<sup>1007</sup> The reference might be to wisdom acquired by reading or from the mouth of a teacher.

<sup>1008</sup> Literally, thoughts.

<sup>1009</sup> The knowledge of things. The reference might be to beliefs or knowledge based on empirical knowledge.

<sup>1010</sup> I tried to find out whether one can be wise, wicked and a glutton, at the same time.

<sup>1011</sup> Literally, their thoughts.

<sup>1012</sup> Literally, causes their wisdom to be swallowed. Thus, wisdom cannot be combined with debauchery.

<sup>1013</sup> It is a present *kal* form. In I.E.'s version of Scripture, *motzei* was probably vocalized with a *tzerei*. The word is vocalized *cholam, segol* (*motze*) in our versions of Kohelet. See R. Goodman.

<sup>1014</sup> *Korei* is a present *kal* form vocalized *cholam, tzerei*.

<sup>1015</sup> A present form.

motzi.<sup>1016</sup> *Motze* (Ps. 135:7) is sounded on the first syllable, because the word which follows it [*ru'ach*] is also sounded on the first syllable.<sup>1017</sup>

The word *metzodim* (snares) comes from the word *tzayid* (hunter)<sup>1018</sup> (Gen. 10:9).<sup>1019</sup> It is vocalized like the word *meromim* (on high) (Is. 33:16). It comes from a root whose middle root letter is “incomplete.”<sup>1020</sup>

The word *charamim* means “nets.” The word *charamim* (nets) in, *a place for the spreading of nets* (Ezek. 26:5) is similar to it.

The meaning of *whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands* is that the heart and thoughts of the women<sup>1021</sup> are devoted at every moment to the spreading of nets to snare people. Her hands are like a prison.

The meaning of *be taken by her* is: be taken by her net.

Kohelet says that it is better<sup>1022</sup> for a wise man to be dead rather than [to be entrapped by] lust.

**27. BEHOLD, THIS HAVE I FOUND, SAITH KOHELETH, ADDING ONE THING TO ANOTHER, TO FIND OUT THE ACCOUNT.**

BEHOLD. Kohelet is still talking about the women [mentioned in the previous verse.]

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<sup>1016</sup> It is irregular, for *motze* in Ps. 135:7 should have been vocalized with a *chirik* rather than with a *tzerei*. For *motzi* is the normal form of the root *yod, tzadi, alef* in the *hifil*.

<sup>1017</sup> This is technically referred to as *nasog achor*— “it goes back.” That is, when a word precedes a word that is sounded on the first syllable, it, too, is pronounced on the first syllable. The accent of the first word “retreats” to its first syllable,

<sup>1018</sup> Both words come from the same root: *tzadi, vav, dalet*.

<sup>1019</sup> The hunter ensnares prey.

<sup>1020</sup> A root that at times drops its middle letter, an *ayin vav*.

<sup>1021</sup> Spoken of in our verse.

<sup>1022</sup> Literally, death would be better for the wise than lust.

The phrase *amerah Kohelet* (saith Kohelet) is what wisdom days.<sup>1023</sup>

The meaning of *cheshbon* (account) is a [logical] conclusion.<sup>1024</sup>

Kohelet says, [*Behold, this have I found...*] *adding one thing to another*<sup>1025</sup> in order to come to a [logical] conclusion.<sup>1026</sup> This is because a person cannot come to a conclusion, which is what he desires, unless he places one premise next to another other premise. Now, it is known that the first premise consists of a subject and a predicate. So, does the second premise. Now [we can come to a logical conclusion] if when placing the premises side to side, the predicate of the first premise is the same as the subject of the second premise.<sup>1027</sup> [A logical conclusion may also be reached] if the two subjects of the premises are the same<sup>1028</sup> or the two predicates of the premises are the same.<sup>1029</sup> If we place one premise next to the other in the manner just described then a third premise will result.<sup>1030</sup>

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<sup>1023</sup> *Amerah* is feminine. The phrase should have read *amar Kohelet*. Hence, I.E.'s suggestion that *amerah Kohelet* should be understood as *amerah he-chakhmah* (wisdom said) or *amerah chokhmat Kohelet* (Kohelet's wisdom said). See Goodman.

<sup>1024</sup> Hebrew, *machashevet*. I.E. refers to the third step in a syllogism by the term *machashevet*. David Rosen *Die Religionphilosophie Abraham ibn Ezra's*, p. 232. Quoted by Goodman.

<sup>1025</sup> According to Kohelet, *adding one thing to another* means comparing one thing to another.

<sup>1026</sup> I.E.'s rendition of our verse which reads: *Behold, this have I found, saith Koheleth, adding one thing to another, to find out the account.*

<sup>1027</sup> Premise 1. People (subject) are living beings (predicate). Premise 2. Living beings (subject) are sentient (predicate). Conclusion: People are sentient. (Maimonides, *Milot Ha-Higayon*; Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1987, p. 34 as quoted by R. Goodman.)

<sup>1028</sup> Premise 1. Living beings (subject) are sentient (predicate). Premise 2. Some living beings (subject) are white (predicate). Conclusion. Some sentient beings are white (Maimonides, *Milot Ha-Higayon*; Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1987, p. 34 as quoted by R. Goodman).

<sup>1029</sup> Premise 1: People (subject) are living beings (predicate). Premise 2: Stones (subject) are not living beings (predicate). Conclusion. 3. Stones are not people (Maimonides, *Milot Ha-Higayon*; Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1987, p. 34 as quoted by Goodman).

The above applies to things relating to the spirit <sup>1031</sup> and also to [things relating to] bodies. <sup>1032</sup>

The point of our verse is: It would be improper for a wise man to be joined with a woman in any way, were it not for the fact that it is impossible to leave behind a descendent, a third person, <sup>1033</sup> unless the father and mother are joined.

Another interpretation [for, *Behold, this have I found, saith Koheleth, adding one thing to another, to find out the account*] is:

This verse is connected to what follows.

The meaning of *cheshbon* (account) is "an account" or "a sum." <sup>1034</sup> The point of our verse is: When you consider any thing, you will find that it does not exist by itself. <sup>1035</sup> [It cannot be described] unless <sup>1036</sup> it is compared to something else. Let describing an object as large or small [serve as an example]. Something cannot be

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<sup>1030</sup> See notes 168, 169, 170.

<sup>1031</sup> Intellectual premises.

<sup>1032</sup> Human bodies.

<sup>1033</sup> A child.

<sup>1034</sup> The first interpretation explained *cheshbon* as meaning, a logical conclusion reached via comparing two premises. This interpretation renders *cheshbon* as a sum, that is, examining a large number of people and coming to a conclusion. I.E. reads our verse as follows: Behold, this (what is recorded in verse 28) have I found adding one person to another person to find the total number of worthy people

<sup>1035</sup> Literally, it is not alone. Nothing stands by itself. You cannot describe anything except by comparing it in your mind to other things.

<sup>1036</sup> Literary, until.

described as large unless it is compared to something smaller than it. The reverse is the case with a small object.<sup>1037</sup> The same applies to the terms wise and foolish.

The same is true of numbers.<sup>1038</sup> For when 1 is added to 1, the first of the numbers [the number 2] is established.<sup>1039</sup> If you join 1 to the first number [2], it turns into the end [3].<sup>1040</sup> When you join 1 to the end [3], you get the root [4].<sup>1041</sup> When you join 1 to the root [4] you get the circular number [5].<sup>1042</sup> [If you add 1 to the circular number] you get the perfect number [6].<sup>1043</sup> [If you add 1 to the perfect

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<sup>1037</sup> It is small in relation to something which is large.

<sup>1038</sup> According to I.E., 1 by itself is not considered a number (see next note). However, when joined to another number, it takes on meaning. For example, 2 consists of 1+1, 3 consists of 2(1+1) +1; 4 consists of 3(1+1+1) + 1, and so on. Thus, adding 1 to one of the numbers defines the number 1. The number 1 added to the number 2, becomes number three and so on.

<sup>1039</sup> According to I.E., the numbers start with 2. This is the opinion of the Pythagoreans. Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 14a, 1087b. The number 1 is the foundation of numbers. However, the counting of the numbers starts with 2. See *Sefer Ha-Echad* 1. Also see Levin p. 399. Also see I.E. on Ex. 3:15, Short Commentary.

<sup>1040</sup> A body consists of 3 sides [or, ends]: height, width, and depth. See *Sefer Ha-Echad*:3, Levin, p.400. I.E. refers to the numbers by names that only one familiar with numerology would recognize. He speaks of the first number, the end, the root, the perfect number, and the complete number.

<sup>1041</sup> 4 is the first number to have a root. The square root of 4 is 2.

<sup>1042</sup> It does not disappear when squared. 5 squared=25.

<sup>1043</sup> "In number theory, a perfect number is a positive integer that is equal to the sum of its proper positive divisors, that is, the sum of its positive divisors excluding the number itself" (Wikipedia).

number [ 6] you get the complete number [7].<sup>1044</sup> [If you add 1 to the complete number] you get a body [8].<sup>1045</sup>

The meaning of our verse is: Even though we cannot [in reality] find a [perfectly] intelligent, wise, and God-fearing man—that is, the perfect man—we can [from a relative point of view] find such a person if we compare people.<sup>1046</sup> Among males alone,<sup>1047</sup> will one such person will be found among a thousand.

[ADDING ONE THING TO ANOTHER] The word *achat* (one) is feminine.<sup>1048</sup>

Note, the letters of the Hebrew alphabet are divided into two groups. They are divided into letters that at times function as servile letters,<sup>1049</sup> and at times as root letters. The remaining letters of the alphabet serve as root letters. The letters that serve as servile letters are *kastil av hamon* (*kof, sin, tav, yod, lamed, alef, bet, heh,*

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<sup>1044</sup> 7 is called a complete number because it is made up of the first odd number (3) plus the second even number (4). It is also made up of the first even number (2) plus the second odd number (5).

<sup>1045</sup> A cube. A cube consists of eight points. See *Sefer Ha-Echad*: 8, where I.E. goes on to say that 9 ends the numbers. I do not know why he omitted 9 here.

<sup>1046</sup> The truly perfect man cannot be found. However, a relative perfect man can be found.

<sup>1047</sup> Not females.

<sup>1048</sup> Our verse reads: *achat le-achat li-metzo cheshbon* (adding one thing to another, to find out the account). According to I.E., this should be rendered: “comparing one [woman] to another [woman] to find the account”; that is, to see the result of comparing a number of women to each other. I.E. now goes into a discourse on Hebrew linguistics because he wants to grammatically explain the word *achat* (one).

<sup>1049</sup> Letters which serve as prepositions, prefixes, and suffixes. See Leo Prij, *Dies Grammatikalische Terminologie Des Abraham Ibn Esra*, Basel, 1950. pp141-142. They also serve as formative elements to a root. For example, the *mem* in the word *mitzvah* (precept) is a servile letter, for the root of *mitzvahis* *tzadi, vav, heh*. *Dikduke Hate'amim*, ed. Baer and Strack, page 4, line 22. Berlin 1879.

*mem, vav, nun*).<sup>1050</sup> The rest of the letters [of the alphabet] always serve as root letters.

Letters which serve only as root letters are found employed as servile letters only in words where the root letter is doubled. Compare, *shechachoret* (swarthy) (Song of Songs 1:6).<sup>1051</sup> Letters which serve only as root letters are also never dropped unless they come from a double root, such as the *dalet* in the words *shod* (desolation) (Is. 59:7) which comes from the root *shin, dalet, dalet*.

Similarly, the *tav* root letter is dropped when it precedes a *tav*<sup>1052</sup> indicating the second person. Compare, *ve-kharata* (and cut down)<sup>1053</sup> (Deut. 20:20). The root letter *nun* is likewise dropped when it precedes the *nun* of the feminine [imperfect] plural form. Compare, *tishkonnah* (shall they dwell) (Ezek. 17:23). The *nun* is swallowed [by the dagesh].<sup>1054</sup> So, too, the root letter *tav* is dropped in the word *mesharat* (ministered)<sup>1055</sup> (1 Kings 1:15) because the root letter *tav* precedes<sup>1056</sup> the *tav* which indicates the feminine.

The *resh* of *mesharat* (minister) (1 Kings:15)<sup>1057</sup> is vocalized with a *pattach* to indicate that the word is in the feminine. It is so vocalized in order to differentiate

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<sup>1050</sup>I.E. employs *kastil av ha-mon* as a mnemonic device to assist in remembering these letters. He chose the words *kastil av ha-mon* for they spell out “Abraham (*av hamon* (Gen. 17:5) from Castille.” Abraham ibn Ezra came from Castille.

<sup>1051</sup> *Shechachoret* comes from the root *shin, chet, resh*. The *resh* is not ordinarily a servile letter. However, the second *resh* in *shechachoret* is. I.E. points out that a root letter that is doubled can serve as a servile letter.

<sup>1052</sup> Literally, is combined with the *tav*.

<sup>1053</sup> From the root *kaf, resh, tav*.

<sup>1054</sup> Placed in the nun of *tishkonnah*.

<sup>1055</sup> From the root, *shin, resh, tav*.

<sup>1056</sup> Literally, joins.

<sup>1057</sup> *Mesharat* is a variant of *mesharetet*. It thus should have been vocalized *mesharet*. However, it was vocalized *mesharat* to distinguish it from the male form *mesharet*.

between it and the word *mesharet* (minister) (Num.11:28) which is a masculine. The same is true with the *dalet* of [the feminine form of] *echad* (one) (Kohelet 2:14) which has no *dagesh*.<sup>1058</sup> The *dalet* is dropped when it precedes a feminine *tav* which does not have a *dagesh*. The root letter *dalet* is dropped because the *dalet* and the *tav* are both linguals.<sup>1059</sup> The same is the case with *la-lat* (to be delivered) (1 Sam. 4:19.)<sup>1060</sup>

Some say that [*echad* and *achat*] come from different roots but have the same meaning.<sup>1061</sup> They explain that the word *ach* (brother) (Ps. 49:8) and *ach* (brother) (Ezek. 18:10) mean “one.” However, this is farfetched, for the meaning of *ach lo fado yifdeh ish* (Ps. 49:8) is “a brother (*ach*) cannot redeem the life of a man (related to him),” or “a man cannot redeem the life of his brother (*ach*).”<sup>1062</sup> The word *ach* [in Ps. 49:8] is either the subject or the object.<sup>1063</sup> The next verse [which reads: *For too costly is the redemption of their soul, and must be let alone forever*] proves that this is the case. The point of the verses (Ps. 48:8-9) is: People cannot redeem their brothers or their loved ones from death. How can they redeem their brothers or their loved ones from death when they cannot redeem themselves from death?<sup>1064</sup>

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<sup>1058</sup> The *dalet* with a *dagesh* is sounded differently in biblical Hebrew than a *dalet* without a *dagesh*. The Hebrew word for “one” is *echad*. We would thus expect the feminine form to be *achdat*. However, it is hard to pronounce a *dalet* and a *tav* back to back when the *dalet* and *tav* have no *dagesh*. Hence, the *dalet* is dropped and the word sounded *achat*.

<sup>1059</sup> Two consecutive linguals, a *dalet* and *tav*, are difficult to sound.

<sup>1060</sup> *La-lat* is short for *la-ledet*. The *dalet* is dropped to simplify pronunciation. See the above two notes.

<sup>1061</sup> According to this interpretation, *achat* is not the feminine of *echad*, but is the feminine form of *ach*.

<sup>1062</sup> It does not mean “one cannot redeem the life of a man,” or “a man cannot redeem the life of one.”

<sup>1063</sup> It is the subject in Ps. 49:8 if we render the verse, “a brother (*ach*) cannot redeem the life of a man.” It is the object if we render PS. 49:8 “a man cannot redeem the life of his brother (*ach*).”

<sup>1064</sup> Literally, grow tired in attempting to save themselves [from death].

The word *ach* (brother) in *ve'asah ach* (that doeth to a brother) (Ezek.18:10) is an object or a subject. If we take *ach* (brother) as a subject then *ach* refers to Israel.<sup>1065</sup> The meaning of *ve'asah ach* is, an Israelite shall do.<sup>1066</sup>

If *ach* is an object, it refers to a sin. In this case the meaning of *ve'asah ach* is “he will commit a sin which is a sister<sup>1067</sup> to the previously noted transgressions.”<sup>1068</sup>

Or the meaning of *ach* (brother) is, [an evil thing,] for an evil thing is their brother.<sup>1069</sup>

Furthermore, how can the meaning of *ach* in *ve-asah ach* be “one” when the interpretation that *ach* means “one” is refuted<sup>1070</sup> by the phrase *me'achat me'elleh* (any of these things) that follows? For, if *ach* means “one,” then the verse would be read as if written: *ve-asah echad me-achat me-elleh* (doeth one, one of these things).<sup>1071</sup>

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<sup>1065</sup> Israel (an Israelite)) is the brother of which Ezek. 18:10 speaks. Ezek. 18:10 reads: “If he beget a son that is a robber, a shedder of blood, and that doeth to a brother (*ach*) any of these things.” This interpretation reads our verse as follows: “If he beget a son that is a robber, a shedder of blood, and a brother (*ach*) that doeth any of these things.”

<sup>1066</sup> That is, an Israelite shall do. The reference is to the son mentioned earlier in the verse. I.E. uses the term “Israel” because he wants to stress that the word *ach* refers to a person, not to a number.

<sup>1067</sup> That is, who commits a sin which is similar to robbing or shedding blood.

<sup>1068</sup> Ezek. 18:10 reads: “If he beget a son that is a robber, a shedder of blood, and that doeth to a brother (*ach*) any of these things.” According to this interpretation, our verse means: If he beget a son that is a robber, a shedder of blood, and a “brother” that commits a sin, which is a sister (similar) to any of these things—robbing or shedding blood. “Which is a sister” is not part of the verse. It is I.E.'s interpretation of “any of these things.” According to I.E. “any of these things” means “anything similar (a “sister”) to these things.”

<sup>1069</sup> Evil is their second nature. Hence, the prophet applies the term “brother” to their evil activities.

<sup>1070</sup> So Yonah Filwarg, *Ve-nei Reshef*, Petrekov, 1900. p.36.

**28. WHICH YET MY SOUL SOUGHT, BUT I FOUND NOT; ONE MAN AMONG A THOUSAND HAVE I FOUND; BUT A WOMAN AMONG ALL THOSE HAVE I NOT FOUND.**

WHICH YET MY SOUL SOUGHT. The word *bikshah* (sought) is a *pi'el*. The *chirik* [beneath the *bet*] proves the aforementioned.<sup>1072</sup> The *dagesh* is missing from its *kof*<sup>1073</sup> as it is missing from the [*lamed* in the] word *shilchu*<sup>1074</sup> (They have sent) (Ps. 74:7) and the word *hetel* (mocked) in *hetel li* (hath mocked me) (Gen. 31:7). *Hetel*<sup>1075</sup> is related to the word *va-yehattel* (mocked) in, *that Elijah mocked them* (1 Kings 18:27). There is no other word like *hetel* in any of the whole roots that are in the [*pi'el*] singular masculine.<sup>1076</sup> The phrase "whole roots" applies to all roots, except for those [whose middle root letters] are gutturals.<sup>1077</sup>

[ONE MAN AMONG A THOUSAND HAVE I FOUND; BUT A WOMAN AMONG ALL THOSE HAVE I NOT FOUND.] The phrase "among all those" refers back to "among a thousand," the number earlier mentioned.

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<sup>1071</sup> *Doeth one, one of these things* is redundant. Furthermore, the phrase *echad me-achat* is ungrammatical, for *echad* is masculine and *achat* is feminine.

<sup>1072</sup> Verbs in the *pi'el* perfect are vocalized with a *chirik* beneath the first stem letter.

<sup>1073</sup> Verbs in the *pi'el* have a *dagesh* in the second root letter. *Bikshah*, which comes from the root *bet, kof, shin*, has no *dagesh* in it.

<sup>1074</sup> *Shilchu* is a *pi'el*. It, too, lacks a *dagesh* in its middle root letter.

<sup>1075</sup> *Va-yehattel* is a *pi'el*. It follows the regular grammatical rule and has a *dagesh* in the *tav*, its middle root letter,

<sup>1076</sup> There is no other word in the *pi'el* singular masculine whose first root letter is vocalized with a *tzerei* and has no *dagesh* in its middle root letter. Had *hetel* followed the rule, then it would have been vocalized *hittel*.

<sup>1077</sup> Words whose middle root letters are gutturals are usually vocalized in the *pi'el* with a *tzerei* beneath the first root letter and do not have a *dagesh* in the middle root letter. *Filwarg*.

Scripture speaks of a thousand because Solomon had a thousand wives. Compare, *And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart* (1Kings 11:3).

**29. BEHOLD, THIS ONLY HAVE I FOUND, THAT GOD MADE MAN UPRIGHT; BUT THEY HAVE SOUGHT OUT MANY INVENTIONS.**

**THIS ONLY.** The plural of *cheshbon* (invention) [is *chishvonot*]. *Chishvonot* (inventions) is a feminine form. However, *chishvonot* is masculine.<sup>1078</sup> Compare, *avonot* (iniquities) (Job 13:23).<sup>1079</sup>

The point of our verse is: God made man to be upright, to walk in a straight path, but man sought crooked paths.<sup>1080</sup> Additionally, the idea expressed in our verse<sup>1081</sup> is connected to the earlier verse which teaches that one woman is sufficient for a man.<sup>1082</sup>

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<sup>1078</sup> Even though it has a feminine form.

<sup>1079</sup> *Avonot* is masculine, even though it has a feminine form, for the singular of *avonot* is *avon*.

<sup>1080</sup> I.E.'s rendition of "they have sought out many inventions."

<sup>1081</sup> Our verse which teaches that a man should take one women is, tied to verse 27 which according to I.E. teaches that a man should marry only one women.

<sup>1082</sup> God made man upright; that is, God intended man to have one woman. However, they have sought out many inventions; they seek more than one woman.

## CHAPTER 8

### 1. WHO IS AS THE WISE MAN? AND WHO KNOWETH THE INTERPRETATION OF A THING? A MAN'S WISDOM MAKETH HIS FACE TO SHINE, AND THE BOLDNESS OF HIS FACE IS CHANGED.

WHO IS AS THE WISE MAN? There are instances where a word is to be read as if written twice.<sup>1083</sup> The word *al* (not) in: *O Lord, rebuke me not in Thine anger* (Ps. 38:2)<sup>1084</sup> and the word *al* (not) in: *Let Reuben live, and not die* (Deut. 33:6)<sup>1085</sup> are examples. So, too, the word *yikhpeh* (pacifieth) in: *A gift in secret pacifieth anger* (Prov. 21:14).<sup>1086</sup>

We also find letters that are to be read as if written twice.<sup>1087</sup> For example: *Even by the God* (me-El) *of thy father, Who shall help thee, and the Almighty* (ve-et Shaddai) [*Who shall bless thee* (Gen. 49:25) should be read as if written:] “Even by

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<sup>1083</sup> Literally, pulls itself and other one with it.

<sup>1084</sup> Ps. 38:2 literally reads: *O Lord, rebuke me not in Thine anger, chasten me in Thy wrath*. I.E. believes that the verse should be read as if written: “O Lord, rebuke me not in Thine anger, chasten me not in Thy wrath,” for the Psalmist would not ask God to chasten him.

<sup>1085</sup> Deut. 33:6 literally reads: *Let Reuben live, and not die; may his men become few*. I.E. believes that the verse should be read as if written: “May Reuben live, and not die; may his men not become few,” for Moses was blessing Reuben.

<sup>1086</sup> Prov. 21:14 literally reads: *A gift in secret pacifieth anger, and a present in the bosom strong wrath*. I.E. believes that the verse should be read as if written: *A gift in secret pacifieth anger and a present in the bosom pacifieth strong wrath*.

<sup>1087</sup> See note 1.

the God (*me-El*) of thy father, Who shall help thee, and even by (*u-me-et Shaddai*) the Almighty [Who shall bless thee].<sup>1088</sup>

*Even by the God of thy father, Who shall help thee, and even by the Almighty Who shall bless thee* is connected<sup>1089</sup> to the verse that precedes it;<sup>1090</sup> namely, to [*But his bow abode firm, and the arms of his hands were made supple by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob; from thence, from the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel*]. Our verse tells us that [Jacob told Joseph]: All this<sup>1091</sup> came to you from the God of your father Who shall eternally help you.

Rabbi Saadiah Gaon of blessed memory says that the meaning of *Even by the God (me-El) of thy father, Who shall help thee* is: I shall ask of the God (*me-El*) of thy father that He help thee.<sup>1092</sup>

According to both interpretations a *mem* is to be placed before the word *et*.

A *mem* is similarly to be placed before the word *meisharim* (smooth wine) in *meisharim ahevukha* (Song 1:4).<sup>1093</sup> The meaning of *meisharim ahevukha*<sup>1094</sup> is:

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<sup>1088</sup> In other words, the *mem* placed before *El* is also to be placed in front of the word *ve-et* later in the verse. *Ve-et* is to be read as if written *u-me-et*.

<sup>1089</sup> Literally, it is connected.

<sup>1090</sup> Gen. 49:24.

<sup>1091</sup> *His bow abode firm, and the arms of his hands were made supple* (Gen. 49:24).

<sup>1092</sup> According to I.E., Rabbi Saadiah Gaon reads *Even by the God (me-El) of thy father, Who shall help thee, and even by the Almighty Who shall bless thee* (Gen. 49:25) as follows: “I shall ask of the God (*me-El*) of thy father that He help thee, and of the (*u-me-et*) Almighty that He shall bless thee.” According to this interpretation, Gen. 49:25 is not connected to Gen. 49:24.

<sup>1093</sup> *Meisharim ahevukha* is to be interpreted as if written *mi-meisharim ahevukha*.

“They love you more than smooth wine (*mi-meisharim*).” *Meisharim* describes the wine.<sup>1095</sup> The same applies to the word *meisharim* (smooth wine) in, *it glideth down like smooth wine*<sup>1096</sup> (Prov. 23:31), and *meisharim* (smooth)<sup>1097</sup> in: *And the roof of thy mouth is like the best wine that glided down smoothly for my beloved* (Song 7:10).<sup>1098</sup>

The word *ahevukha* (they love thee) (Song 1:4) refers back to the maidens mentioned in the previous <sup>1099</sup> verse (Song 1:3).

Similarly, *Who is as the wise man? And who knoweth (yode’a) the interpretation of a thing?* is to be read as if written: *Who is as the wise man? And who is like the one who knoweth (ke-ha-yode’a) the interpretation of a thing?*<sup>1100</sup>

On the other hand, it is possible that the interpretation of *Who is as the wise man? And who knoweth (yode’a) the interpretation of a thing* is: “Who is as the wise man? He who knoweth (*ha-yode’a*) the interpretation of a thing.”<sup>1101</sup>

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<sup>1094</sup> That is, *mi-meisharim ahevukha*. The *mem* placed in front of a word may mean “more than.”

<sup>1095</sup> It refers to good wine. The word *meisharim* literally means “evenness” or “smoothness.” Here it refers to wine which is smooth; that is, very good wine.

<sup>1096</sup> Translated according to I.E.

<sup>1097</sup> Translated according to I.E.

<sup>1098</sup> Translated according to I.E.

<sup>1099</sup> Literally, the first verse.

<sup>1100</sup> In other words, *yode’a* is to be read as if written *ke-ha-yode’a*.

<sup>1101</sup> In this case, a *kaf* need not be placed in front of *ha-yode’a*.

The word *peshar* (interpretation) comes from the Aramaic.

The meaning [of our text<sup>1102</sup> is]: “Why should people occupy themselves with schemes that are not of any use?”<sup>1103</sup>

[A MAN'S WISDOM MAKETH HIS FACE TO SHINE, AND THE BOLDNESS OF HIS FACE IS CHANGED.]

There is no one like the wise man who walks on the straight path, like the wise man who seeks wisdom and tries to know the reason for everything; that is, the reason for things and why are they so.<sup>1104</sup>

It is also possible that the word *peshar* (interpretation) [is a variant form of the word *porash* (clarified)<sup>1105</sup>]. It is related to the word *porash* (clarified) in: *because it had not been clarified* (Num.15:34). The letters of *porash* were inverted.<sup>1106</sup> The last letter [of *porash*] was placed in the middle of the word [*peshar*].<sup>1107</sup>

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<sup>1102</sup> According to I.E., 8:1 continues the thought of 7:29.

<sup>1103</sup> I.E.'s paraphrase of: *but they have sought out many inventions* (7:29).

<sup>1104</sup> In other words, why waste time on worthless schemes when one can follow the teachings of wisdom and learn how to live? According to this interpretation our verse reads: "Who is as the wise man? He who knoweth how to explain a thing.

<sup>1105</sup> Or, "interpret," "explain."

<sup>1106</sup> The *resh* and *shin* changed places. Thus *porash* (*peh, resh, shin*) became *peshar* (*peh, shin, resh*). In other words, *peshar* is to be understood as the word *porash* (interpret) with the *resh* and the *shin* exchanging places. If this is the case, then *peshar* is a Hebrew word.

<sup>1107</sup> According to this interpretation or verse reads: Who is as the wise man? and who knoweth how to clarify a thing.

The meaning of: *A man's wisdom maketh his face to shine* is: “A man's wisdom places light on his face”; that is, it removes anger.<sup>1108</sup> Our verse is similar in meaning to: *In the light of the king's countenance is life* (Prov. 16:15).

The meaning of, and *the boldness of his face is changed* is: “Wisdom removes arrogance from one's face,” for wisdom gives birth to humility. When the rational soul (the *neshamah*) overpowers the aggressive soul (*ru'ach*), anger and arrogance are removed.<sup>1109</sup>

## **2. I [COUNSEL THEE]: KEEP THE KING'S COMMAND, AND THAT IN REGARD OF THE OATH OF GOD.**<sup>1110</sup>

I [COUNSEL THEE]: KEEP THE KING'S COMMAND. After Kohelet concluded directing the wise man to guard himself against being ensnared by lust (Kohelet 7:26), he warns him<sup>1111</sup> not to rely on his wisdom and disrespect the current king<sup>1112</sup> because [he thinks that] the king is a fool when compared to himself.<sup>1113</sup>

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<sup>1108</sup> Wisdom brings contentment, which is reflected on a person's face.

<sup>1109</sup> When the rational soul (the *neshamah*) overpowers the contentious soul (*ru'ach*), anger disappears and the person's facial expression changes. It is said to shine.

<sup>1110</sup> Literally, I keep the king's command.

<sup>1111</sup> Literally, he goes back to warn him.

<sup>1112</sup> Literally, the king of his place.”

<sup>1113</sup> He thinks that he is wiser than the king.

The meaning of: *I [counsel thee: keep the king's command, and that in regard of the oath of God ]* is: “I command you, or I warn you, regarding two things that you shall not rebel against:

1.[Do not rebel] against that which comes out of the king’s mouth;

2. [Take heed with regard] to that which comes out of your very mouth<sup>1114</sup> and is contrary to the wishes of God,<sup>1115</sup> Who is revered and awesome.

[I caution you regarding these two things] for a king will not hold guiltless whoever rebels against his commands. [Similarly,] the True King<sup>1116</sup> will not hold guiltless he who swears falsely by His name.

**3. BE NOT HASTY TO GO OUT OF HIS PRESENCE;<sup>1117</sup> STAND NOT IN AN EVIL THING; FOR HE DOETH WHATSOEVER PLEASETH HIM.**

BE NOT HASTY TO GO OUT OF HIS PRESENCE. [Our verse has two verbs *tibbahel* (be hasty) and *telekh* (go out) without a *vav* connecting them.]<sup>1118</sup> We find such a thing in: *And let us know* (ve-nede'ah), *eagerly strive* (nirdefah) [*to know the Lord*] (Hosea 6:3),<sup>1119</sup> and in: *Multiply not* (al tarbu)[ *your speaking*]<sup>1120</sup> for you speak (tedabberu) *proud talk* (1 Sam. 2:3).<sup>1121</sup>,

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<sup>1114</sup> Swearing falsely, invoking God's name in vain.

<sup>1115</sup> Literally, and is against God.

<sup>1116</sup> God.

<sup>1117</sup> Literally, Be not hasty you go out of his presence.

<sup>1118</sup> Our verse should have read: *al tibbahel....ve-telekh*.

<sup>1119</sup> Our verse should have read: *ve-nede'ah ve-nirdefah*.

The basic meaning of these verses is: “And let us know (*ve-nede'ah*) to eagerly strive (*le-nirdefah*)<sup>1122</sup> [to know the Lord] (Hosea 6:3), and "Multiply not (*al tarbu*) to speak (*le-dabber*)<sup>1123</sup> proud talk” (1 Sam. 2:3).

However, it is preferable to assume that a *shin*, which is in place of the word *asher* (that), is missing [from the words *nirdefah* and *tedabberu*]. The verses should be read as follows: “And let us know (*ve-nede'ah*) that we should eagerly strive (*she-nirdefah*)<sup>1124</sup> [to know the Lord]” (Hosea 6:3), and: “Multiply not (*al tarbu*) [ your speaking,] [for you speak] (*she-dabberu*) proud talk” (1 Sam. 2:3).

The same is the case with the word *telekh* (you go out) [in our verse].<sup>1125</sup> Our verse should be read as if written: “Be not hasty to go out (*la-lekhet*) of his presence,” or “Be not hasty (*al tibbonahel*) so that you go out (*she-telekh*) of his presence.”<sup>1126</sup>

The meaning of before him”;<sup>1127</sup> is, from before the king. The import of our verse is: Let your heart not be hasty because you think that you can go out from before

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<sup>1120</sup> Translated literally. A prefix is missing from *tedabberu* for *Multiply not you speak* (*tedabberu*) *proud talk* is awkward.

<sup>1121</sup> Our verse should have read: *al tarbu ve-tedabberu*.

<sup>1122</sup> *Nirdefah* is to be read as if written *le-nirdefah*.

<sup>1123</sup> *Tedabberu* is to be interpreted as if written *le-dabber*.

<sup>1124</sup> *Nirdefah* is to be read as if written *she-nirdefah*.

<sup>1125</sup> Our verse literally reads: “Be not hasty you go out (*telekh*) of his presence,” which does not read well. Hence, I.E.'s comment.

<sup>1126</sup> According to I.E., Scripture often omits prefixes. Our verse, 1 Sam. 2:3 and Hosea 6:3 are examples.

the king, lest you do something that is evil in his eyes, for he can do with you as he wills.<sup>1128</sup>

**4. FORASMUCH AS THE KING'S WORD HATH POWER; AND WHO MAY SAY UNTO HIM: 'WHAT DOEST THOU?'**

FORASMUCH. In all places where the word of the king rules, the king's decree is over you. There is no one to chasten the king and save you from his hand, for everyone fears him. If this is the case with a human king, how much more is it the case with the True King Whose glory fills all that is above and all that is below?

**5. WHOSO KEEPETH THE COMMANDMENT SHALL KNOW NO EVIL THING; AND A WISE MAN'S HEART DISCERNETH TIME AND JUDGMENT.**

WHOSO KEEPETH THE COMMANDMENT SHALL KNOW NO EVIL.

In most cases, evil will not come to him.

AND A WISE MAN'S HEART DISCERNETH TIME AND JUDGMENT. Some say that the word *et* (time) here has the meaning of “wisdom.”<sup>1129</sup> They also say that this is the case with the words *la-ut* (to sustain) in: *to sustain with words him that is weary* (Is. 50:4),<sup>1130</sup> *itti* (appointed) in: *by the hand of an appointed man*

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<sup>1127</sup> Do not think that you can get away from the king. I.E. interprets “to go out of his presence” to mean “to escape the king's wrath.”

<sup>1128</sup> In other words, do not think that you can get away from the king. You must be very careful. If you do anything that displeases him, he will punish you and you will not be able to escape.

<sup>1129</sup> According to this interpretation, *And a wise man's heart discerneth time and judgment* is to be understood as if written: “And a wise man's heart discerneth wisdom and judgment.”

<sup>1130</sup> This opinion renders *to sustain with words him that is weary*: “to make wise the weary with words.”

(Lev. 16:21),<sup>1131</sup> *la-ittim* (the times) in: *who knew the times* (Est. 1:13),<sup>1132</sup> and *la-ittim* (of the times) in: *that had understanding of the times* (1 Chron. 12:33).<sup>1133</sup> However, this is incorrect, for the meaning of *la-ut* (Is. 50:4) is “to set a time.”<sup>1134</sup> The reference is [to what follows; that is, to] *He wakeneth morning by morning* (ibid).<sup>1135</sup> [Similarly,] the meaning of *ish itti* (an appointed man) (Lev. 16:21) is: “a man who is appointed to go at the fixed time<sup>1136</sup> and will not tarry.” The meaning of *ish itti* (an appointed man) (Lev. 16:21) might also be: “a man who is in the habit of going at all times of the year to the wilderness [of Azazel],” which is mentioned in the verse. The meaning of *ish itti* [thus] is “a person who is accustomed.”

As to *yode'ei vina la-ittim* (that had understanding of the times) (1 Chron. 12:32), the sages of blessed memory have already explained that its meaning is: “they established leap years by calculation”<sup>1137</sup> They also noted that *yode'ei ha-ittim*

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<sup>1131</sup> This opinion renders *by the hand of an appointed man*, “by the hand of a wise man.”

<sup>1132</sup> This opinion renders *who knew the times*, “who were versed in wisdom.”

<sup>1133</sup> This opinion renders *that had understanding of the times*: “that had understanding of the wisdoms(science).”

<sup>1134</sup> The word *et* usually means “time.” Hence, the interpretations that follow.

<sup>1135</sup> God sets a time (the morning) for the prophet to learn His message. See I.E. on Is. 50:4.

<sup>1136</sup> On Yom Kippur.

<sup>1137</sup> In other words, *ittim*, means “times.” *Ittim* is the plural of *et*.

(who had understanding of the times) (Est. 1:13) refers to experts in the laws governing the planets.<sup>1138</sup>

Another interpretation for *Whoso keepeth the commandment shall know no evil thing* means: “Whoso keepeth the commandment has no desire to know any evil thing.”

*And a wise man's heart discerneth time and judgment* is connected to the verse that follows.<sup>1139</sup>

**6. FOR TO EVERY MATTER THERE IS A TIME AND JUDGMENT; FOR THE EVIL OF MAN IS GREAT UPON HIM.**

FOR TO EVERY MATTER THERE IS A TIME. The wise man knows that there is a time for every matter, and he will not engage in a quarrel with a man that fortune smiles upon at that time.

The meaning of: *For the evil of man [is great upon him]* is: “Even though a man knows that there is a time for every matter, he does not know when the evil time will come. This is a great evil.”

**7. FOR HE KNOWETH NOT THAT WHICH SHALL BE; FOR EVEN WHEN IT COMETH TO PASS, WHO SHALL DECLARE IT UNTO HIM?**

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<sup>1138</sup> Or constellations. *Yode'ei ha-ittim* refers to those who know the time when the heavenly bodies appear in the sky.

<sup>1139</sup> Our verse is to be understood to mean: “A wise man knows that to every matter there is a time and judgment, but he does not know when trouble shall come upon him. This is a great evil.”

FOR HE KNOWETH NOT THAT WHICH SHALL BE. For he does not know that which shall be, and if he knows that which shall be, he knows it in a general way<sup>1140</sup> or from the experience that he underwent.<sup>1141</sup>

The meaning of: *Who shall declare it unto him?* is: “Who shall declare it unto him in detail how things will be?”

**8. THERE IS NO MAN THAT HATH POWER OVER THE SPIRIT TO RETAIN<sup>1142</sup> THE SPIRIT;<sup>1143</sup> NEITHER HATH HE POWER OVER THE DAY OF DEATH; AND THERE IS NO DISCHARGE IN WAR; NEITHER SHALL WICKEDNESS DELIVER HIM THAT IS GIVEN TO IT.**

THERE IS NO MAN THAT HATH POWER...OVER THE DAY OF DEATH. If a person knows the day of his death, it is of no help to him, for there is no man that has power over his spirit.<sup>1144</sup> This verse shows that the spirit is like a captive in a prison.<sup>1145</sup> I noted this in the opening of my words.<sup>1146</sup>

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<sup>1140</sup> One can have a general idea of what is to come, but one cannot be sure.

<sup>1141</sup> One may draw conclusions from what he has undergone in the past and use this as a basis to project what will be in the future. However, things do not always repeat themselves.

<sup>1142</sup> Hebrew, *le-khelo*. *Kele* means “prison.” I.E. renders *le-khelo* as “to imprison.”

<sup>1143</sup> Hebrew, *ru'ach*. *Ru'ach* means both “spirit” and “wind.” I.E. renders it here as “spirit.”

<sup>1144</sup> Literally, the spirit.

<sup>1145</sup> I.E. understands our verse as follows: “There is no man that hath the power to imprison the spirit.”

<sup>1146</sup> I.E. in his Introduction to Kohelet notes that the body is a prison for the soul.

NEITHER HATH HE POWER OVER THE DAY OF DEATH. The kingdom will be of no avail to the king [on the day of his death], nor will the weapons that he prepared for war be of any use.

[AND THERE IS NO DISCHARGE IN WAR] The meaning of *mishlachat* (discharge) is “weapons.” *Ba-shalach* (by the sword) in: *And his life from perishing by the sword* (Job 33:18) is similar. *Mishlachat ba-milchamah* (discharge in war) refers to the weapons of war.<sup>1147</sup>

Some say that "in war "refers to the war waged by the body's makeup<sup>1148</sup> which preserves the body until the end of life, for death comes when illness enters the body. If the body's makeup grows weak,<sup>1149</sup> then the person dies.

[WICKEDNESS] *Resha* (wickedness) refers to much activity and success.<sup>1150</sup> It is similar to the word *yarshi'a* (disturb) in: *When He giveth quietness, who then can disturb?* (Job 34:29),<sup>1151</sup> and *yarshi'a* (victories) in: *and whithersoever he turned himself, he was successful* (1 Sam. 14:47).<sup>1152</sup>

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<sup>1147</sup> The weapons of war are of no avail on the day of death.

<sup>1148</sup> The various parts of the body. The reference is apparently to the four humors. According to medieval medicine, there are four humors in the body, each of which tries to be dominant but is restrained by the others. If one humor becomes dominant, it causes illness. Medieval medicine tried to keep these various humors balanced. The four humors are heat, cold, moisture, and dryness.

<sup>1149</sup> If the humors cannot be balanced so as to provide healing from the illness.

<sup>1150</sup> Literally, victory.

<sup>1151</sup> Who can be active and destroy the quietness which He gives.

<sup>1152</sup> Translated according to I.E.

Some say that *resha* (wickedness) refers to money, for most of it is gotten by wickedness.<sup>1153</sup>

**9. ALL THIS HAVE I SEEN, EVEN APPLIED MY HEART THERETO, WHATEVER THE WORK THAT IS DONE UNDER THE SUN; WHAT TIME ONE MAN HAD POWER OVER ANOTHER TO HIS HURT.**

ALL THIS HAVE I SEEN. Kohelet says this while he is still occupied with warning the wise man not to rebel against the king's word.<sup>1154</sup> [He says:] "After I applied my heart, I saw [that there is] a time when one man has<sup>1155</sup> power over another person like himself to his hurt; that is, to hurt him.<sup>1156</sup> The meaning of: *what time one man had power over another to his hurt* is similar to: *for every matter there is a time* (v. 6).<sup>1157</sup>

**10. AND SO I SAW THE WICKED BURIED, AND THEY ENTERED INTO THEIR REST;<sup>1158</sup> BUT THEY THAT HAD DONE RIGHT WENT AWAY**

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<sup>1153</sup> The usual meaning of *resha* is "wickedness." This interpretation understands the word according to its usual meaning.

<sup>1154</sup> Our verse is connected to vv. 2-6. Our verse speaks of what results from disobeying the king.

<sup>1155</sup> Literally, had.

<sup>1156</sup> I.E. reads our verse as follows: "All this have I seen after I applied my heart thereto: A time when one man had power over another to hurt him."

<sup>1157</sup> "Time" refers to a propitious time for the one who seeks to do him harm. See I.E. on v. 6. I.E. reads our verse as follows: "All this have I seen after I applied my heart thereto: There is a fixed time when one man had power over another to hurt him."

<sup>1158</sup> The Hebrew reads: *and they entered*. The words "into their rest" are not in the verse.

FROM THE HOLY PLACE AND WERE FORGOTTEN IN THE CITY; THIS ALSO IS VANITY.<sup>1159</sup>

AND SO I SAW THE WICKED BURIED. The commentaries erred in interpreting this verse.

Some say that *kevurim* (buried) means “safe in their palaces.”<sup>1160</sup> They explain that *and they entered* [and] *went away* means “they do as they will.”

They say that the word *ve-yishtakkekhu* (and were forgotten) comes from the Aramaic [word *ve-ashakkechu*] by which Onkelos renders *va-yimtze'u* (that they found) (Gen. 11:2).<sup>1161</sup>

Others say that *va-vo'u* (and they entered) means: “and they disappeared.”<sup>1162</sup> It is like *u-va* (and disappears) in *u-va ha-shemesh* (and the sun disappears) (Kohelet

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<sup>1159</sup> Literally, “And so I saw the wicked buried, they entered, and from the holy place they go. They are forgotten in the city where they did right. This also is vanity.” The verse is difficult to comprehend. Hence, the interpretations that follow.

<sup>1160</sup> *Kevurim* means buried. The commentators quoted by I.E. say that here it means “kept” or “protected.”

<sup>1161</sup> In other words, *ve-yishtakkechu* (and were forgotten) means “and were found.” This interpretation renders our verse as follows: “I saw the wicked ensconced in their palaces. They come [and go to their palaces] and go out of the holy place at will. They are seen in the city where they did well. This also is vanity.” In other words, the evil people were safe in their homes. They come and go at will. They go about their business in the city where they do well.

<sup>1162</sup> This interpretation renders *And so I saw the wicked buried, and they entered*: “And so I saw the wicked buried, and they were gone. The wicked did wicked things and, like all people, eventually died. They were not punished for their evil deeds.”

1:5).<sup>1163</sup> This too is incorrect,<sup>1164</sup> for we find the term *ba* used in the sense of disappearing only in regard to the sun, for *ba* is the opposite of *yatza*<sup>1165</sup> (goes out). Scripture similarly states *The sun was risen (yatza) upon the earth* (Gen. 19:23).<sup>1166</sup> Some commentaries say that *ba bi-sicharo* (his payment is lost) (Ex. 21:14) is similar.<sup>1167</sup> However, it is not so, for the meaning of *ba bi-sicharo* is as follows: “This thing came (*ba*) to him;<sup>1168</sup> that is, he will not be paid [for his loss], because he took a rental price (*bi-sicharo*).<sup>1169</sup>

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<sup>1163</sup> This interpretation renders the opening of our verse as follows: “And so I saw the wicked buried, and they disappeared.”

<sup>1164</sup> This, like the first interpretation, is incorrect.

<sup>1165</sup> Literally, *ve-yatza*. *Ba* means “came.” *Yatza* means “went out.” *Ba* is used in opposition to *yatza*.

<sup>1166</sup> Hence, when Scripture wants to say that the sun set, it says *ba ha-shemesh* (Kohelet 1:5). It uses the term *ba* because *ba* is the opposite of *yatza*.

<sup>1167</sup> This interpretation renders *ba bi-sicharo* as “it is lost, for he received payment “that is, he is not reimbursed, for he received payment. According to this interpretation, Ex. 21:14 reads: “And if a man borrow aught of his neighbor, and it be hurt or die, the owner thereof not being with it, he shall surely make restitution. If the owner thereof be with it, he shall not make it good. If the animal were rented, it [the obligation to pay for the damage for the rented animal] disappears, for he [the owner] received payment for the rental.”

<sup>1168</sup> In this case, *ba* retains its usual meaning of “come” or “came.”

<sup>1169</sup> This interpretation renders *ba bi-sicharo* it came (that is, this happened) for he received payment. According to this interpretation, Ex. 21:14 reads: “And if a man borrow aught of his neighbor, and it be hurt or die, the owner thereof not being with it, he shall surely make restitution. If the owner thereof be with it, he shall not make it good. If the animal were rented, this thing [the loss] came (*ba*) to him [the owner], because he took a rental price (*bi-sicharo*).” In other words, the owner will not be paid for his loss because he took a rental price

Similarly, the *payyetanim*<sup>1170</sup> erred when in a *me'orah*<sup>1171</sup> they end a line of the poem with *kumi ori ki va orekh* (arise, shine, for thy light is come) (Is. 60:1). Their words contradict each other if they do not quote the entire verse.<sup>1172</sup>

The following is the meaning of the [entire] verse<sup>1173</sup> [in Is. 60:1]: “Arise, shine, for your ancient light<sup>1174</sup> has disappeared”: *u-kevod Adonai alayikh yizrach*, “but the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.”

Scripture similarly goes on to say:<sup>1175</sup> *The sun shall be no more thy light by day, [neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee, but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory]* (ibid. 60:19).

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<sup>1170</sup> Those who composed liturgical poetry.

<sup>1171</sup> A liturgical poem dealing with light. The poem is inserted in the daily morning section of the Sabbath and holiday prayers praising God for creating the luminaries (*yotzer ha-me'orot*).

<sup>1172</sup> Literally, if they do not complete the verse. The poem quotes part of Is. 60: 1; that is, it reads *kumi ori ki va orekh* (arise, shine, for thy light is come). According to I.E., the poet is misusing the verse, for the meaning of *kumi ori ki va orekh* is: “Arise, shine, for your light has disappeared.” If the light has disappeared, how can it shine?

<sup>1173</sup> Which the liturgical poet misunderstood. It should be noted that most of the commentaries explain *kumi ori* the way the liturgical poets did; that is, it means: “for your light has come.” See Radak and Metzudot on Is. 60:1. It is similarly interpreted in the popular *le-kha dodi* hymn which is part of the Sabbath eve service.

<sup>1174</sup> The sun.

<sup>1175</sup> Literally, to explain. That is. to explain the meaning of *Arise, shine, for thy light is come; but the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee*.

Our verse<sup>1176</sup> [*And so I saw the wicked buried, and they entered into their rest; but they that had done right went away from the holy place, and were forgotten in the city; this also is vanity*] is to be interpreted as follows:

*U-ve-khen* (and so) is Aramaic for the Hebrew word *az* (then) (Ex.15:1).<sup>1177</sup> The meaning of our verse is: “When I set my mind<sup>1178</sup> [to what happens under the sun], I then saw that the wicked who overpower people and do evil to them die without pain and are buried in their graves.<sup>1179</sup> Our verse is like: *For there are no pangs at their death* (Ps. 73:4).<sup>1180</sup>

*And they enter* means: They enter into this world a second time, that is, their children come and take their place, and their memory is preserved.

The meaning of *but they that [had done right] went away from the holy place [and] were forgotten in the city* is: “The holy ones<sup>1181</sup> die without children<sup>1182</sup> in the city where they lived. They were those that had done right.” The word *ken* (right) in our verse is like the word *ken* (right) in: *The daughters of Zelophehad speak right* (Num. 27:7).

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<sup>1176</sup> Verse 10 of our chapter.

<sup>1177</sup> The word *ken* means “then,” for the Aramaic translation of the Torah renders *az* by *ken*. I.E. renders the opening of our verse as follows: “Then I saw the wicked buried.”

<sup>1178</sup> In v. 9. Literally, When I applied my mind.

<sup>1179</sup> They are respectfully laid to rest.

<sup>1180</sup> The wicked die peacefully.

<sup>1181</sup> I. E. 's interpretation of they...*went away from the holy place*.

<sup>1182</sup> I.E. interprets *but they that go away* as meaning “they that die.”

Kohelet wonders: How is it that the memory of the righteous is cut off and all the good that they did is forgotten, while the wicked die in peace and they leave children in their place? This also is vanity.

**11. BECAUSE SENTENCE AGAINST AN EVIL WORK IS NOT EXECUTED SPEEDILY, THEREFORE THE HEART OF THE SONS OF MEN IS FULLY SET IN THEM TO DO EVIL.**

BECAUSE SENTENCE AGAINST AN EVIL WORK IS NOT EXECUTED SPEEDILY. Because revenge is not exacted, and neither does punishment and retribution quickly follow for the evil which is done, the heart of men and their souls are filled with a desire to do evil. This is so, for the fear of doing evil has been removed from them.

**12. BECAUSE A SINNER DOETH EVIL A HUNDRED TIMES, AND PROLONGETH HIS DAYS—THOUGH YET I KNOW THAT IT SHALL BE WELL WITH THEM THAT FEAR GOD, THAT FEAR BEFORE HIM.**

BECAUSE A SINNER DOETH EVIL. For people see the sinner doing evil hundreds of times and God does not punish him.<sup>1183</sup> However,<sup>1184</sup> intelligent people, and also, I, know that it shall be well with them that fear God even though the latter will not happen quickly.

**13. BUT IT SHALL NOT BE WELL WITH THE WICKED, NEITHER SHALL HE PROLONG HIS DAYS, WHICH ARE AS A SHADOW, BECAUSE HE FEARETH NOT BEFORE GOD. BUT IT SHALL NOT BE WELL WITH THE**

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<sup>1183</sup> Literally, is long suffering to him.

<sup>1184</sup> Literally, even though.

WICKED. At his end. Some of them will not live long. Their lives will pass like a shadow.

Scripture is explicit when it reads *because he feareth not before God*, because there are various types of wickedness.<sup>1185</sup>

**14. THERE IS A VANITY WHICH IS DONE UPON THE EARTH: THAT THERE ARE RIGHTEOUS MEN UNTO WHOM IT HAPPENETH ACCORDING TO THE WORK OF THE WICKED; AGAIN, THERE ARE WICKED MEN TO WHOM IT HAPPENETH ACCORDING TO THE WORK OF THE RIGHTEOUS—I SAID THAT THIS ALSO IS VANITY.**

THERE IS A VANITY. From the start of this verse until the verse which reads *This also have I seen as wisdom under the sun (9:13)*, we have 16 verses dealing with one topic. These verses are connected.

Our verse is also connected to what is above it.<sup>1186</sup> There are righteous men who experience what was fit to befall the wicked for their evil deeds. The reverse is also true.<sup>1187</sup> When I saw this, I declared: “All is vanity, be it in regard to righteousness<sup>1188</sup> or be it in regard to wickedness.<sup>1189</sup> Our verse is similar to: *But as*

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<sup>1185</sup> The evil of the person in our verse consists of a lack of fear of God. This then leads to a wide variety of evil deeds.

<sup>1186</sup> Our verse is not only connected to the verse which follows, it is also connected to a verse above it. The reference is to v. 12, which speaks of the wicked going unpunished.

<sup>1187</sup> There are evil men who experience what was fit to befall the righteous [i.e., reward] for their good deeds.

<sup>1188</sup> It is vanity when the righteous suffer.

<sup>1189</sup> It is vanity when the wicked prosper. This tempted the psalmist and Kohelet to consider emulating the ways of the wicked.

*for me, my feet were almost gone, [my steps had well-nigh slipped;] for I was envious at the arrogant [when I saw the peace of the wicked ] (Ps. 73:2-3)<sup>1190</sup>*

**15. SO I COMMENDED MIRTH, THAT A MAN HATH NO BETTER THING UNDER THE SUN THAN TO EAT, AND TO DRINK, AND TO BE MERRY, AND THAT THIS SHOULD ACCOMPANY HIM IN HIS LABOUR ALL THE DAYS OF HIS LIFE WHICH GOD HATH GIVEN HIM UNDER THE SUN.**

SO I COMMENDED MIRTH. I then commended mirth<sup>1191</sup> for a man has no better thing than to eat and to drink.

The meaning of *that this*<sup>1192</sup> *should accompany him in his labor* is: This thing<sup>1193</sup>—namely, happiness and enjoyment—should accompany him.

**16. WHEN I APPLIED MY HEART TO KNOW WISDOM, AND TO SEE THE BUSINESS THAT IS DONE UPON THE EARTH—FOR NEITHER DAY NOR NIGHT DO MEN SEE SLEEP WITH THEIR EYES—**

WHEN I APPLIED MY HEART TO KNOW WISDOM. When I applied my heart to the business that is done upon the earth, and to why what should happen to the wicked befalls the righteous,<sup>1194</sup> I almost commended mirth.<sup>1195</sup> For neither day

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<sup>1190</sup> The psalmist, like Kohelet, complains that the wicked prosper.

<sup>1191</sup> I.E. renders *So I commended mirth* as: “I almost commended mirth.” See his comments on the next verse.

<sup>1192</sup> The Hebrew reads *hu*. *Hu* usually means “he.”

<sup>1193</sup> In other words, *hu* is to be rendered “this thing” or “it,” rather than “he.”

<sup>1194</sup> Verse 14.

<sup>1195</sup> Verse 16. I.E. interprets *So I commended mirth* to mean “I almost commanded mirth.” This is because he does not believe that Kohelet concluded that one should become a hedonist because he does not understand theodicy.

nor night did my eyes see sleep due to my many thoughts [devoted to trying to understand why what should strike the wicked befalls the righteous.]<sup>1196</sup>The *vav* affixed to *be-enav* (with their eyes)<sup>1197</sup> refers back to *libbi* (my heart).<sup>1198</sup>

**17. THEN I BEHELD ALL THE WORK OF GOD, THAT MAN CANNOT FIND OUT THE WORK THAT IS DONE UNDER THE SUN; BECAUSE THOUGH A MAN LABOUR TO SEEK IT OUT, YET HE SHALL NOT FIND IT; YEA FURTHER, THOUGH A WISE MAN THINK TO KNOW IT, YET SHALL HE NOT BE ABLE TO FIND IT.**

THEN I BEHELD ALL THE WORK OF GOD, Then I beheld part of the work of God. I understood their basics. However, I was not able to understand the evil

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<sup>1196</sup> I.E. interprets our verses as: “I almost commended mirth when I applied my heart to the point where I denied sleep to my eyes day and night. This was because of my many thoughts devoted to knowing the business that is done upon the earth, and why what should happen to the wicked befalls the righteous.”

I.E. understands verses 14-17 as follows: Kohelet sees that the righteous receive the punishment due the wicked, and the wicked receive the reward due the righteous (v. 14) .This indicated to him that being good or bad is not reflected in how a person is treated by God (v. 16). This almost drives Kohelet to believe that a person should indulge in the pleasures of the world (v. 15). He then concludes that the solution to the problem of theodicy is beyond man's ken.

<sup>1197</sup> Literally, his eyes.

<sup>1198</sup> *Enav* is to be rendered “its eyes” and refers to the “eyes of the heart” earlier mentioned. I.E. interprets our verse as saying: “When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth, I almost commended mirth for neither day nor night did my heart see sleep with its eyes [closed].” Kohelet’s “eyes of the heart” refers to Kohelet’s ability to see (i.e., understand) why a just, omniscient, omnipotent, and merciful God allows the wicked to prosper and the righteous to suffer.

works that were done under the sun,<sup>1199</sup> for wise men worked hard and tired themselves in trying to discover the reason for this and failed.<sup>1200</sup>

The meaning of *be-shel* is “because.” The same is the case with the word *be-sheli* (because of me) in: *because of me this great tempest is upon you* (Jonah1:12). Job the righteous complained about the very same thing.<sup>1201</sup>

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<sup>1199</sup> I could not understand why God tolerates, and even seems to reward, the evil found in this world.

<sup>1200</sup> So did I.

<sup>1201</sup> See Job 21:7-9: *Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, wax mighty in power? Their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes. Their houses are safe, without fear; neither is the rod of God upon them.*

## CHAPTER 9

1. FOR ALL THIS I LAID TO MY HEART, EVEN TO MAKE CLEAR ALL THIS: THAT THE RIGHTEOUS, AND THE WISE, AND THEIR WORKS, ARE IN THE HAND OF GOD; WHETHER IT BE LOVE OR HATRED, MAN KNOWETH IT NOT; ALL IS BEFORE THEM.

FOR ALL THIS I LAID TO MY HEART, EVEN TO MAKE CLEAR ALL THIS. The word *ve-la-vur* should have been vocalized with a *cholam*.<sup>1202</sup> Similarly, the word *yerun* (sing)<sup>1203</sup> in *doth sing and rejoice* (Prov. 29:6),<sup>1204</sup> for both words come from a double root.<sup>1205</sup> *La-vur* has the same meaning as *li-veror* (to make clear)<sup>1206</sup> which is related to the word *barur* (clearly) in: *my lips...shall speak clearly* (Job 33:3).<sup>1207</sup>

[THAT THE RIGHTEOUS, AND THE WISE, AND THEIR WORKS, ARE IN THE HAND OF GOD.] For I have seen that [in the case of] the righteous and the wise, their works are not in their own control. They are in the hand of God.

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<sup>1202</sup> *La-vur* comes from the root *bet, resh, resh*. The middle letter of such roots is usually vocalized with a *chollam* in the infinitive form. Compare *la-kov* (Num. 23:11) which comes from the root *kaf, bet, bet*. Thus, *la-vur* should have been written *la-vor*.

<sup>1203</sup> From the root *resh, nun, nun*.

<sup>1204</sup> *Yerun* should have been written *yeron*.

<sup>1205</sup> See note 1

<sup>1206</sup> *Li-veror* and *la-vur* come from the same root and are both *kal* infinitive. They mean the same. However, in *la-vur* a *resh* is dropped, while *li-veror* is conjugated like a whole root; that is, a root that does not drop any of its letters.

<sup>1207</sup> Translated literally.

The word *avadehem* (their works) is similar to *mabadehem* (their works) in: *Therefore He taketh knowledge of their works* (Job 34:25).<sup>1208</sup>

[WHETHER IT BE LOVE OR HATRED, MAN KNOWETH IT NOT; ALL IS BEFORE THEM.] Men also do not know when anything that they love or hate will come upon them. It is all before them. They are not aware of it.

*Before them* may also mean “before they come into being.” What has been decreed for them has been decreed.<sup>1209</sup>

2. ALL THINGS COME ALIKE TO ALL; THERE IS ONE EVENT TO THE RIGHTEOUS AND TO THE WICKED; TO THE GOOD AND TO THE CLEAN AND TO THE UNCLEAR; TO HIM THAT SACRIFICETH AND TO HIM THAT SACRIFICETH NOT; AS IS THE GOOD, SO IS THE SINNER, AND HE THAT SWEARETH, AS HE THAT FEARETH AN OATH.

ALL THINGS COME ALIKE TO ALL. All things come to them as they come *to all*. *There is one event for the righteous and for the wicked. There is no difference between them.*

TO THE GOOD AND TO THE CLEAN AND TO THE UNCLEAR. The term *tame* (unclean) here is the opposite of the word *ha-tov* (*the good*), and the word *ha-tahor* (*the clean*).<sup>1210</sup> We similarly find the word *pikke'ach* (*seeing*) to be the opposite of the word *ivver* (*blind*) and the word *cheresh* (*dumb*) in the verse: *Who hath made man's mouth, [or who maketh a man dumb, or deaf, or seeing (pikke'ach), or blind? Is it not I the Lord?]* (Ex. 4:11).<sup>1211</sup>

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<sup>1208</sup> In other words, *avadehem* (their works) means the same as *mabadehem* (their works). Both words come from the root *ayin, bet, dalet*.

<sup>1209</sup> Before they are born.

<sup>1210</sup> *Tame* is the opposite of *tahor*. It is not the opposite of *tov*. However, here it stands in contrast to *tov*, for “clean” implies “good.”

<sup>1211</sup> According to I.E., “mouth” is in opposition to “dumb” (i.e., mute). *Pikke'ach* (*seeing*) is in contrast to “deaf” and to “blind.”

The word *pikke'ach* (seeing) is like the word *li-feko'ach* (to open) in: *To open the blind eyes* (Is. 42:7), and *pa'ko'ach* (opening) in: *opening the ears* (ibid. 20).<sup>1212</sup>

The *kafs* affixed to *tov* (good) in *ka-tov* (as is the good) and to *chote* (sinner) in *ka-choteh* (so is the sinner) are in keeping with the grammatical rules governing the *kafs* in the Hebrew language.<sup>1213</sup> Thus, *ka-eved ka-donav* (as with the servant, so with his master) (Is. 24:2) means that the servant will be like the master and the master will be like the servant. There will be no difference between them.

Similarly, *ka-moni ka-mokha, ke-ammi khe-ammekha* (I am as thou art, my people as thy people)<sup>1214</sup> (1Kings 22:4), and *ka-chashekhah ka-orah* (The darkness is even as the light (Ps. 139:12)).<sup>1215</sup>

The one who says<sup>1216</sup> that *ka-yamim* (according unto the days) in: *ka-yamim asher yeshavtem* (according unto the days that ye abode there) (Deut.1:46)<sup>1217</sup> is to be

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<sup>1212</sup> In other words, *pikke'ach* (seeing) can refer to one who hears or to one who sees. It usually refers to one who can see. Hence, I.E.'s comments.

<sup>1213</sup> According to I.E., when two nouns follow each other and each of the nouns has a *kaf* prefixed to it, this indicates that the former is like the latter and the latter is like the former. Thus, the meaning of *ka-tov ka-chote* (as is the good so is the sinner) is: “as it is with the good person so is it with the sinner; as it is with the sinner, so is it with the good person.” In other words, what befalls one befalls the other.

<sup>1214</sup> *Ka-moni ka-mokha, ke-ammi khe-ammekha* is to be understood as follows: I am as thou art, thou art as I am; my people are as thy people, and thy people are as my people.

<sup>1215</sup> *Ka-chashekhah ka-orah* is to be understood as follows: The darkness is even as the light; the light is even as the darkness.

<sup>1216</sup> The reference is to Dunash ibn Labrat. See R. Goodman p. 114 notes 12-13. I.E. quotes Dunash here, because according to Dunash the *kaf* prefixed to a word can mean "the." I.E. disputes this.

<sup>1217</sup> Deut. 1:46 reads: “So ye abode in Kadesh many days, according unto the days that ye abode there.”

interpreted as if written *ha-yamim* (the days),<sup>1218</sup> offers an interpretation that has no taste or fragrance.<sup>1219</sup> For, what meaning is there in: “You dwelt in Kadesh many days, the days that you dwelt there?”

The correct interpretation of *ka-yamim Asher yeshavtem* (according unto the days that ye abode there) is as follows:

The spies (sent by Moses to scout the Land of Canaan) departed from Kadesh (Barne'a).<sup>1220</sup> The Israelites came to Kadesh, the city of Moab, in the fortieth year.<sup>1221</sup> They spent all the<sup>1222</sup> preceding years<sup>1223</sup> in the wilderness of Kadesh.<sup>1224</sup>

This then is the interpretation of *ka-yamim asher yeshavtem* (according unto the days that ye abode there): “You dwelt in [the wilderness of] Kadesh many days,<sup>1225</sup>

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<sup>1218</sup> This commentary reads our verse as follows: So ye abode in Kadesh many days, the days that ye abode there.

<sup>1219</sup> It serves no purpose. It does not explain anything.

<sup>1220</sup> The spies sent out by Moses to spy out the Land of Canaan departed from Kadesh Barne'a. See Deut. 1:19-25.

<sup>1221</sup> Num. 20:1 reads: *And the children of Israel, even the whole congregation, came into the wilderness of Zin in the first month; and the people abode in Kadesh; and Miriam died there, and was buried there.*

According to I.E., the Kadesh in Num. 20:1 cannot be the Kadesh where the Children of Israel dwelt for nearly 40 years, for Num. 20:1 speaks of Kadesh as where Israel arrived at in the fortieth year. I.E. identifies the Kadesh in Num. 20:1 as a Moabite city, for Moses sent messengers to the king of Edom from Kadesh asking for permission to pass through his land. Moses told the king of Edom that he is in Kadesh, a city near the border of Edom (Deut. v. 16). Kadesh fits that description because Moab borders Edom (R. Goodman).

<sup>1222</sup> Literally, these.

<sup>1223</sup> The years following the debacle at Kadesh Barne'a.

<sup>1224</sup> The Kadesh in Num. 20:1 refers to the city in Moab. However, the Kadesh where Israel dwelt for close to 40 years was in the wilderness of Kadesh. The two are not the same.

in accordance with the (40 days) that you dwelt in Kadesh,<sup>1226</sup> until the spies returned.”<sup>1227</sup> The verse *ka-yamim asher yeshavtem* (according unto the days that ye abode there) is in keeping with: *After the number of the days in which ye spied out the land, [even 40 days, for every day a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years]* (Num. 14:34). For when the spies came back, the Israelites said, *Lo, we are here, and will go up unto the place [which the Lord hath promised]* (Num. 14:40).<sup>1228</sup>

It is possible that *the righteous* and *the wicked* refer to deeds,<sup>1229</sup> *the clean* and *the unclean* refer to the<sup>1230</sup> body, <sup>1231</sup> *to him that sacrificeth* refers to him who brings an offering purchased from his own money, <sup>1232</sup> *the good* and *the sinner* refer to

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<sup>1225</sup> Forty years.

<sup>1226</sup> Kadesh Barne’a.

<sup>1227</sup> Israel had to spend a year per day in the wilderness for the 40 days that the spies were in Canaan. Israel was in Kadesh Barne’a during the 40 days that the spies spent in Canaan.

<sup>1228</sup> We thus see that they did not move from their camp until then.

<sup>1229</sup> Literally, his deeds. It does not refer to a wicked person, but to a wicked deed. In other words, the results of doing a good deed or a bad deed are the same.

<sup>1230</sup> Literally, his body. According to this interpretation, “the clean” is not the opposite of “the good,” as it is according to the first interpretation.

<sup>1231</sup> It makes no difference whether one is ritually pure or impure.

<sup>1232</sup> It does not refer to a Kohen who sacrifices someone else's animal. It refers to a worshipper who brings an offering which he himself paid for.

thoughts of the heart,<sup>1233</sup> *and he that sweareth* refers to sins committed by [improper] speech.<sup>1234</sup>

3.THIS IS AN EVIL IN ALL THAT IS DONE UNDER THE SUN, THAT THERE IS ONE EVENT UNTO ALL; YEA 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.

THIS IS AN EVIL IN ALL THAT IS DONE UNDER THE SUN. There is nothing that is done under the sun that is more difficult to bear than the fact that one event (death) befalls everyone.<sup>1235</sup> It is for this reason<sup>1236</sup> that the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart.

*Be-chayehem* means while they still live.<sup>1237</sup>

*Ve-acharav el ha-metim* (and after that they go to the dead) means: “Furthermore, they say the following regarding the dead: [*for to him that is joined to all the living there is hope; for a living dog is better than a dead lion* (v. 4)].<sup>1238</sup>

The word *acharav* (after that) refers to the heart of the sons of men.<sup>1239</sup>

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<sup>1233</sup> The good refers to the person of good thoughts. The sinner refers to those who sin in their thoughts.

<sup>1234</sup> According to I.E., the commandments fall into three categories: action, thought, and speech (see *Yesod Mora* 7:2). Sins are similarly committed by action, thought, and speech. Our verse mentions all three. Kohelet is thus saying that it makes no difference whether a person keeps or violates the commandments.

<sup>1235</sup> Literally, than this.

<sup>1236</sup> That one event befalls everyone.

<sup>1237</sup> *Be-chayehem* literally means “in their life.” Hence, I.E.'s comment.

<sup>1238</sup> Our verse is to be understood as follows: Furthermore, their hearts say the following regarding the dead: *For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope; for a living dog is better than a dead lion* (v. 4).

Our verse employs the term *benei ha-adam* (the sons of men) because it is more difficult for the young ones (to properly express themselves) because of their lack of maturity.<sup>1240</sup>

4. FOR TO HIM THAT IS JOINED TO ALL THE LIVING THERE IS HOPE;  
FOR A LIVING DOG IS BETTER THAN A DEAD LION.

FOR TO HIM THAT IS JOINED TO ALL THE LIVING THERE IS HOPE. This is the thought of the sons of men: *For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope.*

Another interpretation: *For to him*<sup>1241</sup> *that is joined* refers to the dead mentioned in the previous verse. Its meaning is: Who among the dead can be joined to the living? That is, no one among the dead can be joined to those who are apart from them.<sup>1242</sup> Only the living, not the dead, have hope.<sup>1243</sup>

The text reads: *yevuchar* (is chosen).<sup>1244</sup> Scripture reads *ki mi asher yevuchar* (for him that chosen) because “the dead cannot choose.”<sup>1245</sup>

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<sup>1239</sup> Mentioned earlier in the verse.

<sup>1240</sup> I.E. believes that the sons of men (*benei ha-adam*) refers only to mature people. However, the term *ha-adam* (men) takes in all people (R. Goodman).

<sup>1241</sup> The Hebrew reads *Ki mi*. *Ki mi* literally means “for who.” Ibn Ezra’s first interpretation connects *ki mi* to “the living.” His second interpretation connects it to the dead mentioned in the previous verse.

<sup>1242</sup> “Those who are apart from him (the dead person)” refers to the living. This interpretation reads our verse as follows: For who among the dead will be joined to the living? for only to the living is there hope.

<sup>1243</sup> I.E.’s paraphrase of *For a living dog is better than a dead lion*.

<sup>1244</sup> Our text reads *yevuchar*. However, *yevuchar* is traditionally interpreted and sounded as if written *yechubbar*. The first reading is a *ketiv* and the second reading a *keri*. Up till now I.E.

5. FOR THE LIVING KNOW THAT THEY SHALL DIE; BUT THE DEAD KNOW NOT ANYTHING, NEITHER HAVE THEY ANY MORE A REWARD; FOR THE MEMORY OF THEM IS FORGOTTEN.

FOR THE LIVING. The living, even if they are fools, know that they will die. The dead, even though they were wise when alive, [now] know nothing. They do not have anything to hope for, for their name and memory are forgotten.

6. AS WELL THEIR LOVE, AS THEIR HATRED AND THEIR ENVY, IS LONG AGO PERISHED; NEITHER HAVE THEY ANY MORE A PORTION FOREVER IN ANYTHING THAT IS DONE UNDER THE SUN.

AS WELL THEIR LOVE. The love, the hatred, and the envy<sup>1246</sup> [which they experienced] while they were alive perished long ago. They forever have no share in the world.

7. GO THY WAY, EAT THY BREAD WITH JOY, AND DRINK THY WINE WITH A MERRY HEART; FOR GOD HATH ALREADY ACCEPTED THY WORKS.

GO THY WAY, EAT THY BREAD. This is what the heart tells people. This is the *madness* [that fills the heart] (v. 3). The heart tells people: While you live, eat your bread with joy, and drink your good wine with a merry heart; for God wants you to do these things, since the dead have no share in the world.

8. LET THY GARMENTS BE ALWAYS WHITE; AND LET THY HEAD LACK NO OIL.

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interpreted our text as if it read *yechubbar*. He now interprets it according to the *ketiv*. According to the *ketiv* our verse reads: for who [among the dead] shall be chosen to join the living.

<sup>1245</sup> The verse literally reads *ki mi asher yevuchar* for who [among the dead] shall be chosen to join the living and does not read " who among the dead shall choose [to join the living]" for the dead cannot choose.

<sup>1246</sup> Literally, Their love, their hatred, and their envy.

9. ENJOY LIFE WITH THE WIFE WHOM THOU LOVEST ALL THE DAYS OF THE LIFE OF THY VANITY, WHICH HE HATH GIVEN THEE UNDER THE SUN, ALL THE DAYS OF THY VANITY; FOR THAT IS THY PORTION IN LIFE, AND IN THY LABOR WHEREIN THOU LABOREST UNDER THE SUN.

LET THY GARMENTS BE ALWAYS WHITE The early commentaries all explained our verses in the same way.<sup>1247</sup> They interpreted them as follows:

“If you know that God has accepted your works, then go and eat your bread with joy (v. 7).”

“You have to see to it that thy garments be always white (v. 8); that is, that your deeds never be filthy.”

*And let thy head lack no oil* (v.8) means: you should have a good name.

Kohelet also advises the man whom *God has accepted his works* (v.7)<sup>1248</sup> to marry a woman and not go astray with a woman who is a stranger (v. 9).<sup>1249</sup>

[Kohelet advises:] *Whatsoever thy hand attaineth to do by thy strength, that do* (v. 10) because the coming world<sup>1250</sup> is not the world of action but the world of reward.

However, according to my opinion the preceding and following verses<sup>1251</sup> are connected.<sup>1252</sup> They contain the words of the heart of the children of men. It is as if

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<sup>1247</sup> They read vv. 8-10 as containing figures of speech encouraging the man who wishes to find favor in the eyes of God (v. 7) to lead an ethical life. Thus, *white garments* means performing good deeds, *oil on the head* refers to having a good name. and *enjoying life with the wife whom you love* refers to not committing adultery.

<sup>1248</sup> Literally, “charges him.”

<sup>1249</sup> A woman who is not his wife. See Prov. 5:20.

<sup>1250</sup> The world that follows death, the world of the souls

<sup>1251</sup> Vv. 7-10 follow a sequence that connects them to each other.

the person were speaking to his soul. The heart stands for the person's soul. [The soul tells him:] “Go, eat and drink, wear clean garments, constantly anoint your head with oil, and be happy with the wife whom you love.”<sup>1253</sup> All of the aforementioned are strictly pleasures of the body.<sup>1254</sup>

10. WHATSOEVER THY HAND ATTAINETH TO DO BY THY STRENGTH, THAT DO; FOR THERE IS NO WORK, NOR DEVICE, NOR KNOWLEDGE, NOR WISDOM, IN THE GRAVE, WHITHER THOU GOEST.

WHATSOEVER THY HAND ATTAINETH TO DO. Whatever you are able to do regarding things that are pleasurable, do; for there is no action, and no accounting for, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave.

*She'ol* means “the grave,”<sup>1255</sup> for we find the term used with regards to the righteous<sup>1256</sup> as in: *but I will go down to the grave (she'ol) to my son mourning* (Gen. 37:35).

11. I RETURNED, AND SAW UNDER THE SUN, THAT THE RACE IS NOT TO THE SWIFT, NOR THE BATTLE TO THE STRONG, NEITHER YET BREAD TO THE WISE, NOR YET RICHES TO MEN OF UNDERSTANDING, NOR YET FAVOR TO MEN OF SKILL; BUT TIME AND CHANCE HAPPENETH TO THEM ALL.

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<sup>1252</sup> They are not metaphors. They tell a person how to enjoy life, step-by-step; that is, eat, wear clean clothes, anoint your head, and enjoy the wife whom you love.

<sup>1253</sup> In addition, the soul tells him: *Whatsoever thy hand attaineth to do by thy strength, that do; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest* (v. 10).

<sup>1254</sup> They are not metaphors for leading an ethical life

<sup>1255</sup> It does not mean hell, as rendered by the Vulgate. See I.E. on Gen. 37:35.

<sup>1256</sup> The righteous do not go down to hell.

I RETURNED. Solomon says, “I reversed myself and reconsidered my praise of enjoyment, and the conviction that man should pursue pleasure.<sup>1257</sup> For [I noticed] that a man cannot be happy in this world and enjoy himself in it. Furthermore,<sup>1258</sup> I saw the swift stumble, and [I saw] those who have no strength to run, flee and save themselves.

NOR THE BATTLE TO THE STRONG. Compare: *a mighty man is not delivered by great strength* (Ps. 33:16).

NEITHER YET BREAD TO THE WISE. The wise should rule over the fools and be leaders. However, in most cases the reverse is so.

NOR YET FAVOR TO MEN OF SKILL. In regards to government; that is, that the rulers should favor them<sup>1259</sup> and listen to them.<sup>1260</sup>

BUT TIME AND CHANCE HAPPENETH TO THEM ALL. *Them all* refers to the wise and to the fools, to the strong and to the weak. However, I believe that *them all* refers only to those listed in our verse.<sup>1261</sup> The point of our verse is: enjoyment of life is not in man's hand.<sup>1262</sup> The fact that the wise, who are masters of the knowledge upon which all [skilled] work is based, have no bread, proves this.

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<sup>1257</sup> I.E.'s interpretation of vv. 7-10.

<sup>1258</sup> Literally, because.

<sup>1259</sup> Literally, him.

<sup>1260</sup> Literally, “that they should love him and obey him.”

<sup>1261</sup> Literally, only to those mentioned. That is, to the swift, to the strong, to the wise, to men of understanding, and to men of skill.

<sup>1262</sup> Literally, it is not in man's hand to do this. In other words, a person does not have the power to ensure his own happiness.

Those who say *Whatsoever thy hand attaineth to do by thy strength, that do* (v. 10) speak nonsense. They say things that will not be.<sup>1263</sup>

*Et* (time) refers to what the original upper arrangement contains.<sup>1264</sup>

*Pega* (chance)<sup>1265</sup> refers to one of the seven angles with which a planet is aligned with the sun. They are:

1. The point where there are 180 degrees between the planet and the sun;
2. The [two] points where the planet is 90 degrees before or after the sun;
3. The [two] points where the planet is 120 degrees before or after the sun;
4. The [two] points where the planet is 60 degrees before or after the sun.<sup>1266</sup>

Know the following:

The word *et* [time]<sup>1267</sup> is missing a *nun*.

I will now explain:<sup>1268</sup>

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<sup>1263</sup> Not everything that a person thinks that he is capable of, will he be able to accomplish. The stars may be against him. See the next note.

<sup>1264</sup> *Et* (time) refers to the arrangement of the stars and planets at Creation. This arrangement determines the fate of nations and individuals. See I.E. on 3:7.

<sup>1265</sup> *Pega* literally means a chance meeting.

<sup>1266</sup> Literally: “The meaning of *pega* (chance) is the meeting of one of the arrangements [planets] with one of the seven [degrees]. That is, half [of the degrees of a circle], and a half [of that result] before it and after it. And, one-third [of the degrees of a circle], and a half [of that result] before and after it.” See R. Goodman 119-120.

<sup>1267</sup> In, but time and chance happeneth to them all.

<sup>1268</sup> What he means by saying, “the word *et* is missing a *nun*.”

Know the following: The Holy Tongue does not have letters which switch their position in a word,<sup>1269</sup> letters [that] substitute for each other,<sup>1270</sup> swallowed letters,<sup>1271</sup> superfluous letters,<sup>1272</sup> and dropped letters.<sup>1273</sup> The aforementioned does not apply to the *alef*, *heh*, *vav*, and *yod*. This was explained by Rabbi Judah the son of David the grammarian of blessed memory.<sup>1274</sup>

We find that the letter *nun*<sup>1275</sup> is swallowed<sup>1276</sup> and missing when it is a first root letter, a last root letter, and a middle root letter. For example, the *nun* of *nasa* (journeyed) (Gen. 33:17)<sup>1277</sup> is swallowed by a *dagesh* in *va-yissa* (journeyed) (ibid. 12:9). [The same is true of the root *nun* in] *va-yissa* (lifted up) (ibid

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<sup>1269</sup> Literally, inverted letters. These are letters that change their position in a word. Compare *riva* (strive) and *yerivai* (those who strive with me) (Ps. 35:1), where the *yod* changes from being the second letter in the word to the first letter. However, the change does not affect the meaning of the root.

<sup>1270</sup> According to I.E., *chavvah* (Eve) comes from the word *chayyah* (life), the *yod* and *vav* interchanging. See I.E. on Gen. 3:20.

<sup>1271</sup> Letters that are dropped and compensated for by a *dagesh*.

<sup>1272</sup> For example, the *vav* in the word *le-mayeno* (a fountain) (Ps. 114:8) and the *heh* in the word *laylah* (night) (Gen.1:5) are not root letters and have no meaning. They do not serve as prefixes or suffixes. Hence, I.E. refers to them as superfluous.

<sup>1273</sup> For example, in the case of *shelatekh* (thy petition) (1 Sam. 1:17), the *alef* is missing; for the word should have been rendered *she'elatekh*.

<sup>1274</sup> Rabbi Judah the son of David (945-1000) was a renowned grammarian. I.E. refers to him as the elder of the grammarians. He first laid down the thesis that Hebrew is based on three-letter stems or roots. I.E. translated several of his books from Arabic into Hebrew.

<sup>1275</sup> Literally, letter *nun*. The *nun* in words that come from a root whose first stem letter is *nun*.

<sup>1276</sup> Replaced by a *dagesh*

<sup>1277</sup> From the root *nun*, *samekh*, *ayin*.

13:10),<sup>1278</sup> *va-yitten* (set) (ibid. 1:17),<sup>1279</sup> *va-yitta* (planted) (ibid. 2:8),<sup>1280</sup> *va-yiddar* (vowed) (ibid. 28:20),<sup>1281</sup> *va-yippol* (fell) (ibid. 17:3),<sup>1282</sup> *va-yiggof* (struck) (Ex. 32:35),<sup>1283</sup> *yibbol*<sup>1284</sup> (wither) (in [lo] *yibbolalehu* (whose leaf shall not wither) (Ezek. 47:12).<sup>1285</sup>

However, in the *po'el* form<sup>1286</sup> all of these *nuns* are present.<sup>1287</sup> Compare, *nose'a* (journeying) (Ex. 14:10), *nose* (forgiving) (ibid. 34:7), *noten* (give) (Gen. 9:12), *note'a* (planted) (Jer. 11:17), *noder* (vowed) (Lev. 27:8), *nofel* (fallen) (Num. 24:4), *noted* (Ex. 7:27), and *novel* (fading) (Is. 28:1).<sup>1288</sup>

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<sup>1278</sup>From the root *nun, sin, alef*.

<sup>1279</sup>From the root *nun, tav, nun*.

<sup>1280</sup>From the root *nun, tet, ayin*.

<sup>1281</sup>From the root *nun, dalet, resh*.

<sup>1282</sup>From the root *nun, peh, lamed*.

<sup>1283</sup>From the root *nun, gimel, peh*.

<sup>1284</sup>From the root *nun, bet, lamed*.

<sup>1285</sup>In other words, the *nun* is dropped in the imperfect *kal* form in words that have a *nun* as the first root letter.

<sup>1286</sup>The present *kal* form.

<sup>1287</sup>*Nose'a, nose, noten, note'a, noder, nofel, nogef*, and *novel* are present *kal* forms of the just-mentioned roots whose first letter *nun* drops out in the imperfect *kal*. In the present *kal*, the *nun* is retained.

<sup>1288</sup>*Nose'a, nose, noten, note'a, noder, nofel, nogef*, and *novel* all come from roots whose first letter is a *nun*.

The *nuns* are missing in the imperative.<sup>1289</sup> Compare *se'u*<sup>1290</sup> (take your journey) in *kumu se'u* (rise ye up, take your journey) (Deut. 2:24), *se'u*<sup>1291</sup> (Take ye the sum) in *se'u et rosh* (take ye the sum of all the congregation) (Num. 1:2), *tenu*<sup>1292</sup> (give yourselves) in *tenu yad le-YHVH* (but give yourselves unto the Lord) (2 Chron. 30:8).

Sometimes the *nun* remains in its place [in the imperative when it is a root letter]. Compare *niflu* (fall) in *niflu alenu* (fall on us) (Hosea 10:8).

Occasionally the *nun* is swallowed<sup>1293</sup> when it is the middle root letter as the *nun* of *shenei* (two) (Gen. 1:16) in the word *shetei* (two) (Gen. 4:19),<sup>1294</sup> for the word *shenei* is related to the word *eshneh*<sup>1295</sup> (second) in *ve-lo eshneh lo* (and I will not smite him a second time) (1 Sam. 26:8).

Similarly, the *nun* of *ben* (Gen. 4:25) is missing in the word *bat* (Gen. 11:29).<sup>1296</sup>

Likewise, the word *et* (time) (v. 11) comes from the root *ayin, nun, tav*.<sup>1297</sup> The word *onah* (time), which the Rabbis of blessed memory employ, is similar.<sup>1298</sup>

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<sup>1289</sup> The *nun* is dropped in the imperative *kal* form in words whose first root letter is *nun* and is compensated for with a *dagesh*.

<sup>1290</sup> From the root *nun, samekh, ayin*.

<sup>1291</sup> From the root *nun, sin, alef*.

<sup>1292</sup> From the root *nun, tav, nun*.

<sup>1293</sup> Literally, sometimes it is found swallowed.

<sup>1294</sup> *Shetei* is the feminine form of *shenei*.

<sup>1295</sup> *Shenei* is the word *shenayim* in the construct. The root of *shenayim* comes from the same root as *eshneh*; that is, *shin, nun, heh*. *Shetayim* is the feminine form of *shenayim* and *shetei* is the feminine form of *shenei*. Thus, the *nun* stem letter is missing in the word *shetei*. It is swallowed by a *dagesh*.

<sup>1296</sup> Otherwise, the word would be written *benat*.

<sup>1297</sup> However, its *nun* is dropped and compensated for by a *dagesh*.

We also find the words *u-khe-et* (and now)<sup>1299</sup> (Ezra 4:17) and *u-khe-enet* (and now) (ibid. 4:10)<sup>1300</sup>

The *dagesh* in the *tav* of *itto* (his time) (verse 12) swallows the [root] *nun*.<sup>1301</sup> The *dagesh* in the *tav* of *itto* is like the *dagesh* in the *tav* of *bitto* (his daughter) (Gen. 29:6), [which takes the place of a *nun*<sup>1302</sup>] and the *dagesh* in the *tav* of *attah* (you) (v. 9) which swallows the *nun* of *ani* (*I*) (Kohelet 1:12).<sup>1303</sup> The same is the case with the *dagesh* [placed in the [*tet*] of *chittim* (wheat) (Gen. 30:14).<sup>1304</sup> Both of these *nuns*<sup>1305</sup> are present<sup>1306</sup> in the Aramaic.<sup>1307</sup>

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<sup>1298</sup> It has a similar meaning. The word for time (*onah*) which the Rabbis employ comes from the root *ayin, nun, heh*. This root is the stem of *et*, with the *nun* dropped. I.E. will soon go on to say that the *tav* of *et* is not a root letter but is the sign of the feminine.

<sup>1299</sup> At this time.

<sup>1300</sup> We thus see that the words *et* and *enet* are related. They both come from the root *ayin, nun, heh*.

<sup>1301</sup> The root of *itto* is *ayin, nun, tav*. I.E. now goes on to offer examples of words in which a *dagesh* compensates for a dropped *nun*.

<sup>1302</sup> See I.E.'s comment above: *bat* (Gen. 11:29) lacks the *nun* of *ben* (Gen. 4:25).

<sup>1303</sup> *Attah* is related to the word *ani*. Hence, it comes from a root whose middle letter is *nun*. The *nun* is present in the Aramaic form of *attah*, which is *ant*.

<sup>1304</sup> It swallows the *nun*. *Chittim* should have been written *chintim*. Its *nun* is swallowed by the *dagesh* in the *tet*.

<sup>1305</sup> The *nuns* which are dropped in *attah* and *chittim*.

<sup>1306</sup> Literally, seen.

<sup>1307</sup> The *nuns* which are dropped in *attah* and *chittim* appear in the Aramaic. Compare *ant* (you) (Dan. 2:29) and *chintin* (wheat) (Ezra 6:9).

The same is the case with the *dagesh* of *amitto* (His truth) (Ps. 91:4),<sup>1308</sup> for *amitto* comes from the same root as the word (*emunah*) (steady) (Ex. 17:12).<sup>1309</sup> The *tav* of *amitto* is the sign of the feminine,<sup>1310</sup> as shown by *va-tehi ha-emet ne'edderet* (and truth is lacking) (Is. 59:15).<sup>1311</sup> The *tav* of *et* (time) is similarly the sign of the feminine.<sup>1312</sup>

According to this grammatical explanation [of the word *et*],<sup>1313</sup> the word *la-ut*<sup>1314</sup> (to sustain) in *to sustain him that is weary* (Is. 50:4) stands by itself,<sup>1315</sup> and it has no counterpart in Scripture.<sup>1316</sup>

12. FOR MAN ALSO KNOWETH NOT HIS TIME; AS THE FISHES THAT ARE TAKEN IN AN EVIL NET, AND AS THE BIRDS THAT ARE CAUGHT IN THE SNARE, EVEN SO ARE THE SONS OF MEN SNARED IN AN EVIL TIME, WHEN IT FALLETH SUDDENLY UPON THEM.

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<sup>1308</sup> See I.E.'s comment above: *bat* (Gen. 11:29) lacks the *nun* of *ben* (Gen. 4:25).

<sup>1308</sup> I.E. now proceeds to show that at times a word derived from a root whose final letter is a *nun* drops that *nun*. *Amitto* comes from the root *alef, mem, nun*. The *dagesh* of *amitto* compensates for the dropped *nun*.

<sup>1309</sup> *Emunah* comes from the root *alef, mem, nun*.

<sup>1310</sup> This is simply a new piece of information. It has nothing to do with the missing *nun*.

<sup>1311</sup> *Ne'edderet*, which describe *emet*, is feminine. Hence, *emet* must be feminine.

<sup>1312</sup> *Et* is thus feminine.

<sup>1313</sup> That *et* comes from the root *ayin, nun, heh*.

<sup>1314</sup> From the root, *ayin, vav, tav*.

<sup>1315</sup> It has no connection to *et*, which comes from the root *ayin, nun, heh*.

<sup>1316</sup> We do not find another word in Scripture derived from the root *ayin, vav, tav*. I.E.'s point is that if *et* (time) came from the root *ayin, vav, tav*, we could connect *la-ut* to *et*. Indeed, I.E. suggests this in his comments on Is. 50:4: He there renders (*la-ut*), *in season* (Friedlander translation, p 229). However, according to I.E.'s interpretation here, *la- ut* come from different roots. Hence, *la-ut* is unique and has no counterpart.

FOR MAN ALSO KNOWETH NOT HIS TIME. Kohelet says that [an evil] time and [an evil] alignment of the planets with the sun<sup>1317</sup> prevent a person from doing what he desires. Another evil that may befall a person is that he is about to be suddenly be struck by death, and not be aware of this. Kohelet compares people to fish and birds that are unaware that they are in danger until they fall into a trap and are unable to be save themselves.

[EVEN SO ARE THE SONS OF MEN SNARED] The word *yukashim* (snared) is an adjective.

[Rabbi Judah the grammarian<sup>1318</sup> says that there are four words in Scripture—four and not five—that are vocalized like *pu'alim*<sup>1319</sup> but are in reality *pe'ulim*.<sup>1320</sup> The following are the four words.

1. The word *ukkal* (consumed) in: *and the bush was not consumed* (Ex.3:2);
2. The word *lukkach* (taken) in: *if thou see me when I am taken from thee* (2 Kings 2:10);
3. *Mu'adet* (out of joint) in: *and a foot out of joint* (Prov. 25:19);
4. *Yukashim* (snared) in: *even so are the sons of men snared*.<sup>1321</sup>

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<sup>1317</sup> Literally: "He says that the *et* (time) and the *pega* (chance) prevent a person from doing what he desires." I.E. earlier defined *pega* in verse 11 as follows: *Pega* refers to the meeting of a planet with one of the fixed seven points of alignment with the sun.

<sup>1318</sup> See note1275.

<sup>1319</sup> The first letter root letter is vocalized with a *kubbutz* or *shuruk* and the second root letter is vocalized with a *kamatz*.

<sup>1320</sup> *Pa'ul* is the usual passive *kal* form in the present tense. Compare *katuv*, *karu*, *lamud*, etc. It is the opposite of the *po'el*, which is an active form of the *kal*. The first letter root letter is vocalized with a *kamatz* and the second root letter is vocalized with a *shuruk*.

<sup>1321</sup> All these words are *kals*. However, they do not follow the *kal* vocalization. If they did, they would be vocalized: *akhul*, *laku'ach*, *me'uah*, and *yekushim*.

Rabbi Jonah,<sup>1322</sup> whose soul is in Eden, added another word, a fifth word. He added the word *ha-yullad* (that shall be born) in: *the child that shall be born* (Judges 13:8).<sup>1323</sup>

However, Rabbi Samuel the Nagid<sup>1324</sup> says that the *heh* in *ha-yullad* is in place of the word *asher*,<sup>1325</sup> like the *heh* of *ha-hullelah* (the renowned)<sup>1326</sup> (Ezek. 26:17), and that Scripture [in Judges 13:8] employs [*ha-yullad*] a perfect in place of [*ha-ye-yullad*] an imperfect.<sup>1327</sup>

Rabbi Moshe Ha-Kohen,<sup>1328</sup> whose soul rests in Eden, says that there are only four such words.<sup>1329</sup> According to Rabbi Moshe, the word *mu'adet* is to be removed from the number and it is to be replaced by the word *ha-yullad*, for *yukashim*, *ukkal*, *lukkach*, and *yullad* are transitive verbs,<sup>1330</sup> while *mu'adet* is an intransitive verb.<sup>1331</sup> He also says that the *shurak* in *mu'adet* is in place of a *cholam* and that the

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<sup>1322</sup> Rabbi Jonah ibn Janach (c. 990 – c. 1050).

<sup>1323</sup> Judges 13:8 speaks of a prophecy about a child who will be born.

<sup>1324</sup> Rabbi Samuel ben Joseph Ha-Nagid (993-1055) was a leader of Spanish Jewry. He was a Talmudic scholar, grammarian, philologist, and politician. Rabbi Samuel takes issue with Rabbi Judah by suggesting that *yullad* is a *pu'al* in the perfect.

<sup>1325</sup> Rabbi Samuel maintains that the *heh* affixed to *yullad* is not a *heh* which is prefixed to the object, for such a *heh* is not attached to a perfect. It is rather a *heh* which means "who" or "that." Such a *heh* can be affixed to a verb in the perfect.

<sup>1326</sup> *Ha-hullelah* (the renowned) is a *pu'al* in the perfect. The *heh* affixed to it means "that." Rabbi Samuel thus renders *ha-hullelah* as: "that is renowned."

<sup>1327</sup> Thus, *ha-yullad* should be rendered: "that is to be born."

<sup>1328</sup> Moses ben Samuel Ha-Kohen ibn Gikatilla. An 11th century Spanish grammarian and Biblical exegete.

<sup>1329</sup> Words that are *pa'uls* but are vocalized as *pu'als*.

<sup>1330</sup> Hence, they have a *pa'ul* form.

<sup>1331</sup> Intransitive verbs do not come in the *pa'ul*.

word *mu'adet* should have been vocalized [*mu'adet*] like the word *yoshevet* (dwelt) in *and she dwelt upon the wall* (Joshua 2:15).<sup>1332</sup>

[WHEN IT FALLETH SUDDENLY UPON THEM]. The *mem* of *pitom* (suddenly) is superfluous.<sup>1333</sup> The word *peta'im* (the simple) (Ps.116:6) is derived from it.<sup>1334</sup> The word *shilshom* is similar [to *pitom*].<sup>1335</sup> However, there is better interpretation; namely, the *mem* of *shilshom* stands for “today and yesterday.”<sup>1336</sup>

13. THIS ALSO HAVE I SEEN AS WISDOM UNDER THE SUN, AND IT SEEMED GREAT UNTO ME.

THIS ALSO. Because Kohelet earlier said: *neither yet bread to the wise* (verse 11),<sup>1337</sup> he now says the opposite in praise of the wise person.<sup>1338</sup>

14. THERE WAS A LITTLE CITY, AND FEW MEN WITHIN IT; AND THERE CAME A GREAT KING AGAINST IT, AND BESIEGED IT, AND BUILT GREAT BULWARKS AGAINST IT.

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<sup>1332</sup> Thus, *mu'adet* is a *kal*, except that its *cholam* is replaced by a *shuruk*. It is not a *pa'ul* vocalized like a *pu'al*.

<sup>1333</sup> It is not a root letter, for *pitom* comes from the root: *peh, tav, heh*. Neither is it a pronoun or plural suffix.

<sup>1334</sup> *Peti* (simple) and *pitom* come from the same root: *peh, tav, heh*. The *peti* (simple person) acts in haste.

<sup>1335</sup> For the *mem* of *shilshom* is superfluous.

<sup>1336</sup> The *mem* of *shilshom* is not superfluous. It is the sign of the plural. *Shilshom* means a plural of three; that is, “three days.”

<sup>1337</sup> In verse 11, Kohelet says that the wise have no bread; in other words, “what point is there in being wise when you have nothing to eat?”

<sup>1338</sup> Kohelet now says that wisdom is great.

THERE WAS A LITTLE CITY. The early commentaries said that this is a parable.<sup>1339</sup>

A LITTLE CITY. The little city represents the human body.

AND FEW MEN WITHIN IT. The powers of nature that serve the soul.

A GREAT KING. The reference is to the evil inclination. The man who is poor [and wise] (verse 15) stands for man's intelligence.

However, in reality our verse is not a parable, but is to be taken according to its plain reading. It speaks of the wise man who does not have bread. This wise man says,<sup>1340</sup> [*What advantage hath ...the poor man that hath understanding? 6:8.*]

[The point of verses 14-16 is:] Even though in most cases the wisdom of the poor wise man will not help him in this world, there are also times when wisdom helps more than royalty.

Kohelet says:

*A little city.* The little city corresponds to: *and besieged it.*<sup>1341</sup>

*A great king* means a king with a large number of people. The aforementioned is in contrast to: *and few men within it.*

The city is situated in a low place; hence, it is possible to build great bulwarks that are higher than it. There is thus no doubt that the city will be taken. There is no one to save it.<sup>1342</sup>

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<sup>1339</sup> Literally, “was said by way of a parable.”

<sup>1340</sup> Literally, “himself says.”

<sup>1341</sup> The king besieged the little city. It was easy to besiege the city because it was small.

<sup>1342</sup> I.E. reads our verse as follows: There was a little city which was besieged. It had few men within it. There came a king with a large army and fought against it. He built great bulwarks against it. The city had no chance to survive.

The word *metzodim* (bulwarks) is similar to *metzad* (stronghold) in: *to the stronghold unto David* (1 Chron.12:17), and to *metzudat* (stronghold) in: *the stronghold of Zion* (2 Sam.5:7). The *mem*<sup>1343</sup> is a root letter.

15. NOW THERE WAS FOUND IN IT A MAN POOR AND WISE, AND HE BY HIS WISDOM DELIVERED THE CITY; YET NO MAN REMEMBERED THAT SAME POOR MAN.

NOW THERE WAS FOUND IN IT. *Misken* (poor) is an adjective. However, the word *miskenut* (scarceness) (Deut. 8:9) is a noun. Its *mem* is not a root letter.<sup>1344</sup> This term is employed<sup>1345</sup> in Aramaic.

The meaning of *yet no man remembered that same poor man* is that the poor man was never mentioned<sup>1346</sup> by the people of the city before he saved them.

There are grammarians who say that *Zakhar* (remembered) does not mean “mentioned.”<sup>1347</sup> They say that when the verb *zakhar* (remember) (Gen. 40:23) and *va-yizkor* (remembered) (ibid. 8:1) is encountered in Scripture, it always means “remembered.”<sup>1348</sup> However, the word *azkirah* (I will make to be remembered) (Ps. 45:18), which is a *hifil*, means “to make mention by mouth.”<sup>1349</sup> They are forced to explain the clause reading: *Yet did not the chief butler remember (zakhar) Joseph* (Gen. 40:23) to mean that Joseph did not enter his mind,<sup>1350</sup> and that *but forgot him* (ibid.) repeats *Yet did not the chief butler remember.*<sup>1351</sup>

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<sup>1343</sup> The *mem* of *metzodim*.

<sup>1344</sup> Literally, “added” or “superfluous.”

<sup>1345</sup> Literally, “known.”

<sup>1346</sup> Literally, “remembered by the mouth of the people of the city. “According to I.E., *zakhar* (remembered) means “mentioned.”

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<sup>1347</sup> Literally, “[does not mean] to remember by mouth.”

<sup>1348</sup> Mentally recalled. Literally, “remembered by the heart.”

<sup>1349</sup> It means, “I will mention.”

<sup>1350</sup> Literally, “his heart.”

However, in my opinion it is better to explain the term *zekhirah*(remembering) as at times meaning “remembering,”<sup>1352</sup> and at other times as meaning “mentioning.”<sup>1353</sup> The verse: *And the message<sup>1354</sup> of the Lord shall ye mention* (*tizkeru*) *no more*, which means: "You will not mention to me with your mouth the message of the Lord (Jer. 23:36)," shows that this is the case. For what meaning is there [in the context of Jer. 23:36 to] “You will not recall in your hearts the memory of the burden of the Lord”?<sup>1355</sup>

16. THEN SAID I: “WISDOM IS BETTER THAN STRENGTH;  
NEVERTHELESS, THE POOR MAN’S WISDOM IS DESPISED, AND HIS  
WORDS ARE NOT HEARD.”

THEN SAID I: “WISDOM IS BETTER THAN STRENGTH.” Even though the wisdom of the poor man is despised and his words are not heard, the fact of the

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<sup>1351</sup> Gen. 40:23 reads: *Yet did not the chief butler remember (zakhar) Joseph but forgot him.* If *zakhar* means to keep in mind, then “but forgot him” repeats “Yet did not the chief butler remember (*zakhar*) Joseph.” However, according to I.E.'s interpretation that *zakhar* means “mentioned,” the verse does not repeat itself. It should be read: “Yet did not the chief butler mention (*zakhar*) Joseph but forgot him.” Thus, the verse does not repeat itself.

<sup>1352</sup> Literally, “in the heart.”

<sup>1353</sup> Literally, “by mouth.”

<sup>1354</sup> Literally, “the burden.”

<sup>1355</sup> Jer. 23:36 reads: *And the burden of the Lord shall ye mention no more; for every man's own word shall be his burden; and would ye pervert the words of the living God, of the Lord of hosts our God?* It makes no sense to interpret *And the burden of the Lord shall ye mention no more* as “You will not recall in your hearts the memory of the burden of the Lord” because Jeremiah is referring to the people speaking out loud, not thinking to themselves.

matter is that in time of need his wisdom accomplishes what mighty men cannot achieve.<sup>1356</sup>

The word *im* (though)<sup>1357</sup> should be inserted before the word<sup>1358</sup> *chokhmat* (the wisdom of). Our text should be read as if written: *ve-im chokhmat ha-misken bezuyah* (even though<sup>1359</sup> the wisdom of the poor man is despised).<sup>1360</sup> Compare: *and you are thirsty, go to the vessels* (Ruth 2:9), which should be read as if written: “and if (*ve-im*) you are thirsty, [go to the vessels].” There are many such cases.<sup>1361</sup>

## 17. THE WORDS OF THE WISE SPOKEN IN QUIET ARE MORE ACCEPTABLE THAN THE CRY OF A RULER AMONG FOOLS.

**THE WORDS OF THE WISE.** There is a commentator who explains the previous verse: *Wisdom is better than strength* as follows:<sup>1362</sup> Even though the poor man’s wisdom is despised [verse 16], his words which are spoken in a low and calm voice will certainly be more acceptable than those of one who rules over fools by shouting; for the words of the wise are as nails well-fastened in the soul.<sup>1363</sup>

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<sup>1356</sup> I.E.’s paraphrase of the verse. I.E. now explains how he arrived at this interpretation.

<sup>1357</sup> Literally, “if.”

<sup>1358</sup> Literally, “The word *im* is missing from in front of *ve-chokhmat* (the wisdom of).”

<sup>1359</sup> Literally, “and if.”

<sup>1360</sup> According to I.E., our verse should be read as if written: “Then said I: ‘Wisdom is better than strength, even though the poor man’s wisdom is despised and his words are not heard.’”  
Literally: “Then said I: ‘Wisdom is better than strength, and if the poor man’s wisdom is despised and his words are not heard.’”

<sup>1361</sup> Where a word is missing from the text and should be supplied; i.e., an ellipsis.

<sup>1362</sup> Our verse and the one preceding it appear to contradict each other. The previous verse stated: “The poor man’s wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard.” Our verse states: “The words of the wise spoken in quiet are more acceptable than the cry of a ruler among fools.” The comments that follow reconcile these verses.

<sup>1363</sup> See 12: 11. I.E. explains why words spoken in a low and calm voice are more acceptable than the shouts of a ruler, who rules over fools.

Some say that the words of one wise man are not heard.<sup>1364</sup> They are only listened to when the wise gather.<sup>1365</sup>

Others say that the wise men<sup>1366</sup> refers to wise wealthy men.<sup>1367</sup>

In my opinion, Kohelet does not speak about a single event.<sup>1368</sup> I have already taken note of this.<sup>1369</sup> If there are times when the wisdom of a poor wise man is despised, there are other times when his voice is paid more attention to than the words of the king.

## 18. WISDOM IS BETTER THAN WEAPONS OF WAR; BUT ONE SINNER DESTROYETH MUCH GOOD.

WISDOM IS BETTER THAN WEAPONS OF WAR. Wisdom does not need instruments of war. Kohelet previously said *wisdom is better than strength* (verse 16), [that is, wisdom is better than the] strength of the heart.<sup>1370</sup> Wisdom will save and protect better than weapons of war safeguard the warrior. Observe, we find that wisdom will save the wise who possess it. It will also save others along with

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<sup>1364</sup> Verse 16 speaks of a single wise man. People do not pay attention to the opinion of a solitary wise man.

<sup>1365</sup> Literally, “when they gather. “That is, when the wise gather and express an opinion. Hence, our verse speaks of wise men and verse 16 of a single wise man.

<sup>1366</sup> In our verse.

<sup>1367</sup> Whereas verse 16 speaks of a wise man who is poor.

<sup>1368</sup> Sometimes a poor wise man is not listened to (verse 16). At other times, he is listened to (verse 17).

<sup>1369</sup> See I.E. on Kohelet 7:3.

<sup>1370</sup> Bravery. Wisdom is superior to courage.

the wise,<sup>1371</sup> as in the case of the man of the little city (verse 14).<sup>1372</sup> The opposite is the case [with a sinner, for] *one sinner destroyeth much good*.

**BUT ONE SINNER DESTROYETH MUCH GOOD** refers back to the ruler among fools (verse 17).

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<sup>1371</sup>Literally, “him.”

<sup>1372</sup> The wise man of the little city saves himself and the people of the city.

## CHAPTER 10

### 1. DEAD FLIES MAKE THE OINTMENT OF THE PERFUMER FETID AND PUTRID; SO DOTH A LITTLE FOLLY OUTWEIGH WISDOM AND HONOR.

DEAD FLIES. We find many cases in Scripture where the singular is employed in place of the plural.<sup>1373</sup> The correct way to understand these instances is to explain them as being abridged.<sup>1374</sup>

DEAD FLIES MAKE THE OINTMENT OF THE PERFUMER FETID AND PUTRID. Its meaning is: “Each fly in its place [makes the ointment of the perfumer fetid and putrid].<sup>1375</sup> Compare the following:

*Its branches* (banot)<sup>1376</sup> *runs* (tza'adah)<sup>1377</sup> *over the wall* (Gen. 49:22),<sup>1378</sup> the meaning of which is: “Each branch in its place [runs over the wall].”<sup>1379</sup>

*And the woman took the two men, and hid him* (Josh. 2:4),<sup>1380</sup> the meaning of which is, she hid each one of the men in his place.<sup>1381</sup>

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<sup>1373</sup> *Zevuvei* (flies) is a plural. However, the verbs *yavish* (make fetid) and *yabb'ia* (make putrid) which govern it are singular.

<sup>1374</sup> There are missing words (ellipses) in the verse which explain its use of singular verbs.

<sup>1375</sup> Our verse should be understood as if written: “Each and every dead fly makes the ointment of the perfumer fetid and putrid.”

<sup>1376</sup> *Banot* is a plural.

<sup>1377</sup> *Tza'adah* is a singular.

<sup>1378</sup> Translated literally. See I.E. on Gen. 49:22.

<sup>1379</sup> According to I.E., Gen. 49:22 should be understood as: Each and every branch runs over the wall.

<sup>1380</sup> Translated literally.

*And Hezekiah received the letters...and read it* (Is. 37:14 ),<sup>1382</sup> the meaning of which is: And Hezekiah received the letters and read each letter individually. He then spread out the letter in which these things were written<sup>1383</sup> [before the Lord] (ibid).

The word *yabbi'a* (make putrid) is difficult to explain in the context of this verse.<sup>1384</sup>

Some explain that *yabbi'a* (make putrid) comes from *avabu'ot* (blisters) (Ex. 9:9).<sup>1385</sup> However, this interpretation is not in keeping with the rules of Hebrew grammar, for the root of *avabu'ot* is *bet, ayin, heh*.<sup>1386</sup> It comes from a verb whose third root letter is not always present.<sup>1387</sup> The same is the case with *tiveh*

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<sup>1381</sup> I.E. reads Josh. 2:4 as: And the woman took the two men and hid each one of them.

<sup>1382</sup> Letters (*sefarim*) is a plural, whereas the pronoun *hu* in *va-yikra'ehu* (and read it) is a singular.

<sup>1383</sup> "Let not thy God in whom thou trustest beguile thee, saying, 'Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.'" See Is. 37:10.

<sup>1384</sup> Its meaning in our verse is uncertain. However, its meaning is clear when used elsewhere in Scripture. The word *yabbi'a* is found in Ps. 19:3, which reads: *Day unto day uttereth* (*yabbi'a*) *speech*. However, it cannot have this meaning in our verse for "Dead flies make the ointment of the perfumer fetid and utter" makes no sense.

<sup>1385</sup> These commentators explain *zevuvei mavet yavish yabbi'a shemen ro'ke'ach* as: "Dead flies make the ointment of the perfumer fetid and produce blisters." Rashi explains: the flies cause "blisters" to appear on the ointment. He writes, "[The flies] turn the ointment into a foam...which is called *zecume* in Old French...,[and] blisters (*avabu'ot*) appear in it. This is the meaning of *yabbi'a shemen ro'ke'ach*." See Rashi on Kohelet 10:1.

<sup>1386</sup> Whereas the root of *yabbi'a* is *nun, bet, ayin*.

<sup>1387</sup> Literally, "It comes from a verb whose third letter is not always complete." *Yabbi'a* is a *hifil*. If it came from the root *bet, ayin, heh*, it would be vocalized *yaveh* and not *yabbi'a*.

(causeth...to boil) in *and the fire causeth the waters to boil* (Is. 64:1),<sup>1388</sup> and *niveh* (swelling out) in *swelling out in a high wall* (Is. 30:13).<sup>1389</sup>

It appears to me that *yabbi'a* (make putrid) is related to the word *mabbu'a*<sup>1390</sup> (fountain) (Kohelet 12:6), for the *dagesh* in the *bet*<sup>1391</sup> compensates for the *nun* which is the first letter of its root. The word *nove'a* (bubbling) in: *a bubbling brook* (Prov. 18:4)<sup>1392</sup> shows that this is the case.<sup>1393</sup>

The meaning of our verse is: “Dead flies make the ointment of the perfumer [into] an ointment which emits a most terrible fetid scent. The fetid odor does not cease because the [dead] flies cause it to bubble forth.”<sup>1394</sup> *Yabbi'a* is a transitive verb.<sup>1395</sup>

[OUTWEIGH (YAKAR)]. Note the following: When the word spelled *yod*, *kof*, *resh* is vocalized with two *kematzim* (*yakar*),<sup>1396</sup> it is an adjective. However, when the word is vocalized with a *sheva* beneath the *yod* and a *kamatz* beneath the *kof*, it is a noun, as in the word, *yekar* (precious) vocalized *sheva*, *kamatz* [in: *But the lips of knowledge are a precious jewel* (Prov. 20:15).] The word *yekar* means “glory.”

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<sup>1388</sup> *Tiveh* comes from a verb that drops its third root letter. It comes from the root *bet*, *ayin*, *heh*.

<sup>1389</sup> *Niveh* comes from a verb that drops its third root letter. It comes from the root *bet*, *ayin*, *heh*.

<sup>1390</sup> From the root *nun*, *bet*, *ayin*.

<sup>1391</sup> Of *yabbi'a*. So, too, the *dagesh* in the *bet* of *mabbu'a*,

<sup>1392</sup> Translated according to I.E.

<sup>1393</sup> All three root letters are present in *nove'a*. This shows that the Hebrew word for “bubbles” comes from the root *nun*, *bet*, *ayin*.

<sup>1394</sup> According to this interpretation, our verse should be interpreted as: “Dead flies make the ointment of the perfumer fetid. They, continuously bubble forth a fetid odor.”

<sup>1395</sup> It is a *hifil*.

<sup>1396</sup> As it is in our verse.

It is always vocalized with a [*sheva* followed by a] *kamatz*. It is vocalized *sheva, kamatz*<sup>1397</sup> whether in the absolute or the construct.<sup>1398</sup> Compare the word *serad* (plaited) [vocalized *shave, kamatz*] in *bigdei ha-sarad* (the plaited garments) (Ex. 31:10);<sup>1399</sup> *yekar* (precious thing [vocalized *sheva, kamatz*] in: *and his eye seeth every precious thing* (Job 28:10); *yekar* (honor) (vocalized *sheva, kamatz*) in: *and the honor of his excellent majesty* (Est. 1:4).

The construct form of *yekar* (glory) is vocalized with a *kamatz* [that is, *sheva, kamatz*] to distinguish between *yekar* [*sheva, kamatz*]—a noun in the construct—and *yekar* [*sheva, pattach*]—an adjective in the construct.<sup>1400</sup> Compare *yekar* (glorious of)<sup>1401</sup> (vocalized *sheva, pattach*) in: *glorious of spirit*<sup>1402</sup> *is a man of discernment* (Prov. 17:27).

Therefore, the one who employs the word *yekar* (honor) which is vocalized with a *kamatz* beneath the *yod* in the *Rosh Ha-Shanah* prayer which reads, “*And give honor (yakar) to Thy glorious name*<sup>1403</sup> errs. In truth, the word should be vocalized with a *sheva* beneath the *yod* (*yekar*),<sup>1404</sup> as in the word *yekar* (honor)<sup>1405</sup> in: *all the wives will give to their husbands honor* (*yekar*) (Est. 1:20).

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<sup>1397</sup> Literally, "in the same way."

<sup>1398</sup> The *kamatz* usually changes to a *pattach* in the construct in words whose last vowel is a *kamatz*. Compare *davar* which becomes *devar* in the construct.

<sup>1399</sup> *Serad* is vocalized identically in the absolute and in the construct.

<sup>1400</sup> If *yekar* (*sheva, kamatz*), a noun, were vocalized in the construct *sheva, pattach*, it would be confused with *yekar*, an adjective vocalized *sheva, pattach*. The latter word is the construct form of *yakar* (vocalized *kamatz, kamatz*) and is an adjective.

<sup>1401</sup> Translated according to I.E.

<sup>1402</sup> Translated literally.

<sup>1403</sup> The prayer is found in the Musaf Amidah in the *Malkhiyot* blessing. It is currently recited daily in the second part of the *alleinu* prayer.

<sup>1404</sup> For *yakar* is an adjective. The context requires a noun; i.e., *yekar*.

The word *yakar* [*vocalized- kamatz, kamatz*] in our verse describes man.<sup>1406</sup> The point of the verse is: Just as dead flies make the ointment of the perfumer fetid, so does a little folly tarnish<sup>1407</sup> the man who is glorious because of his wisdom and the glory which he possesses. For a little folly will destroy and sully<sup>1408</sup> his reputation<sup>1409</sup> and make it fetid.

The folly spoken of in our verse is sin. This verse is connected to a verse which comes before it; namely, *but one sinner destroyeth much good* (9:18).<sup>1410</sup> [The latter verse teaches that] even one sin is a very harsh thing for a wise man.

Can you not see that God appeared two times to King Solomon?<sup>1411</sup> Furthermore, King Solomon built a Temple<sup>1412</sup> dedicated to God's glory.<sup>1413</sup>

Solomon's wisdom was above and beyond that of<sup>1414</sup> the earlier and later sages. Nothing unrighteous was found in Solomon. Yet because of one sin—that he did

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<sup>1405</sup>Which is a noun.

<sup>1406</sup> *Yakar* is an adjective modifying “man,” even though “man” does not appear in our verse. According to I.E., *yakar* should be understood as: the glorious man.

<sup>1407</sup> Literally, make fetid.

<sup>1408</sup> Literally, make fetid.

<sup>1409</sup> Literally, his memory.

<sup>1410</sup> Our verse speaks of “a little folly”; that is, a small number of sins. Verse 9:18 speaks of one minor sin.

<sup>1411</sup> 1 Kings 11:9. The two times are described in 1 Kings 3:5; 9:2 and 11:9.

<sup>1412</sup>Literally, a place.

<sup>1413</sup>The Holy Temple. See 1 Kings, chapter 6.

<sup>1414</sup> Literally, “ascended above and was wider than.”

not look after what his wives were doing; that is, they used Solomon's wealth to build temples to their gods—Scripture writes about Solomon all that Achiyah<sup>1415</sup> and Nehemiah say about him.<sup>1416</sup>

Do not be surprised at this,<sup>1417</sup> because any sin is declared to be major or minor according to the one who commits it. Compare: *Through them that are nigh unto Me I will be sanctified* (Lev 10:3).<sup>1418</sup> How precious is the homily of our ancients of blessed memory on: *and round about Him it stormed mightily* (Ps. 50:3).<sup>1419</sup>

Similarly, very harsh words were written regarding men greater than King Solomon<sup>1420</sup> because of small lapses in behavior without any intention to sin.<sup>1421</sup> These lapses resulted from events which they did not bring about.<sup>1422</sup>

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<sup>1415</sup> Achiyah the prophet blamed Solomon for the idol worship in Judah. See 1 Kings 11:29-39.

<sup>1416</sup> Neh. 13:26. Nehemiah says that Solomon's foreign wives caused him to sin.

<sup>1417</sup> That Scripture harshly criticizes Solomon.

<sup>1418</sup> When God is very strict with those close to Him, He is sanctified. For people say that if the righteous are punished for sinning, we certainly will be. They therefore refrain from sinning.

<sup>1419</sup> God "storms upon" those close to Him.

<sup>1420</sup> Moses and Aaron.

<sup>1421</sup> The reference appears to be the sin of Moses and Aaron at the waters of Meribah. See Num. 20:7-13: *And the Lord spoke unto Moses, saying, "Take the rod, and assemble the congregation, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes, that it give forth its water; and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock; so thou shalt give the congregation and their cattle drink...." And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said unto them, "Hear now, ye rebels; are we to bring you forth water out of this rock?" And Moses lifted up his hand and smote the rock with his rod twice; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their cattle. And the Lord said unto Moses and Aaron, "Because ye believed not in Me, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them." These are the waters of Meribah, where the children of Israel strove with the Lord, and He was sanctified in them."*

## 2. A WISE MAN'S HEART IS AT HIS RIGHT;<sup>1423</sup> BUT A FOOL'S UNDERSTANDING AT HIS LEFT.

A WISE MAN'S HEART IS AT HIS RIGHT. Kohelet does not speak of the physical heart, for it lies in the center [of the chest], both in the wise and in the fool. The meaning of our verse is that the wise man's intelligence is with him and is quickly available to him when needed. The reverse is the case with the fool.

Solomon<sup>1424</sup> because of small lapses in behavior without any intention to sin.<sup>1425</sup> These lapses resulted from events which they did not bring about.<sup>1426</sup>

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<sup>1422</sup> Literally, were caused by others. The incident at the waters of Meribah was caused by Israel's request for water. Had the people not gathered and complained, the incident would not have occurred.

<sup>1423</sup> Translated literally.

<sup>1424</sup> Moses and Aaron.

<sup>1425</sup> The reference appears to be the sin of Moses and Aaron at the waters of Meribah. See Num. 20:7-13: *And the Lord spoke unto Moses, saying, "Take the rod, and assemble the congregation, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes, that it give forth its water; and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock; so thou shalt give the congregation and their cattle drink...." And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said unto them, "Hear now, ye rebels; are we to bring you forth water out of this rock?" And Moses lifted up his hand and smote the rock with his rod twice; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their cattle. And the Lord said unto Moses and Aaron, "Because ye believed not in Me, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them." These are the waters of Meribah, where the children of Israel strove with the Lord, and He was sanctified in them."*

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A WISE MAN'S HEART IS AT HIS RIGHT. Kohelet does not speak of the physical heart, for it lies in the center [of the chest], both in the wise and in the fool. The meaning of our verse is that the wise man's intelligence is with him and is quickly available to him when needed. The reverse is the case with the fool.

[A WISE MAN'S HEART IS AT HIS RIGHT.] It is as if the heart of the wise man is at his right, for the right is more powerful and responds more quickly than the left. The aforementioned is so because the liver, which is the fountain from which the blood flows, is located in the right side of the body.

There is no argument [against this interpretation] from those who use their left hand,<sup>1428</sup> for the parable follows that which is found in most people.

**3. YEA ALSO, WHEN A FOOL WALKETH BY THE WAY, HIS UNDERSTANDING FAILS HIM, AND HE SAITH TO EVERY ONE THAT HE IS A FOOL.**

YEA ALSO, WHEN A FOOL WALKETH BY THE WAY. The fool shows his lack of wisdom and intelligence in all of his affairs, in all that he does. Even when he walks by the way, he, as it were, calls out what he is. He shows his shame and lets everyone know his deficiencies.

The meaning of *and he saith to everyone that he is a fool* is: "It is as if his mouth announces to everyone that he is a fool."<sup>1429</sup>

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<sup>1426</sup> Literally, were caused by others. The incident at the waters of Meribah was caused by Israel's request for water. Had the people not gathered and complained, the incident would not have occurred.

<sup>1427</sup> Translated literally.

<sup>1428</sup> Left-handed people respond more quickly with their left hand than they do with their right hand.

<sup>1429</sup> The fool does not actually announce, "I am a fool." However, this is clear by what he says and does.

**4. IF THE SPIRIT OF THE RULER RISE UP AGAINST THEE, LEAVE NOT THY PLACE; FOR GENTLENESS ALLAYETH GREAT OFFENCES.**

IF THE SPIRIT OF THE RULER RISE UP. Kohelet earlier said: *The words of the wise spoken in quiet are more acceptable than the cry of a ruler among fools* (9:17). He therefore back tracks and warns the wise man: “If because of your wisdom you ascended to the level of governance <sup>1430</sup>—as in: *For out of prison he came forth to be king* (4:14)—*leave not thy place*. That is, do not cease being humble. Or, *leave not thy place* might also mean: “continue to occupy yourself with wisdom as you were wont to do.”<sup>1431</sup> Act as if you did not move from your place and rise up to a high status relative to others. Furthermore, be aware of the following: If you (morally) weaken<sup>1432</sup> [that is let go of your old good habits—of being humble, or being occupied with the study of wisdom], then your relaxing [of your old practices] will place great sins upon you.<sup>1433</sup>

It is better to interpret *marpeh* (gentleness) as being a [verb in the] *hifil*.<sup>1434</sup> The word *harpeh* (let alone) in: *Let her alone* (2 Kings 4:27) is related to it. The *alef* [at the end of the word] *marpeh* (gentleness) is in place of a *heh*.<sup>1435</sup> It is like the *alef*

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<sup>1430</sup> Our verse reads: *im ru'ach ha-moshel ta'aleh alekha* (If the spirit of the ruler rises up against thee). I.E. understands this to mean: “If the spirit of the ruler rises up in thee, that is, if you become an official or a ruler

<sup>1431</sup> In addition to your various duties.

<sup>1432</sup> I.E. interprets *marpeh* (gentleness) to be an abstract noun meaning “weaken,” that is, to morally weaken (Filwarg).

<sup>1433</sup> Our verse concludes with *ki marpeh yanni'ach chata'im gedolim* (for gentleness allayeth great offences). This interpretation renders the phrase: for letting go of your good habits will deposit great sins upon you.

<sup>1434</sup> In other words, *marpeh* is not an abstract noun. It is a verb that refers to a specific object, namely governance.

<sup>1435</sup> I.E. interprets *marpeh* as being related to *harpeh*. However, *harpeh* is spelled with a *heh* at the end of the word and *marpeh* with an *alef*. This indicates that they come from different roots and are not related. Hence, I.E.'s comment

[at the end of the word] *merappeh* (weakeneth) in: *for as much as he weakeneth* (Jer. 38:4), which is a *pi'el*.<sup>1436</sup>

[According to this interpretation,] the meaning of *ki marpeh yanni'ach chata'im gedolim* (for gentleness allayeth great offences) is: “the one who leaves the government abandons great sins.”<sup>1437</sup> Others say that the meaning of *ki marpeh yanni'ach chata'im gedolim*<sup>1438</sup> is, “One who knows how to heal, will not eat anything that will bring him great harm. He will certainly be on guard (and not eat anything that is injurious).” This commentator explains *if the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee* as meaning: “If the anger of the ruler rise up against you, do not stop studying wisdom.”<sup>1439</sup> The wise man will not anger the ruler.” The point of our verse is that the wise man will forsake all things that lead to a trespass that will anger the ruler. He will act like a physician who, before he gets ill, keeps himself from harmful food.<sup>1440</sup>

## 5. THERE IS AN EVIL WHICH I HAVE SEEN UNDER THE SUN, LIKE AN ERROR WHICH PROCEEDETH FROM A RULER.

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<sup>1436</sup> *Merappeh*, like *marpeh*, is related to *harpeh*. *Harpeh* comes from the root *resh, peh, heh*. So, do *merappeh* and *marpeh*. However, an *alef* replaces the *heh* in *merappeh* and *marpeh*.

<sup>1437</sup> This interpretation renders our phrase “For the one who let’s go abandons great sins.” This explanation reads our verse as follows: “If the spirit of ruling comes upon you, do not leave your place, that is do not become a governor. For the one who leaves governance abandons great sins.”

<sup>1438</sup> This interpretation connects *marpeh* to *rofe* (physician). According to I.E. the wise man acts like a physician. It renders *marpeh* as “one who heals”; that is, a wise man knows how to avoid danger. It reads our verse as follows: if the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, do not cease to study wisdom; for the one who is wise knows how to avoid angering the ruler.

<sup>1439</sup> This interpretation renders *leave not thy place as*: continue studying wisdom as you were wont to do.

<sup>1440</sup> This interpretation connects *marpeh* to *rofe* (physician). It renders *marpeh* as “one who heals.” In this case *marpeh* comes from the root *resh, peh, alef*.

THERE IS AN EVIL. The word *she-yotza* (which proceedeth) comes from a root whose third letter is an *alef*,<sup>1441</sup> but is here vocalized as a word whose third root letter is a *heh*.<sup>1442</sup> It is vocalized like *osah* (did)<sup>1443</sup> in: *for Esther did the commandment of Mordecai* (Est. 2:20).

*Yotza* (proceedeth) is a feminine,<sup>1444</sup> for the masculine form of this word is *yotze* (went out) (Josh. 6:1).<sup>1445</sup>

We find the same with the word *dasha* (grass) in: *as a heifer at grass* (Jer. 50:11), which is vocalized like a word whose third root letter is a *heh*, even though *dasha* is spelled with an *alef*.<sup>1446</sup> *Dasha* [which comes from the root *dalet, shin, alef*] is vocalized like the word *davah* (sickness) (Lev. 20:18) [which comes from the root *daled, vav, heh*] and the word *ravah* (watered) [which comes from the root *resh, vav, heh*] in: *that the watered be swept away with the dry* (Deut. 29:18). [The exceptional vocalization of *dasha* and *yotza* are similar] even though the grammarian<sup>1447</sup> says that the *alef* of *dasha* is in place of a *heh*.<sup>1448</sup>

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<sup>1441</sup> Its root is *yod, tzadi, alef*.

<sup>1442</sup> The root *yod, tzadi, alef* is normally vocalized *yotze'ah* (sheva beneath the *tzadi*) of *yotzet* in the present feminine form. However, in our verse it is vocalized *yotza*.

<sup>1443</sup> From the root *ayin, sin, heh*, which is vocalized *osah* (*kamatz* beneath the *sin*) in the present feminine form.

<sup>1444</sup> *Yotza*, like *osah*, is a feminine and is similarly vocalized. This, even though its third root letter is an *alef*, whereas the third root letter of *osah* is a *heh*.

<sup>1445</sup> The present masculine form of the root *yod, tzadi, alef* is *yotze*. Hence, the correct feminine form should be *yotze'ah* or *yotzet*.

<sup>1446</sup> *Dashah* comes from the root *dalet, shin, alef*. It should have been vocalized *desha'ah*. However, it is vocalized *dashah* as if it came from the root *dalet, shin, heh*.

<sup>1447</sup> Rabbi Yehudah ibn Chayuj.

[LIKE AN ERROR WHICH PROCEEDETH FROM A RULER] Our verse is connected in meaning with the verse that is above.<sup>1449</sup>

The ruler finds it necessary in governing to do things which are immoral.<sup>1450</sup> He makes it seem as if what he did was by accident and that he did not know (the facts).<sup>1451</sup>

## 6. FOLLY IS SET ON GREAT HEIGHTS, AND THE RICH SIT IN LOW PLACE.

FOLLY IS SET ON GREAT HEIGHTS. The commentaries say that the word *sekhel* (folly) should have been spelled with a *sin* [in which case the word would mean “the wise”]. They say that the meaning of our verse is: “It is fitting for those who possess wisdom to sit on great heights. The reverse is the case with the rich.”<sup>1452</sup> The aforementioned is true in and of itself. However, it does not fit in with the verses that come before and after it.<sup>1453</sup>

The following is the meaning of our verse. The *sekhel*—that is, the fool—is placed on great heights.

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<sup>1448</sup> According to Rabbi Yehudah ibn Chayuj, the vocalization of *dasha* and *yotza* are not similar. *Yotza* is irregular because the word should have read *yotze'ah*. However, *dasha* is read as such because *dasha* comes from the root *dalet, shin, heh*, and its final *alef* is in place of the *heh*. This indicates that *dasha* is in the present feminine form; its vocalization is regular.

<sup>1449</sup> It deals with the king’s anger.

<sup>1450</sup> Literally, the opposite of the truth. That is, the true or right way.

<sup>1451</sup> One should take this into consideration when attempting to assuage the king’s anger.

<sup>1452</sup> It is fitting for the rich to sit in a low place. It is worthy of note that I.E. was a wise man and a poor man.

<sup>1453</sup> The interpretation does not fit the context of the verses in which it is found.

The word *sekhel* (folly) is probably an adjective,<sup>1454</sup> like *yeled* (child) (4:13)<sup>1455</sup> and *helekh* (a traveler) (2 Sam. 12:4).<sup>1456</sup>

The word *rabbim* means “great.”<sup>1457</sup>

*Ashirim* (rich) refers to people of great status.<sup>1458</sup> We thus find in the Book of Proverbs: *The rich ruleth over the poor* (Prov. 22:7). [Our verse says that the reverse is the case:] *The rich sit in a low place.*

## 7. I HAVE SEEN SERVANTS UPON HORSES, AND PRINCES WALKING AS SERVANTS UPON THE EARTH.

I HAVE SEEN SERVANTS UPON HORSES. This verse speaks of the same topic that the verse which precedes it deals with.<sup>1459</sup> Solomon introduces these two verses with:<sup>1460</sup> *There is an evil* (v. 5).<sup>1461</sup> I have already commented that “there is” means “sometimes there is.”<sup>1462</sup>

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<sup>1454</sup> Modifying the word *ish*, even though the word *ish* is not in the text. Thus, *sekhel* should be understood as *ish ha-sekhel*; that is, “the foolish man.”

<sup>1455</sup> According to I.E., *yeled* is an adjective modifying *adam* or *ish*, which is unstated in the verse. It is short for “*yeled adam*,” a young man.

<sup>1456</sup> According to I.E., an adjective modifying the elliptical subject “man.” It is short for *ish helekh*, a travelling man.

<sup>1457</sup> Its usual meaning is “many.” Hence, I.E.'s comment.

<sup>1458</sup> Rich people possess great status.

<sup>1459</sup> Both verses deal with a change in the order of society.

<sup>1460</sup> Literally, “Solomon first says concerning all of them: There is an evil.”

<sup>1461</sup> “There is” in v. 5 also applies to our verse.

<sup>1462</sup> Literally, there is found a few times.

**8. HE THAT DIGGETH A PIT SHALL FALL INTO IT; AND WHOSO BREAKETH THROUGH A FENCE, A SERPENT SHALL BITE HIM.**

HE THAT DIGGETH A PIT. Be aware of the following: The word *gummatz* (pit) is unique.<sup>1463</sup> It is not found a second time [in Scripture]. It also has no son or brother in Scripture.<sup>1464</sup>

The word *chofer* (diggeth) [which precedes it] indicates its meaning.<sup>1465</sup> Our verse is similar to: *He hath digged a pit and hollowed it* (va-yachperehu) (Ps.7:16).<sup>1466</sup>

Our verse probably refers to the ruler who acts immorally.<sup>1467</sup> The fence in: *and whoso breaketh through a fence* refers to a fence built by the early wise men.<sup>1468</sup>

On the other hand, the verse might be speaking of the fool. The point of the verse is: Even though there are occasional things in this world which are contrary to morality, [in most cases] *He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it*. The wise man who can see the future<sup>1469</sup> will not fall [into the pit].

**9. WHOSO QUARRIETH STONES SHALL BE HURT THEREWITH; AND HE THAT CLEAVETH WOOD IS ENDANGERED THEREBY.**

WHOSO QUARRIETH STONES SHALL BE HURT THEREWITH. Most of the commentaries explain the phrase *yissakhen bam* (is endangered thereby) as

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<sup>1463</sup> The word *gummatz* is only encountered in our verse.

<sup>1464</sup> Neither it is found in a different form in Scripture.

<sup>1465</sup> Our text reads *chofer gummatz*. *Chofer* (diggeth) indicates that *gummatz* refers to a pit.

<sup>1466</sup> We thus see that the root *chet, peh, resh* (the root of *chofer* and *va-yachperehu*) refers to digging a pit.

<sup>1467</sup> Mentioned in v. 6. Literally, “the opposite of the truth.”

<sup>1468</sup> Our verse is figurative. The foolish ruler acts immorally and violates the laws that the ancients laid down—the “fence” that protects the tradition.

<sup>1469</sup> Sees the consequences of different courses of action. Avot 2:9.

meaning will warm himself therewith.<sup>1470</sup> They claim that the word *sokhenet* (warmer) in: *and she became a warmer unto the king* (1 Kings 1:4) is similar.<sup>1471</sup>

This verb is found in the *kal* form in Arabic and only in the intransitive.<sup>1472</sup>

I believe that in reality the word *sokhenet* means “master of the king's treasury.” Compare, *arei miskanot* (store-cities) (Ex. 1:11) and *sokhen* (steward) in: *Go, get thee unto this steward* (Is. 22:15).

The commentary [that explains *yissakhen* to mean "will warm himself"] has no head nor leg,<sup>1473</sup> for what reason is there *if the iron be blunt*<sup>1474</sup> [to follow *he that cleaveth wood will be warmed therewith*]?

In my opinion, the word *yissakhen* in *yissakhen bam* (shall be hurt therewith) is related to the word *sakkanah* (danger). The word *sakkanah* is often employed in the writings of the early Sages.<sup>1475</sup> Our verse and the verse that follows are connected.<sup>1476</sup> Kohelet still speaks in praise of wisdom.

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<sup>1470</sup> See Rashi on this verse.

<sup>1471</sup> Translated in accordance with these commentaries.

<sup>1472</sup> I.E. argues that *yissakhen* cannot mean "be warmed therewith," and *sokhenet* cannot mean "a warmer." This is because the Arabic word for "warm" (*sakan*) means this only in the *kal* intransitive. However, *yissakhen* is a *nifal*. Furthermore, if we render *sokhenet* "a warmer," then it is transitive. However, the word is intransitive in Arabic. Thus, the Arabic indicates that *yissakhen* and *sokhenet* are not related to a word meaning "warm."

<sup>1473</sup> The verse is not connected to the verse that comes before it, nor to which follows it.

<sup>1474</sup> What connection is there between our verse—which according to these commentaries, interprets our phrase as meaning: “he that cleaved wood will be warmed therewith”—and the verse that follows: *If the iron be blunt, and one do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength; but wisdom is profitable to direct?*

<sup>1475</sup> The Talmudic sages.

<sup>1476</sup> Literally, the two verses are connected.

Our verse is also connected to the verse that comes before it, which speaks of a fool who in his folly breaks through a fence. The wise man will guard himself from doing this.

The point of our verse is: A person cannot achieve anything in this world without toil, hard work, and placing himself in danger. Even stones that do not belong to anyone, and anyone who wants to may take them, can only be moved to where one wants them by toil. Similarly, one grows very tired in chopping the trees of the forest. One even endangers himself when engaging in this activity.

**10. IF THE IRON BE BLUNT, AND ONE DO NOT WHET THE EDGE, THEN MUST HE PUT TO MORE STRENGTH; BUT WISDOM IS PROFITABLE TO DIRECT.**

IF THE IRON BE BLUNT. This is certainly the case<sup>1477</sup> if the iron is blunt and one did not whet its edge. [for] then the strength of the hewer will grow weak.”<sup>1478</sup>

The meaning of *lo fanim kilkel* (and one do not whet the edge) is: “its edge was not sharpened.”<sup>1479</sup>

The word *kilkel* (whet) comes from a double root.<sup>1480</sup> The first letter<sup>1481</sup> of the root is doubled.<sup>1482</sup> *Kilkel* is similar in meaning to the word *kalal* (burnished) in *burnished brass* (Ezek. 1:7).

[If the iron is blunt and one did not whet its edge] then the strength of the hewer will grow weak

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<sup>1477</sup> What is described in v. 9.

<sup>1478</sup> This comment renders *va-chayalim yegabber* as, the iron will overcome the hewer. That is, it will exhaust the hewer. See next note.

<sup>1479</sup> In other words, *kilkel* means “sharpened.”

<sup>1480</sup> Its root is *kof, lamed, lamed*.

<sup>1481</sup> Literally, the *peh*. The first root letter of a verb (po'al) is referred to as the *peh*, the second as the *ayin* and the third as the *lamed*.

<sup>1482</sup> Hence, the word *kilkel*.

*Yegabber* (then must he put to more strength)” means it<sup>1483</sup> will overpower.<sup>1484</sup> Compare, *ve-gibbarti* (And I will strengthen) in: *And I will strengthen the house of Judah* (Zech. 10:6).

The word *chayalim* means “strength.” Compare *cheli* (my strength) in: *God, the Lord, is my strength* (Hab. 3:19), and *chayil* (strong) in *strong men* (Gen. 47:6; Ex. 18:21).<sup>1485</sup>

**BUT WISDOM IS PROFITABLE TO DIRECT.** The point of the verse is that wisdom has an advantage over all toil.<sup>1486</sup> For wisdom will make man fit and perfect and [its acquisition] does not entail hard labor<sup>1487</sup> and loss of strength.

The word *kasher* (right) in: *and the thing seem right* (Est. 8:5) is an intransitive verb in the *kal*. However, the word *hakhsher* (direct) in our verse is a *hifil*.<sup>1488</sup>

**11. IF THE SERPENT BITE BEFORE IT IS CHARMED, THEN THE CHARMER<sup>1489</sup> HATH NO ADVANTAGE.**

**IF THE SERPENT BITE.** Kohelet returns to what he spoke about above; that is, to: *And whoso breaketh through a fence, a serpent shall bite him* (v. 8). The fence spoken of in the aforementioned verse probably refers to the fence made by the

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<sup>1483</sup> The ax (the iron).

<sup>1484</sup> The ax (the iron) will overpower the strength of the hewer. I.E. reads our verse as follows: If the iron is blunt and one does not sharpen its edge, then the iron will overcome the strength of the hewer; that is, it will exhaust the hewer.

<sup>1485</sup> Translated according to I.E.

<sup>1486</sup> Spoken of in v. 9 and the first part of v. 10.

<sup>1487</sup> Physical toil.

<sup>1488</sup> *Hakhsher* (to direct) in our verse is transitive. However, *kasher* in Esther 8:5 is intransitive.

<sup>1489</sup> Hebrew *ba'al ha-lashon*. I.E. renders *ba'al ha-lashon* as a slanderer. He renders our verse: If the serpent bite and cannot be charmed, then the slanderer hath no advantage.

ruler. Kohelet compares a slanderer <sup>1490</sup> to a snake. The point of our verse is: The slanderer has no more profit than does a viper that cannot be charmed. For the viper harms and derives no pleasure from the damage that it causes. <sup>1491</sup>

## 12. THE WORDS OF A WISE MAN'S MOUTH ARE GRACIOUS; BUT THE LIPS OF A FOOL WILL SWALLOW UP HIMSELF.

THE WORDS OF A WISE MAN'S MOUTH. [The meaning of our verse is:] far be it for a wise man to be a slanderer. On the contrary, all the words that come out of his mouth are gracious. However, the fool brings destruction upon himself by his words. <sup>1492</sup>

[Scripture reads *ve-siftot kesil tevalle 'ennu* (but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself.) *Tevalle 'ennu* (will swallow up himself) is a singular. <sup>1493</sup> [However, *siftot* (lips) is a plural. <sup>1494</sup>] We find the same in *zevuvei mavet* [*yavish yab'ia shemen roke'ach*] (Dead flies [makes the ointment of the perfumer fetid and putrid]) (v.1), <sup>1495</sup> and: *shemesh yare'ach amad* <sup>1496</sup> *zevulah* <sup>1497</sup> (The sun and moon stand still in its habitation) (Hab. 3:11). <sup>1498</sup>

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<sup>1490</sup> I.E. interprets *ba'al ha-lashon*. (charmer) as slanderer.

<sup>1491</sup> I.E. explains the verse as follows: Just as the serpent which was not charmed bites [and gets no pleasure from biting], so the slanderer derives no benefit from his slander. In other words, a slanderer defames people even when he derives no benefit from doing so.

<sup>1492</sup> I.E.'s paraphrase of: *But the lips of a fool will swallow up himself*.

<sup>1493</sup> The suffix of *tevalle 'ennu* (will swallow up himself) is a singular pronoun.

<sup>1494</sup> *Siftot* (lips) is a plural. Hence the verb governing it should be a plural. Thus, in place of *tevalle'ennu* (it will swallow him up), Scripture should have read *tevalle'uhu* (they will swallow him up).

<sup>1495</sup> *Zevuvei* (flies) is a plural. However, the verbs *yavish* (make fetid) and *yab'ia* (make putrid) governing *zevuvei* are singular. According to I.E., the verse is to be understood as follows: "Each dead fly makes the ointment of the perfumer fetid and putrid." See I.E. on v. 1 plus the notes thereto. I.E. is saying that our verse should be read as follows: "But each one of the lips of a fool will swallow him up." A lip by itself does not swallow. R. Goodman says that it would be better

**13. THE BEGINNING OF THE WORDS OF HIS MOUTH IS FOOLISHNESS;  
AND THE END OF HIS TALK IS GRIEVOUS MADNESS.**

THE BEGINNING OF THE WORDS OF HIS MOUTH. The beginning and end of his words make no sense.<sup>1499</sup>

**14. A FOOL ALSO MULTIPLIETH WORDS; YET MAN KNOWETH NOT  
WHAT SHALL BE; AND THAT WHICH SHALL BE AFTER HIM, WHO CAN  
TELL HIM?**

A FOOL ALSO MULTIPLIETH WORDS. The fool says, “I will eat and drink because I do not know what will be latter in my life or after my death.”<sup>1500</sup> It is possible that *For who knoweth what is good for man? [all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow? For who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?]* (6:12) is similar in meaning to our verse. For the verse above it reads: *Seeing there are many words that increase vanity* (6:11).<sup>1501</sup>

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to interpret *tevalle'ennu* as referring to a set of lips. In this case the word *tevalle'ennu*, does not present any problem.

<sup>1496</sup> *Amad* is a singular verb. The verb should have read in the plural, that is *amedu*, for *amedu* governs *shemesh* (sun) and *yare'ach* (moon). According to I.E., the verse is to be understood as follows: The sun and moon each stand in its place. See I.E.'s comments on Hab.3:11.

<sup>1497</sup> *Zevulah* (its place) should have read *zevulam* (their place), for the reference is to the sun and to the moon.

<sup>1498</sup> Translated literally.

<sup>1499</sup> The words of the fool make no sense from beginning to end.

<sup>1500</sup> I.E.'s paraphrase of: *Yet man knoweth not what shall be; and that which shall be after him, who can tell him?*

<sup>1501</sup> Our verse states: *A fool also multiplieth words; yet man knoweth not what shall be; and that which shall be after him, who can tell him?* I.E. interprets the latter as meaning: A fool multiplies words, and says, I will eat and drink because I do not know what will be latter in my life or after my death. I.E. believes that 6:12 which states: *For who knoweth what is good for man in his life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow? For who can tell a man what shall*

**15. THE LABOR OF FOOLS WEARIETH EVERY ONE OF THEM, FOR HE KNOWETH NOT HOW TO GO TO THE CITY.**

THE LABOR OF FOOLS. Kohelet describes the fool who toils in seeking things that are above and beyond him,<sup>1502</sup> while being ignorant of that which is seen and known. He is like a man who wants to go to a city but does not know the way. He will tire himself and not achieve his desire.

The word *amal* (toil) in all of Scripture is masculine. It is only feminine here. We find the same with the word *kavod* (glory). It is masculine in all of Scripture with the exception of one instance, namely *techad* (be united)<sup>1503</sup> in: *let my glory not be united* (Gen. 49:6).

**16. WOE TO THEE, O LAND, WHEN THY KING IS A BOY, AND THY PRINCES FEAST IN THE MORNING!**

WOE TO THEE, O LAND. After noting the folly of the fool (vv. 10-15), Kohelet goes on to say that if this fool is a king, then things are very precarious.<sup>1504</sup> This is certainly the case if the king is also a boy.

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*be after him under the sun?* should be interpreted similarly. That is, 6:12 contains the words of a fool, who says *For who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?*

I.E.'s proof for this is that 1) our verse opens with *a fool multiplies words* and 2) verse 6:12 is preceded by *There are many words that increase vanity*. The point of this comment is that the words of the speaker in 6:12 do not represent the opinion of Kohelet. They represent the words of the fool.

<sup>1502</sup> Literally: “hidden” or “wonderful.”

<sup>1503</sup> *Techad*, which governs *kavod*, is feminine. Hence, *kavod* is feminine in Gen. 49:6.

<sup>1504</sup> Literally hard.

The word *iy* (woe) is similar to the word *oy* (woe) [in Num. 21:29],<sup>1505</sup> and *iy* (woe) in: *but woe to him that is alone when he falleth* (Kohelet 4:10). The word *iy* is not found a third time in Scripture.<sup>1506</sup>

AND THY PRINCES FEAST IN THE MORNING. [Woe to thee, O land,] because your princes are occupied only in eating and nothing else. They act contrary to the verse reading: *Execute justice in the morning* (Jer. 21:12).<sup>1507</sup>

**17. BLESSED<sup>1508</sup> ART THOU, O LAND, WHEN THY KING IS A FREE MAN, AND THY PRINCES EAT IN DUE SEASON, IN STRENGTH, AND NOT IN DRUNKENNESS!**

BLESSED ART THOU. The word *ashrei* (blessings of) comes in the plural form without a suffix.<sup>1509</sup> Compare *ashrei* (blessings of) in: The blessings of the man (Ps. 1:1).<sup>1510</sup>

It also comes at times in the plural and at other times in the singular with a suffix. Compare, *ashrav* (blessings are his)<sup>1511</sup> in: *and whoso trusteth in the Lord, has many blessings* (Prov. 16:20)<sup>1512</sup> and *ashrehu* (blessed is he)<sup>1513</sup> in: *but he that keepeth the law, blessed is he* (Prov. 29:18).<sup>1514</sup>

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<sup>1505</sup> In other words, it means woe.

<sup>1506</sup> The word *iy* is not found a third time in Scripture with the meaning of woe.

<sup>1507</sup> Rather than execute justice in the morning, they gorge themselves.

<sup>1508</sup> Hebrew, *ashrei*. The word is usually rendered "the happiness of, "or" happy is." I have rendered it as "the blessings of, to make Ibn Ezra understandable. J.P.S. renders "Happy is."

<sup>1509</sup> When the word *ashrei* is found in Scripture without a suffix, it is always a plural.

<sup>1510</sup> J, P. S. renders, happy is the man.

<sup>1511</sup> Here, *ashrei* is in the plural for it is connected to the pronominal suffix *av*. *Av* is a singular third person pronominal suffix attached to a word in the plural.

<sup>1512</sup> Translated according to I.E. J.P.S. renders: *and whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he*.

Rabbi Moshe Ha-Kohen, whose soul rests in Eden, says that *ashrehu* (blessed is he) (Prov. 29:18) is a plural.<sup>1515</sup> He says the same regarding *enehu* (His eyes) in: *yet His eyes are upon their ways* (Job 24:23), *yadehu* (its hands) (Hab. 3:10), *gibborehu* (his mighty men) (Nach 2:4), and *re'ehu* (his friends) in: *when he prayed for his friends* (Job 42:10).

Rabbi Moshe Ha-Kohen offers proof to his position [that *enehu* (his eyes) in: *yet His eyes (enehu) are upon their ways* (Job 24:23) is a plural] from [the phrase] *enei YHVH* (the eyes of the Lord) in: *For the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord* (Prov. 5:21).<sup>1516</sup>

Rabbi Moshe Ha-Kohen forgot the phrase *en YHVH* (the eye of the Lord) in: *Behold, the eye of the Lord is toward them that fear Him* (Ps. 33:18).<sup>1517</sup>

Furthermore, *yadehu* (its hands) (Hab. 3:10) is a singular.<sup>1518</sup> So, too, *gibborehu* (his mighty men) (Nachum 2:4).<sup>1519</sup> The meaning of *magen gibborehu me'adam*

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<sup>1513</sup> *Ashrei* in *ashrehu* is a singular, for it is connected to the pronominal suffix *hu*. *Hu* is a third person pronominal suffix which is attached to a word in the singular.

<sup>1514</sup> J. P.S. renders: *But he that kept the law, blessed is he.*

<sup>1515</sup> According to Rabbi Moshe, the suffix *hu*, which is a singular third person pronominal suffix, is attached to a plural form. He offers as examples: *enehu* (his eyes), *yadehu* (his hands), *gibborehu* (his mighty men), and *re'ehu* (his friends). According to Rabbi Moshe, the same is the case with *ashrehu*. The suffix *hu* indicates that *ashrei* is a plural.

<sup>1516</sup> *Enei* in *enei YHVH* (the eyes of the Lord) is a plural. We thus see that Scripture employs the plural when it speaks of God's eyes. Hence, *enehu* (His eyes) in Job 24:23 should be rendered "His eyes," not "His eye."

<sup>1517</sup> *En* is a singular. We thus see that Scripture speaks of "the eye of God." Hence it is possible to translate Job 24:23 as "yet His eye (*enehu*) is upon their ways."

<sup>1518</sup> According to I.E. *yadehu* means *its hand*.

<sup>1519</sup> The *hu* suffix refers to each one of his mighty men.

(the shield of his mighty man is made red) (Nachum 2:4) is as follows: “The shield of each mighty man that is in him is made red.”<sup>1520</sup>

[Is the] the world overturned because of the clause reading: *when he prayed for his friends* (re'ehu) (Job 42:10)?<sup>1521</sup>

If Rabbi Moshe is correct,<sup>1522</sup> then *re'ehu* (his friend) in *by the hand of his friend the Adullamite* (Gen. 38:20) refers to two people.<sup>1523</sup> Furthermore, what difference is there between *re'o* (his friend) (Jer. 6:21) *re'ehu* (his friend) (Gen. 38:20), and [between] *seyo* (his sheep) (Deut. 22:1) and *seyehu* (his sheep) (1 Sam. 14:34).<sup>1524</sup>

We also find *yirdefo* (he shall pursue him) (Hosea 8:3) and *yirdefehu* (he chased him) (Judges 9:40).<sup>1525</sup>

Perhaps Job prayed a separate prayer for each one of his friends, and each one of his friends took seven bullocks and seven rams [and offered them as a sacrifice to

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<sup>1520</sup> “In him” is to be understood as “in Israel.” The shield of each mighty man that is in Israel is made red. In other words, *gibborei* in *gibborehu* is a singular.

<sup>1521</sup> The Book of Job makes it clear that Job prayed for his friends. Thus, *re'ehu* must mean “his friends.” Hence, the verse in Job supports Rabbi Moshe's position that the suffix *hu* indicates that the word to which it is suffixed is a plural. However, I.E. argues that Job 42:10 is an anomaly, and we should not overturn the rules of Hebrew grammar because of it (Meijler).

<sup>1522</sup> That *hu* is a singular suffix attached to a plural.

<sup>1523</sup> For according to Rabbi Moshe, *re'ehu* is a plural and should be rendered “his friends.” However, Gen. 38:20 speaks only of one person.

<sup>1524</sup> We thus see that the suffixes *-o* and *-hu* are interchangeable. They are both third person singular masculine pronominal suffixes attached to a noun or verb in the singular.

<sup>1525</sup> See previous footnote.

the Lord.]<sup>1526</sup> The phrase *ashrekh aretz* (blessed art thou, O land)<sup>1527</sup> shows that *ashrehu* (blessed is he) (Prov. 29:18) is a singular.<sup>1528</sup>

[WHEN THY KING IS A FREE MAN] *Ben chorim* (a free man) means a man, who does noble<sup>1529</sup> deeds.<sup>1530</sup> *Ben chorim* is the opposite of *ben beliyya'al* (a base fellow) (1 Sam. 25:17).

One of the commentators says: "It is known that there is no color among the colors that is superior<sup>1531</sup> to white, which is similar to light. There is likewise no hue inferior to black.<sup>1532</sup> Scripture compares people who are great to the color white and base<sup>1533</sup> people to black.

The above commentator explains that the word *chorim* (free) is similar to the word *chur* (white) in: *there were hangings of white, fine cotton, and blue* (Est.1:6). He

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<sup>1526</sup> According to I.E., it is possible to interpret *re'ehu* in Job 42:10 without overturning the rules of Hebrew grammar ("overturning the world") In other words, *re'ehu* is to be rendered "his friend." The verse is to be understood to mean: "when he (Job) prayed for each friend." In other words, Job 42:10 is referring to what is stated in Job 42:8: *Now therefore, take unto you seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to My servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt-offering; and My servant Job shall pray for you; for him will I accept, that I do not unto you aught unseemly; for ye have not spoken of Me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath.'*

<sup>1527</sup> The root word for "blessed" in *ashrekh* is *esher*, a singular. If "blessed" in our verse were based on a plural, it would read *ashrayikh*.

<sup>1528</sup> The word *ashrekh* shows that the Hebrew word for "blessed" (*esher*) can possess a suffix which indicates that the word to which it refers is a singular. Hence, there is no reason to maintain that the word *ashrei* in *ashrehu* is a plural form.

<sup>1529</sup> Literally, great.

<sup>1530</sup> Compare, *chorim* (nobles) in: *and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers* (Neh. 4:8).

<sup>1531</sup> Literally, that is higher.

<sup>1532</sup> Literally, that is lower than.

<sup>1533</sup> Literally, those of a small status.

similarly explains the word *chorai* (white)<sup>1534</sup> in: *and they that weave white fabric* (Is. 19:9),<sup>1535</sup> and *chori* (white) in: *three baskets of white bread* (Gen. 40:16).

The Aramaic word for white is *chivar*.<sup>1536</sup>

The opposite of *chorim* (white men) is *chashukkim* (dark men) in: *he shall not stand before dark men* (Prov. 22:29).

[IN STRENGTH, AND NOT IN DRUNKENNESS] Some say that *va-shetiyah* (in drunkenness) means “in drinking.”<sup>1537</sup> Others say that *va-shetiyah* means “in failure.”<sup>1538</sup> Compare *ve-nishtu* (shall fail) in: *And the waters shall fail from the sea* (Is. 19:5), and *nashatah* (faileth) in: *and their tongue faileth because of thirst* (ibid. 41:17).

The meaning of our verse is that the king and princes do all of their work in strength.<sup>1539</sup> Kohelet connects strength to eating because he intends to say that the princes do not eat until they desire to eat, and the food they already ate is digested. In other words, they do not eat unless they have a need to do so, and not for purposes of pleasure.<sup>1540</sup>

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<sup>1534</sup> Translated according to the commentator quoted by I.E.

<sup>1535</sup> They explain *chori* to mean white.

<sup>1536</sup> This shows that the word *chorim* means “white,” for the Aramaic *chivar* is related to the Hebrew words *chorim* and *chori*.

<sup>1537</sup> To the point of drunkenness

<sup>1538</sup> Literally, in poverty.

<sup>1539</sup> In other words, they are in charge of affairs.

<sup>1540</sup> After stating: *Blessed art thou, O land, when thy king is a free man*, Scripture goes on to say: *and thy princes eat in due season, in strength, and not in drunkenness*. The latter phrase explains what is meant by the former phrase. The entire verse is to be understood as: *Blessed are you, O land, when your king and princess are free men; that is, they are in charge of things and not slaves to their lusts. For example, they eat to maintain their strength and not because they are slaves to food.*

**18. BY SLOTHFULNESS THE RAFTERS SINK IN; AND THROUGH IDLENESS OF THE HANDS THE HOUSE LEAKETH.**

BY SLOTHFULNESS THE RAFTERS SINK IN. It is known that all words that follow the form of *shenayim* (two)<sup>1541</sup> refer to pairs. Compare, *enayyim* (eyes) (Gen. 20:16), *raglayim* (feet) (Lev. 11:42), *yadayim* (hands) (Gen. 34:21), *shokayim* (legs) (Prov. 26:7), and *shinnayim* (teeth) (Gen. 49:12). *Shinnayim* is in the dual form because there are two sets of teeth. Similarly, *rechayim* (millstones)<sup>1542</sup> (Deut. 24:6), and *shamayim* (Gen. 14:19). The one who understands the secret of the spheres will admit to this.<sup>1543</sup> The same applies to *pa'amayim* (twice) (Kohelet 6:6), and *mayim* (waters) (Gen.1:6).<sup>1544</sup> There is a secret which is shut and sealed to the word *mayim*.<sup>1545</sup>

The word *luchotayim* (thy planks) in *all thy planks* (Ezek. 27:5) is in the dual form, for there are boats made up of two planks. The word *derakhayim* (paths) in: *but he*

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<sup>1541</sup> Words ending in the dual form; that is, *pattach, yod, chirik, mem (-ayim)*.

<sup>1542</sup> Translated literally. There are two millstones, an upper and lower one.

<sup>1543</sup> According to I.E., there are two heavens: the firmament and the heaven of heavens. The heaven of heavens is above the firmament and contains 10 spheres, one of which contains the moon, and another one contains the sun. Above it come five spheres, each of which contains one of the five visible planets. Above them is a sphere which contains the fixed stars. Above all these spheres is that sphere which gives rise to the movement of the spheres beneath it. The tenth sphere, which is referred to by I.E. as the *kisse ha-kavod* encompasses all of the other spheres. *Shamayim* is in the dual form because there are two heavens. For other interpretations, see Goodman's comment on this verse.

<sup>1544</sup> *Mayim* (water) is in the dual form.

<sup>1545</sup> I.E. is most likely referring to the upper waters and the lower waters mentioned in Gen. 1:7.

that follows *vain paths* (Prov. 28:18)<sup>1546</sup> is also in the dual form. The end of the verse, which reads *shall fall in one of them*,<sup>1547</sup> shows that this is the case.<sup>1548</sup>

This being the case,<sup>1549</sup> then *ba-atzaltayim* (by slothfulness) refers back to hands.<sup>1550</sup> It is as if the verse read: “By the slothfulness of the hands [the rafters sink in].”

Scripture employs an abridged style.<sup>1551</sup>

The word *mekareh* (rafters) in our verse is a noun. Some say that it is a verb.<sup>1552</sup> Compare the word *mekareh* (layest the beams) in: *Who layest the beams of Thine upper chambers in the waters* (Ps. 104:3), and *keruhu* (laid the beams thereof) (Neh. 3:3). *Mekareh* (layest the beams) and *keruhu* (laid the beams thereof)<sup>1553</sup> are in the *pi'el*. The *resh* of these verbs should have received a *dagesh*.<sup>1554</sup> According to this interpretation, our verse reads: “He who lays beams with slothful hands will

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<sup>1546</sup> Translated according to I.E.

<sup>1547</sup> In one of the paths.

<sup>1548</sup> That *derakhayim* is in the dual form.

<sup>1549</sup> That words ending in *pattach*, *yod*, *chirik*, *mem* (*-ayim*) are in the dual form.

<sup>1550</sup> I.E.'s point is *ba-atzaltayim* (by slothfulness) must be in the dual form, since it ends in *-ayim*. The question arises: What two things is *ba-atzaltayim* referring to? I.E. believes that it is referring to *yadayim* (hands) mentioned in the second part of the verse.

<sup>1551</sup> *By slothfulness the rafters sink in* is short for: “By slothfulness of the hands the rafters sink in.”

<sup>1552</sup> Meaning, “lays rafters” or “lays beams.”

<sup>1553</sup> Literally, “these verbs.”

<sup>1554</sup> *Mekareh* and *keruhu* come from the root *kof*, *resh*, *heh*. The rule is that a *dagesh* is placed in the middle root letter in verbs in the *pi'el*. Thus, if *mekareh* and *keruhu* are *pi'els* as I.E. maintains, why is there no *dagesh* in the middle stem of *mekareh* and *keruhu*? The answer is that a *resh* does not receive a *dagesh*.

produce shoddy work.” However, this interpretation of the word *mekareh* is far-fetched. For the word *yimmakh* (sink in)<sup>1555</sup> [which governs *ha-mekareh*] is a *nifal*<sup>1556</sup> like the word *yiddal*<sup>1557</sup> (shall be made thin) in: *that the glory of Jacob shall be made thin* (Is. 17:4). *Yimmakh* comes from a double root.<sup>1558</sup>

THROUGH IDLENESS OF THE HANDS. *Shiflut yadayim* (idleness of the hands) refers to poverty and paucity.<sup>1559</sup>

THE HOUSE LEAKETH. *Yidlof* (leaketh) is connected to the word *delef* (dripping) in: *A continual dripping* (Prov. 27:15). The reference is to the drops [of rain] that come down.<sup>1560</sup>

This verse is connected to the previous one. It is as if Kohelet says the following regarding the king and his officers who are occupied with eating and are too lazy to look after the needs of the kingdom. They cause two things, which they did not as of yet experience,<sup>1561</sup> to come upon them.

One. Their kingdom will be destroyed like the house that is destroyed little by little and its rafters sink.

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<sup>1555</sup> *Nifal* is a passive form. This being the case, *yimakh ha-mekareh* (the rafters sink in) cannot be rendered: “The one who lays the beams will produce shoddy work (*yimmakh*),” for *yimmakh* is passive, not active. Furthermore, if *mekareh* is a verb governed by *yimmakh* (a passive), then our clause would read: “The one who lays the beams will sink in.” This makes no sense.

<sup>1556</sup> A passive verb meaning, “*shall be sunk in.*”

<sup>1557</sup> *Yidda* is a *nifal* from the root *dalet, lamed, lamed*.

<sup>1558</sup> *Mem, kaf, kaf*. Thus, it, like *yiddal*, is a *nifal* derived from a double root.

<sup>1559</sup> According to this interpretation, the meaning of our clause is: “And through the poor work of the hands, the house leaks.”

<sup>1560</sup> *Yidlof ha-bayit* (the house leaketh) literally means, the house drips. I.E. thus points out that it is not the house that drips but the rain that drips into the house because the roof of the house has not been properly maintained.

<sup>1561</sup> Literally, “two new things.”

The second thing is: [They will not have money available when necessary,] for they are not concerned with gathering money and storing it for a time of need. This is the meaning of *through idleness of the hands [the house leaketh]*.<sup>1562</sup>

**19. A FEAST IS MADE FOR LAUGHTER, AND WINE MAKETH GLAD THE LIFE; AND MONEY ANSWERETH ALL THINGS.**

A FEAST IS MADE FOR LAUGHTER. Do they<sup>1563</sup> not see that all the joy and laughter in the world is mainly centered around a feast, which is prepared by those who make the feast,<sup>1564</sup> It is also centered around wine,<sup>1565</sup> which makes man's life glad?

It is possible that *chayyim* (the life) is an adjective.<sup>1566</sup>

AND MONEY ANSWERETH ALL THINGS. The word *ya'aneh* (answereth) means “provides.” It is likely that *ya'aneh* comes from the word *et* (time).<sup>1567</sup> The aforementioned is in keeping with my earlier explanation [of the word *et*].<sup>1568</sup> The

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<sup>1562</sup> This is the message conveyed by "through idleness of the hands the house leaks."

<sup>1563</sup> The king and his officers who are too lazy to look after the needs of the kingdom. The feast is a parable for the economic well being of the kingdom.

<sup>1564</sup> Our verse literally reads: "For laughter they make a feast." It does not tell us who makes the feast. Hence I.E. points out that "they make a feast" refers to those who make the feast. Our verse is to be understood as follows: For laughter they, the hosts make a feast. See I.E. on Gen. 25:26; 48:1. J.P. S. renders, A feast is made.

<sup>1565</sup> Our verse literally reads: reads: “For laughter they make bread and wine gladdens life. I.E. explains our verse as follows: For a feast you need bread and wine.

<sup>1566</sup> In other words, *chayyim* is short for *anashim chayyim* (men who are alive), even though the word *anashim* is not in the text. See I.E. on 2:17. I.E. reads our verse as follows: For laughter they make bake bread and wine gladdens the life of living men.

<sup>1567</sup> That is, *ya'aneh* is related to the word *et*.

<sup>1568</sup> See I.E on 9:11. There, I.E. says that *et* comes from the root *ayin, nun, heh*, a root which means “time.” Thus, the word *ya'aneh* means "will in a timely manner. That is, will provide what is needed at the time requested.

meaning of *and money answereth all things* is: Money provides for all things at the time when the one who desires them asks for them.<sup>1569</sup>

**20. CURSE NOT THE KING, NO, NOT IN THY THOUGHT, AND CURSE NOT THE RICH IN THY BEDCHAMBER; FOR A BIRD OF THE AIR SHALL CARRY THE VOICE, AND THAT WHICH HATH WINGS SHALL TELL THE MATTER.**

**CURSE NOT THE KING, NO, NOT IN THY THOUGHT.** Even though the king is a boy (v. 16), take care not to curse him, even in your thought. The meaning of *be-madda'akha* (in thy thought) is “in your heart”; [that is,] in your thoughts which you alone know. Furthermore, curse not the rich in a very private place,<sup>1570</sup> for if the king hears that you cursed him he will employ his power to harm you. [Similarly] the rich man will employ his wealth to do the same.<sup>1571</sup>

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<sup>1569</sup> Literally, “when the one who desires, desires.”

<sup>1570</sup> Literally, “a hidden.”

<sup>1571</sup> Literally, “and the rich with his wealth.”

## CHAPTER 11.

### 1. CAST THY BREAD UPON THE WATERS, FOR THOU SHALT FIND IT AFTER MANY DAYS.

CAST THY BREAD UPON THE WATERS. Kohelet charges the person who has wealth to be generous and to open his hands both to those whom he recognizes and to those whom he does not recognize.<sup>1572</sup>

There are those who say that “the waters” referred to in our verse are waters of a pool which has fish.<sup>1573</sup> There is no need for this interpretation.

### 2. DIVIDE A PORTION INTO SEVEN, YEA, EVEN INTO EIGHT; FOR THOU KNOWEST NOT WHAT EVIL SHALL BE UPON THE EARTH.

DIVIDE A PORTION INTO SEVEN. The main meaning of “seven” in Scripture was stated by the author of the *Sefer Yetzirah*.<sup>1574</sup> The aforementioned said: “The Holy Palace is set in the middle (*Sefer Yetzirah* 4:3).”<sup>1575</sup>

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<sup>1572</sup> According to this interpretation, *cast thy bread upon the waters* means “be charitable to all.”

<sup>1573</sup> This interpretation takes *cast thy bread upon the waters* literally. It means feed the fish, for in the future they will provide you with food (Meijler).

Kohelet says, *yea, even into eight*. “eight” corresponds to the days of the week, because it is the day that one starts counting<sup>1576</sup> the [following] week.<sup>1577</sup>

The meaning of for *thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth* is: “It is possible that you<sup>1578</sup> will become poor.”

The word *yiheyeh* [which is a masculine] governs *ra'ah* [which is] a feminine.<sup>1579</sup> We find the same in *ki yiheyeh na'arah vetulah* (If there be a damsel that is a virgin) (Deut. 22:23).<sup>1580</sup>

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<sup>1574</sup> Literally, “The main meaning of ‘seven’ in Scripture is in accordance with what the author of the Sefer Yetzirah said.”

<sup>1575</sup> Created entities have six corners and a central point. The aforementioned also applies to human beings who have six corners and a central point, the heart. The number 7 stands for all created beings, including humans. See I.E. on Zech. 4:10. According to I.E., our verse reads: “Give a portion to all people; that is, share your wealth with all who are needy.” For numerology in the Bible see, Meir Bar -Ilan, *Genesis Numerology* (Hebrew), Rehovot, Israel, 2004.

<sup>1576</sup> Literally, “that he started counting with.”

<sup>1577</sup> Eight corresponds to the days of the week, because if we count a series of weeks in succession, the eighth day will always be the first day of the new week. *Yea, even into eight*, means give charity every day of the week. Our verse teaches that one should give charity widely and consistently for the more widely one gives, the better are his chances of receiving help from those whom you helped in their time of need.

<sup>1578</sup> Literally, that he will.

<sup>1579</sup> *Yiheyeh* is a masculine governing the feminine *ra'ah*.

<sup>1580</sup> *Yiheyeh* is a masculine governing the feminine *na'arah*. In his commentary on Deut. 22:23, I.E. explains the apparent anomaly of Scripture combining a masculine verb with a feminine noun. There he claims that in such cases we are dealing with an abridged verse. Thus Deut. 22:23 should be understood as if it read: *ki yiheyeh devar na'arah vetulah*. In other words, *yiheyeh* is connected to *devar*, which is an ellipsis—a missing word whose presence should be assumed. The same applies to our verse. It should be interpreted as if written: *mah yiheyeh devar ra*: “for thou knowest not what evil thing shall be (upon the earth).”

**3. IF THE CLOUDS BE FULL OF RAIN, THEY EMPTY THEMSELVES UPON THE EARTH; AND IF A TREE FALL IN THE SOUTH, OR IN THE NORTH, IN THE PLACE WHERE THE TREE FALLETH, THERE SHALL IT BE. IF THE CLOUDS BE FULL OF RAIN.** This is a parable regarding wealth. Money was given to the rich only for them to do good, to help those in need.

[THERE SHALL IT BE.] *Yehu* (shall it be) is a plural.<sup>1581</sup> The *alef in yehu*<sup>1582</sup> is superfluous. It is like the *alef in he-halekhu*<sup>1583</sup> (that went) in: *that went with him* (Josh. 10:24), and the *alef in avu*<sup>1584</sup> (would in: *yet they would not hear* (Is. 28:12).

[*Yehu* is a plural] because the basic word [for “it shall be”] in the masculine [singular] is *yehi*.<sup>1585</sup> There is no form that is similar to *yehu* in Scripture.<sup>1586</sup>

The meaning of: *in the place where the tree falleth, there shall they be* is: “In the place where the fruit of the tree falls,<sup>1587</sup> be it north or south, there shall the gatherers be.”<sup>1588</sup> The reference is to the wealthy.<sup>1589</sup>

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<sup>1581</sup> According to this interpretation, *yehu* means “shall they be.” See next note.

<sup>1582</sup> *Yehu* is spelled *yod, heh, vav, alef*. It comes from the root *heh, yod, heh*. It should have been spelled *yod, heh, vav* (*yehu*). Hence its *alef* is superfluous.

According to I.E our verse which should be understood as follows: “In the place where the fruit of the tree falleth, shall they (the gatherers) be.”

<sup>1583</sup> *Halekhu* is spelled *heh, lamed, kaf, vav, alef*. It comes from the root *heh, lamed, kaf*. *Halekhu* is normally spelled without an *alef*.

<sup>1584</sup> Spelled *alef, bet, vav, alef*

<sup>1585</sup> Hence, *yehu* cannot be a singular.

<sup>1586</sup> The word *yehu* is not found again in Scripture.

<sup>1587</sup> Tree is short for “fruit of the tree.”

<sup>1588</sup> *Yehu* (shall they be) refers to the gatherers of the fruit.

Others say that the reference is to the tree itself,<sup>1590</sup> and that [the first] half of our verse corresponds to [the first] half of the previous verse, and the final half of our verse stands in contrast to the final half of the previous verse.<sup>1591</sup>

This commentator says that the *yod* in the word *yehu* is a third person imperfect prefix. It is related to the word *hu* (it) (Gen. 2:11).<sup>1592</sup> *Yehu* is a singular.<sup>1593</sup>

[According to this interpretation,] the meaning of our verse is: “The tree is watered and worked because it gives fruit. However, when it<sup>1594</sup> falls down, and the owners know that it will never again bear fruit, they leave it in the place that it fell.”

There is commentator who says that *etz* (tree) is related to the word *etzah* (counsel) (2 Sam.16:20).<sup>1595</sup> Whoever says this has not eaten from the tree of knowledge.

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<sup>1589</sup> The maxim is directed at the wealthy: “Gather the fruit that God gives you and share it with the needy” (Meijler).

<sup>1590</sup> In other words, *where the tree falleth* refers to the tree, not to its fruit. According to this interpretation *yehu* is a singular and does not come from the root *heh, yod, heh*. On the contrary it is related to the word *hu* (he or it), spelled *heh, vav, alef*. *Yehu* means “it shall be.” According to this interpretation, the *alef* in *yehu* is not superfluous and the verse reads, “In the place where the tree falleth, there shall it be (yehu).”

<sup>1591</sup> *Divide a portion into seven, yea, even into eight* (first half of verse 2) and *If the clouds be full of rain, they [should] empty themselves upon the earth* (first half of verse 3) deal with giving charity.

*For thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth;*( second half of verse 2); *If a tree fall in the south, or in the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there shall it be* (second half of verse 3) deal with what is destined to be.

<sup>1592</sup> Literal translation of *hu*.

<sup>1593</sup> *Yehu* is a singular, meaning “it (the tree) shall be.” According to this interpretation, *yehu* does not come from the root *heh, yod, heh*, and its *shuruk* does not indicate that it is a plural.

<sup>1594</sup> The tree.

**4. HE THAT OBSERVETH THE WIND SHALL NOT SOW; AND HE THAT REGARDETH THE CLOUDS SHALL NOT REAP.**

HE THAT OBSERVETH THE WIND SHALL NOT SOW. This too is a parable regarding the generous man.<sup>1596</sup> The tight-fisted sluggard says that the wind shows that it will not rain in the coming days. He says: “Why should I take what I have—that is, the seed—and place it and hide it in the ground.”

Others say that this verse is, as implied in a plain reading of the text,<sup>1597</sup> a charge to the planter of the seed. Solomon already noted that there is no work like working the ground.<sup>1598</sup> He therefore charges: “Do not rely on your knowledge and upon your experience,<sup>1599</sup> for the times change.”

**5. AS THOU KNOWEST NOT WHAT IS THE WAY OF THE WIND, NOR HOW THE BONES DO GROW IN THE WOMB OF HER THAT IS WITH CHILD; EVEN SO THOU KNOWEST NOT THE WORK OF GOD WHO DOETH ALL THINGS.**

NOR HOW THE BONES DO GROW IN THE WOMB. There are commentators who say that *atzamim* (bones) means the same as *otzem* (shuts) (Is.33:15).<sup>1600</sup>

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<sup>1595</sup> This commentator interprets our verse as follows: “If counsel falls on the south, or on the north—that is, if God issues a decree on the inhabitants of the north or south—upon the place that the decree falls, there shall it come to be.”

<sup>1596</sup> That is, exhorting a rich man to be generous. This verse tells such a person not to act like the tight-fisted person who says, “Why should I give charity? I am merely throwing my money away.”

<sup>1597</sup> Our verse is not a parable directed to the potentially generous man.

<sup>1598</sup> See I.E. on 5:8. I.E.'s point: Because Kohelet believes working the ground is very important, he advises: Do not neglect working the ground even if you believe that drought or the like is coming.

<sup>1599</sup> Literally: “everything that you have tried.”

<sup>1600</sup> See Rashi’s comment on our verse: “Things that are enclosed (shut) in a full womb.”

However, this is nonsense. In reality, *atzamim* refers to the body of a child in its mother's womb before it is born.<sup>1601</sup> The unborn child is referred to as *atzamim* (bones) because the bones are the foundations of the body. The flesh and the skin [of the fetus, not mentioned in our verse] serve as garments for the body.

*Ha-mele'ah* [is a noun meaning] “she that is with child.”<sup>1602</sup> It is also possible that *mele'ah* is an adjective which describes the word *ishah* (women).<sup>1603</sup> In this case *be-veten* (in the womb) is in the construct [with *ha-ishah*].<sup>1604</sup>

It is also possible that *mele'ah* is an adjective which describes *beten* (womb), for the word *beten* is feminine in the Holy Tongue.<sup>1605</sup> The first *bet* in *be-veten* should have been vocalized with a *pattach*, and the second *bet* should have had a *dagesh* in it.<sup>1606</sup> The same applies to the word *le-ish* (to the man) in *le-ish he-ashir* (to the rich man) (2 Sam. 12:4).<sup>1607</sup>

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<sup>1601</sup> According to this interpretation, *atzamim* means “bones.” Both interpretations agree that *atzamim* refers to the unborn child in the womb. They differ as to the literal meaning of the word *atzamim*.

<sup>1602</sup> In other words, I.E. understands *mele'ah* to be a noun meaning “a pregnant woman.” Our verse reads *ka-atzamim be-veten ha-mele'ah*. *Mele'ah* means “full” and would therefore appear to be an adjective. I.E.’s interpretation of *mele'ah*, on the other hand, renders our verse: “as the child in the womb of a pregnant women.” The interpretations that follow argue that *mele'ah* is an adjective.

<sup>1603</sup> The word *ishah* (woman) is not in the text. I.E. believes that our verse should be interpreted as if it read: *ka-atzamim be-veten ha-ishah ha-mele'ah* (as a child in the pregnant woman’s womb).

<sup>1604</sup> See above note.

<sup>1605</sup> Thus, *ha-mele'ah*, a feminine, is an adjective describing *beten*. According to this interpretation, there is no need to assume that the word *ha-ishah* is missing from our verse, for *be-veten ha-mele'ah* means: “in the pregnant womb.”

<sup>1606</sup> According to this interpretation, *be-veten ha-mele'ah* means “in the pregnant womb.” When an adjective with a *heh* prefixed to it describes a noun, the noun too has a *heh* prefixed to it. Thus, our phrase should have read *ba-beten ha-mele'ah*, for *ba-beten* is short for *be-ha-beten*,

6. IN THE MORNING SOW THY SEED, AND IN THE EVENING WITHHOLD NOT THY HAND; FOR THOU KNOWEST NOT WHICH SHALL PROSPER, WHETHER THIS OR THAT, OR WHETHER THEY BOTH SHALL BE ALIKE GOOD.

IN THE MORNING SOW THY SEED. Its meaning, according to both interpretations,<sup>1608</sup> is: “In the morning always sow thy seed.”<sup>1609</sup>

The *tav* of *tannach* (withhold) is a third person imperfect feminine prefix<sup>1610</sup> because the word *yad* is feminine. The meaning of *al tannach yadekha* (withhold not your hand) is: “Let your hand not withhold.”] because we do not find the word *hi-ni'ach*<sup>1611</sup> directed at two objects.<sup>1612</sup>

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and the prefix *ba* is short for *be-ha*. Similarly, *veten* (lacking a *dagesh*) should have read *beten* (with a *dagesh*), for a *dagesh* is required after a *heh* indicating the direct object.

<sup>1607</sup> The word *le-ish* in *le-ish he-ashir* should have been vocalized with a *kamatz*; that is, it should have read *la-ish*, for *la-ish* is short for *le-ha-ish*.

<sup>1608</sup> The two interpretations of verse 4; namely, that it is directed to the (potentially) generous man or to the owner of a field.

<sup>1609</sup> That is, either “give charity early in the day,” or “plant your seed early in the day.”

<sup>1610</sup> The word *tannach* can also be a second person masculine prefix. This is how the JPS 1917 Tanakh translates it. It renders *al tannach yadekah*: “withhold not your hand.” I.E., for the reasons that will soon become clear, renders the phrase: “Let your hand not withhold.” In other words, *tannach* governs one’s hand. It is not a second person masculine prefix but is a third person feminine prefix.

<sup>1611</sup> *Tannach* like *hi-ni'ach* is a *hifil*. Both words are derived from the root *nun, vav, chet*.

<sup>1612</sup> Words in the *hifil* have two objects. Compare *he'ekhil* (he fed; literally “he caused him to eat”), which has two objects—the person doing the feeding and the person being fed. *Tannach* in our verse is short for the *hifil, tani'ach*. Contrary to most cases, we do not find any word coming from the root *nun, vav, chet* to have two objects in the *hifil*. Thus, *tannach* can't mean “do not withhold your hand (literally, “do not cause your hand to withhold”), because this rendering implies two objects: a person and his hand. I.E.’s interpretation links *tannach* to the hand, not to the person whose hand it is. It tells the hand not to withhold from planting.

**7. AND THE LIGHT IS SWEET, AND A PLEASANT THING IT IS FOR THE EYES TO BEHOLD THE SUN.**

AND THE LIGHT IS SWEET. This verse is connected in meaning to the verse that follows.<sup>1613</sup>

Kohelet describes the light as sweet. However, light is not something that can be eaten.<sup>1614</sup>

The basic way to understand the term *the light is sweet* is: “Since all of the senses come together in one place above the forehead, people substitute a word which is employed for one sense and apply it to a different sense.” Compare: *See, the smell of my son* (Gen. 27:27),<sup>1615</sup> and: *all the people saw*<sup>1616</sup> *the thunderings* (Ex. 20:15).

This verse is connected in meaning to the verse that precedes it, to teach that one should always be occupied in doing good. He should not be engaged in any other joy.<sup>1617</sup>

**8. FOR IF A MAN LIVE MANY YEARS, LET HIM REJOICE IN THEM ALL, AND REMEMBER THE DAYS OF DARKNESS, FOR THEY SHALL BE MANY. ALL THAT COMETH IS VANITY.**

FOR IF A MAN LIVE MANY YEARS. [Even] if a person were to know that he would live many years and rejoice in all of them, the light, earlier mentioned,<sup>1618</sup>

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<sup>1613</sup>The next verse states that the boons described in our verse will not last forever.

<sup>1614</sup> This being the case, what does “the light is sweet” mean?

<sup>1615</sup> See is here used for smell.

<sup>1616</sup> Literal translation. *Saw* is used in place of heard.

<sup>1617</sup> Verse 6 states: *In the morning sow thy seed*. Our verse tells us to properly utilize the light of the day.

<sup>1618</sup> In verse 7.

will grow bitter<sup>1619</sup> when he recalls the days of darkness. That is, the days of the grave, *for they shall be many*.

*All that cometh is vanity* means: “A man should understand that everything that comes into this world is vanity.”<sup>1620</sup> Compare: *A generation cometh and a generation goeth*(1:4).

**9. REJOICE, O YOUNG MAN, IN THY YOUTH; AND LET THY HEART CHEER THEE IN THE DAYS OF THY YOUTH, AND WALK IN THE WAYS OF THY HEART, AND IN THE SIGHT OF THINE EYES; BUT KNOW THOU, THAT FOR ALL THESE THINGS GOD WILL BRING THEE INTO JUDGMENT.**

REJOICE, O YOUNG MAN, IN THY YOUTH. Since all is vanity,<sup>1621</sup> *rejoice now, O young man, in thy youth*.<sup>1622</sup> Its meaning is similar to [advising someone]: “Do evil and see what shall befall you.”<sup>1623</sup> Compare: *Philistia, shout victoriously over me*<sup>1624</sup> (Ps. 60:10).<sup>1625</sup> However, Scripture elsewhere reads: *over Philistia do I*<sup>1626</sup>*shout victoriously*<sup>1627</sup> (Ps. 108:10). The meaning of: *Philistia, shout aloud*

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<sup>1619</sup> The sweet light mentioned in verse 7 will grow bitter.

<sup>1620</sup> It does not last.

<sup>1621</sup> It does not last.

<sup>1622</sup> Enjoy your AND before it passes away.

<sup>1623</sup> Kohelet proffers this “advice” sarcastically.

<sup>1624</sup> King David said this to the Philistines, sarcastically mocking their belief that they would defeat him.

<sup>1625</sup> Translated in keeping with I.E.'s comment.

<sup>1626</sup> King David.

<sup>1627</sup> Which shows that King David was not serious when he said: *Philistia, shout aloud victoriously over me*.

*victoriously over me* is as follows: “*upon Edom—who is strong and mighty—do I cast my shoe* (Ps. 60:10; 108:10). Now, *Philistia, cry aloud over me*, and see what I will do to you.” Similarly, *Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom, that dwellest in the land of Uz* (Lam. 4:21).<sup>1628</sup> Our verse similarly ends,<sup>1629</sup> *but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment*.

[BUT KNOW THOU, THAT FOR ALL THESE THINGS GOD WILL BRING THEE INTO JUDGMENT]

*For all these things* refers to rejoicing, cheerfulness of the heart, walking in the ways of the heart, and following what the eyes see.

The word “cheerful” is applied to the heart in Hebrew in three ways:

The first way: When the heart grows cheerful in and of itself. Compare: *and his heart was cheerful* (Ruth 3:7);

The second way: When the heart cheers the person who possesses it. Compare: *And let thy heart cheer thee* (our verse);

The third way: When a person cheers his heart. Compare: *As they were making their hearts cheerful* (Judges 19:22).

Our verse is similar in meaning to: *and that ye go not about after your own heart and your own eyes* (Num. 15:39).<sup>1630</sup>

**10. THEREFORE REMOVE VEXATION FROM THY HEART AND PUT AWAY EVIL FROM THY FLESH; FOR CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH ARE VANITY.**

THEREFORE REMOVE VEXATION FROM THY HEART. The word *shacharut* (childhood) is related to the word *shachar* (dawn) in: *for the dawn*<sup>1631</sup> *breaketh*

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<sup>1628</sup> This, too, is said sarcastically, for the verse concludes: *the cup shall pass over unto thee also*.

<sup>1629</sup> Just as Lam. 4:21 ends with a phrase that shows that the first part of the verse is intended sarcastically, so does our verse.

<sup>1630</sup> In other words, our verse is an admonition not to follow one's desires.

(Gen. 32:27). For Kohelet compares the days of youth to the breaking of the dawn. The word *shacharut* (childhood) is used in our verse in the sense of *shacher* (dawn) as in: *Then shall thy light break forth as the dawn* (ka-shachar) (Is.58:8).<sup>1632</sup>

On the other hand, the word *shachar* might (mean “black” and) allude to black hair.<sup>1633</sup> Compare shechorah (black) in” *I am black, but comely* (Song of Songs 1:5).<sup>1634</sup>

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<sup>1631</sup> Translated literally.

<sup>1632</sup> We thus see that *shachar* refers to the breaking of dawn.

<sup>1633</sup> According to this interpretation, our verse reads: “For childhood and the years of black hair are vanity.” See Rashi: “*Shacharut* means *blackness*. Youth is so called because the hair on one’s head at that time is black.”

<sup>1634</sup> In other words, *shachar* means “black,” for *shachar* is the masculine form of *shechorah* (black).

## CHAPTER 12

1. REMEMBER THEN THY CREATOR IN THE DAYS OF THY YOUTH, BEFORE THE EVIL DAYS COME, AND THE YEARS DRAW NIGH, WHEN THOU SHALT SAY: 'I HAVE NO PLEASURE IN THEM.'

REMEMBER THEN THY CREATOR IN THE DAYS OF THY YOUTH. We find the following words in Scripture [for youth and old age]: *Ne'urim* (youth) (Is. 54:6), *alumim* (youth),<sup>1635</sup> and *zekunim* (old age) (Gen. 37:3). All these words are masculine.<sup>1636</sup> The word *bechurotekha* (thy youth)<sup>1637</sup> is irregular.<sup>1638</sup>

Some say that there are two forms for the Hebrew word for youth.<sup>1639</sup> They explain the word *mi-bechurav* (from his youth up) in: *the minister of Moses from his youth up* (Num. 11:28) as meaning the same as *mi-bechurotav* (from his youth up).<sup>1640</sup>

[*Mi-bechurav* (from his youth up) (Num 11:28) is not to be rendered “from his young men” (*bachurav*).] for the word *bachurim* (young men) (Is. 23:4) does not change when connected to a pronoun.<sup>1641</sup>

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<sup>1635</sup> The word *alumim* is not found in Scripture. However, we find the word *alumav* (his youth) in Ps. 89:46. *Alumav* is *alumim* with the third person pronominal suffix. (R. Goodman).

<sup>1636</sup> We thus see that words that refer to age are in the masculine.

<sup>1637</sup> *Bechurotekha* is *bechurot* with the second-person possessive pronominal suffix.

<sup>1638</sup> For unlike *ne'urim*, *alumim*, and *zekunim*, *bechurot* is a feminine.

<sup>1639</sup> *Bechurim* (masculine) and *bechurot* (feminine).

<sup>1640</sup> There are two forms of the Hebrew word for “youth:” *bechurim* (masculine) and *bechurot* (feminine). Our verse employs *bechurot* plus the second personal pronominal suffix. Num. 11:28 employs *bechurim* plus the third-person masculine pronominal suffix. Thus, the words *bechurotav* and *bechurav* mean the same.

THE EVIL DAYS. The reference is to the days of old age for the old<sup>1642</sup> and the days of illness for all. The latter refers to an illness which ends in death.<sup>1643</sup>

2. BEFORE THE SUN, AND THE LIGHT, AND THE MOON, AND THE STARS, ARE DARKENED, AND THE CLOUDS RETURN AFTER THE RAIN.

BEFORE THE SUN, AND THE LIGHT. *The light* refers to the light of dawn which appears before the rising of the sun. It lasts for an hour and a third of equinoctial hours<sup>1644</sup> after sunset.<sup>1645</sup>

What need is there to mention the light, the moon, and the stars after mentioning the sun?<sup>1646</sup> [The answer is:] There are creatures, such as fowl, that cannot fly during the day because of the flame of the light of the sun.<sup>1647</sup>

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<sup>1641</sup> In other words, *mi-bechurav* in Num. 11:38 cannot be rendered “from his young men.” If it were, the word would read *mi-bachurav*, for *bachurim* (young men) maintains its *pattach* when connected to a pronoun.

<sup>1642</sup> The reference is to the days of old age or the days of illness.

<sup>1643</sup> The evil days refers to the days that a person whether young or old is afflicted with a fatal illness.

<sup>1644</sup> Hours that are measured on the Spring and the Fall equinox, when day length and night length are equal. Hours measured on other days vary in length.

<sup>1645</sup> In other words, the light refers to the light that appears between the break of dawn and sunrise. It also refers to the light that appears between sunset and nightfall.

<sup>1646</sup> I.E. believed that the heavenly bodies are dependent on the sun. See I.E. on Ps. 19:5. Once the sun goes out, the other bodies will lose their source of power. There is thus no reason to mention the light, moon, and stars after speaking of the sun's extinction, for they will die with it.

<sup>1647</sup> I.E. interprets our verse to mean: If you are healthy and enjoy sunlight, remember your Creator before the sun goes down. If you can't tolerate sunshine, then remember your Creator before the radiance that you can enjoy goes down, be it the light, the moon, or the stars. In other words, remember your Creator while you still enjoy whatever light you can (Filwarg),

However, in reality, the light, the moon, and the stars follows the sun because it is biblical style to place [the more important item in a list] either first or last.<sup>1648</sup> Compare, *He that keepeth Israel doth neither slumber nor sleep* (Ps. 121:4). Now slumbering is less intense than sleep.<sup>1649</sup>

Some say *and the clouds [return after the rain]* refers to crying.<sup>1650</sup> Others say that it refers to the phlegm<sup>1651</sup> which overpowers the person.<sup>1652</sup>

According to my opinion, *and the clouds return after the rain* is to be interpreted according to its plain meaning. It refers to the time when an ill person dies. At that time, the world grows dark for him. It appears to him as if clouds cover the light. [Therefore,] our verse is to be understood as follows: after raining, the clouds return to rain.<sup>1653</sup>

**3. . IN THE DAY WHEN THE KEEPERS OF THE HOUSE SHALL TREMBLE, AND THE STRONG MEN SHALL BOW THEMSELVES, AND THE GRINDERS CEASE BECAUSE THEY ARE FEW, AND THOSE THAT LOOK OUT SHALL BE DARKENED IN THE WINDOWS.**

IN THE DAY. The word *ya'uzu* (shall tremble) is similar in meaning to *za* (moved) in: *that he stood not up, nor moved for him* (Est. 5:9).

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<sup>1648</sup> In our verse, the most important item (the sun) is placed first.

<sup>1649</sup> In Ps. 121:4, the more powerful item is mentioned last.

<sup>1650</sup> The rain refers to crying. The eyes of old people are full of tears. See Rashi:  
"The light will dim after the tears of crying."

<sup>1651</sup> Medieval medicine believed that there are four humors in the body: **blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile**. Health was said to be based on maintaining a proper balance among those humors.

<sup>1652</sup> There is too much phlegm in the aged body.

<sup>1653</sup> Literally, the clouds will return to rain after the rain. That is, the darkness or infirmity of old age will be permanent.

THEY ARE FEW. The word *mi'etu* (they are few) is a transitive verb. It means they diminished; that is, the grinders diminished the grinding.<sup>1654</sup>

[IN THE DAY WHEN THE KEEPERS OF THE HOUSE SHALL TREMBLE, AND THE STRONG MEN SHALL BOW THEMSELVES.] Some say that *the keepers of the house* refers to the loins and the ribs.

Others say that the *keepers of the house* speaks of the following four powers in the body: ingestion,<sup>1655</sup> digestion, retention,<sup>1656</sup> and purification.<sup>1657</sup> The purpose of these powers is<sup>1658</sup> to maintain each and every organ.

There is also a commentator who explains *the strong men* as referring to the powers of sustenance, reproduction, and imagination.

However, it appears to me that *the keepers of the house* refers to the hands and the arms, for they protect the body so that no evil befalls it.

*And the strong men* refers to the thighs. They *shall bow themselves* because they are weak.<sup>1659</sup>

*Shall bow themselves* follows *the strong men*. This shows that *the strong men* refer to the thighs.<sup>1660</sup>

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<sup>1654</sup> The teeth cannot properly grind food. According to I.E., *u-vatelu ha-tochanot ki mi'etu* (and the grinders cease because they are few) means: “and the grinders cease because they diminished the grinding.”

<sup>1655</sup> Literally, pulling.

<sup>1656</sup> The stomach retains the digested food until the body needs it.

<sup>1657</sup> After the organs use the nutrients, what remains of them is expelled from the body.

<sup>1658</sup> Literally, that are appointed.

<sup>1659</sup> “Because they are weak” is I.E.'s interpretation of *shall bow themselves*.

The word *chayil* (strong) means strength. The thighs are referred to as *the strong men* because the entire body rests upon them.<sup>1661</sup>

AND THE GRINDERS. This refers to the teeth.

AND THOSE THAT LOOK OUT. The reference is to the eyes

**4. AND THE DOORS SHALL BE SHUT IN THE STREET, WHEN THE SOUND OF THE GRINDING IS LOW; AND ONE SHALL START UP AT THE VOICE OF A BIRD, AND ALL THE DAUGHTERS OF MUSIC SHALL BE BROUGHT LOW.**

AND THE DOORS SHALL BE SHUT. The reference is to the lips.<sup>1662</sup> Compare, *Who can open the doors of his face?* (Job 41:6).

WHEN THE SOUND OF THE GRINDING IS LOW. The reference is to the upper intestines; that is, the stomach which grinds the food.

The word *shefal* (low) is a noun.<sup>1663</sup> It is not an adjective.<sup>1664</sup> The word *shefal* (low) in *Better it is to be of a spirit that is low* (*shefal ru'ach*) (Prov.16:19) is similar. Its meaning is a [spirit that is in a] low state.<sup>1665</sup>

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<sup>1660</sup> It does not refer to the powers of sustenance, reproduction, and imagination as maintained by the commentator earlier referred to. For the weakening of these powers would not be described as bowing.

<sup>1661</sup> It seems that by thighs, I.E. means thighs, calves, and feet, for they serve as a support for the body.

<sup>1662</sup> That is, the mouth.

<sup>1663</sup> An abstract noun (R. Goodman).

<sup>1664</sup> Like the word *shafal* (low) in “the low tree.”

<sup>1665</sup> Literally, lowliness.

[*And the doors shall be shut*]in the street is employed allegorically. When the sound of the grinding is low, there is no flour to be had, and the stores of the bakers in the market are closed.<sup>1666</sup>

We find the words *daltei* (Job 41:6) and *daltot* (Judges 3:23) [both used for “doors of”]. *Daltei* is masculine. *Daltot* is feminine. Both words are in the plural. There thus two forms for the plural of the word *delet*; namely, *delatayim*, and *daltot*. One is masculine and the other feminine. We find the same with *siftei* (lips of) (Mal. 2:7) and *siftot* (lips of) (Kohelet 10:12).<sup>1667</sup>

AND ONE SHALL START UP AT THE VOICE OF A BIRD. It is known that food induces sleep.<sup>1668</sup> When the mouth closes,<sup>1669</sup> eating ceases.<sup>1670</sup> The person will start up at the slightest sound.<sup>1671</sup>

AND ALL THE DAUGHTERS OF MUSIC SHALL BE BROUGHT LOW. The reference is to the throat that was previously used for singing. The voice will be brought so low that it will not be heard. *Yishachu* (shall be brought low), which is masculine, governs *benot* (daughters of), which is feminine. We find the same in

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<sup>1666</sup> I.E. believes: *And the doors shall be shut in the street, when the sound of the grinding is low* is an allegory. It does not refer to an actual event but is a parable describing the breakdown of the body's process of digestion.

<sup>1667</sup> *Siftei* is masculine. *Siftot* is feminine. Both are in the plural. Thus, there are two forms for the plural of *safah* (lip).

<sup>1668</sup> Deep sleep.

<sup>1669</sup> Thus, after speaking of eating, Kohelet speaks of sleep. When the mouth closes, eating ceases (literally, the food is cut off) and only very light sleep follows.

<sup>1670</sup> I.E.'s rendering of *and the doors shall be shut*.

<sup>1671</sup> The slightest sound will awaken a person from his sleep.

*all the wives will give* (yittenu)<sup>1672</sup> *to their husbands honor* (Est. 1:20). However, in reality, *yishachu* and *yittenu*<sup>1673</sup> pertain to the word *kol* (all).<sup>1674</sup>

**5 . ALSO WHEN THEY SHALL BE AFRAID OF THAT WHICH IS HIGH, AND TERRORS SHALL BE IN THE WAY; AND THE ALMOND-TREE SHALL BLOSSOM, AND THE GRASSHOPPER SHALL DRAG ITSELF ALONG, AND THE CAPERBERRY SHALL FAIL; BECAUSE MAN GOETH TO HIS LONG HOME, AND THE MOURNERS GO ABOUT THE STREETS.**

ALSO WHEN THEY SHALL BE AFRAID OF THAT WHICH IS HIGH. Some say that the verse speaks of the aged. The aged have no strength to go up to a high place. They say that the *vav*<sup>1675</sup> of *yira'u* (shall be afraid)<sup>1676</sup> is superfluous. Some say that *yira'u* refers to the thighs;<sup>1677</sup> that is, man's thighs shall fear [high places].

AND TERRORS. The first and third letter of the root<sup>1678</sup> are doubled in the word *chatchattim* (terrors),<sup>1679</sup> for the middle root letter is “swallowed” [ by the

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<sup>1672</sup>*Yittenu* is masculine; nevertheless, it governs *ha-nashim* (the wives), which is feminine.

<sup>1673</sup>Literally, both of them.

<sup>1674</sup>The word *kol* (all) is the subject in both these phrases and is masculine. This is why masculine verb forms appear in both instances.

<sup>1675</sup>A *vav* placed at the end of a third person perfect verb indicates that the verb is a plural.

<sup>1676</sup>*Yira'u* is a plural. However, our chapter is directed to an individual. See v. 1. Hence, this interpretation suggests that *yira'u* be interpreted as if written *yira*.

<sup>1677</sup> *Yira'u* refers back to the strong men—which I.E. interprets as the thighs—in v. 3. Hence, the plural form *yira'u*.

<sup>1678</sup> *Chatchattim* comes from the root *chet, tav, tav*.

<sup>1679</sup> *Chatchattim* is spelled *chet, tav, chet, tav, yod, mem*. It consists of the word *chat* doubled and comes from the root *chet, tav, tav*. The first root *chet* is doubled, the second *tav* is dropped, and the third *tav* is doubled. The middle *tav* is not present in *Chatchattim*. It is “swallowed” by the *tav* which is present in the word.

second tav of the root].<sup>1680</sup> *Chatchattim* is related to the word *chatat* (terror)<sup>1681</sup> in: *ye see a terror* (Job 6:21). It means “terror.”

AND THE ALMOND TREE SHALL BLOSSOM. Some of the commentators say that *ve-yanetz* (shall blossom) is related to the word *nitzah* (its blossoms) in: *its blossoms shot forth* (Gen. 40:10). The reference is to old age.<sup>1682</sup>

AND THE GRASSHOPPER SHALL DRAG ITSELF ALONG. *Chagav* (grasshopper) means “ankle.”<sup>1683</sup>

Some say that *shaked* (almond tree) refers to the organ that turns white after the hair on the head and the beard turn white.<sup>1684</sup>

AND THE GRASSHOPPER SHALL DRAG ITSELF ALONG. The testicles will hang down. Some say that that the *chet* in *chagav* is in place of an *ayin*.<sup>1685</sup> This too is nonsense, for the only letters which interchange are *yod*, *heh*, *vav*, and *alef*. The reason for the aforementioned is that these letters are sometimes seen<sup>1686</sup> and at other times are [sounded but] not seen.<sup>1687</sup>

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<sup>1680</sup> Literally, swallowed. The middle *tav* is not present in *chatchattim*.

<sup>1681</sup> From the root *chet*, *tav*, *tav*.

<sup>1682</sup> The blossom of the almond tree is white. The hair turns white in old age. Thus, *And the almond tree shall blossom* is a metaphor for old age when the hair turns white.

<sup>1683</sup> The part of the leg used for jumping.

<sup>1684</sup> The reference is probably to pubic hair.

<sup>1685</sup> *Chagav* is to be read as if written *agav* (lust).

<sup>1686</sup> The *alef*, *yod*, *vav* and *heh* are vowels letters. Sometimes they appear as part of the spelled word. At other times they are present but are pronounced as part of the vowel.

<sup>1687</sup> Literally, “hidden.” See note 52. All these letters may be dropped and thus may interchange with each other.

AND THE CAPERBERRY SHALL FAIL. Some say *aviyonah* (caperberry) is related to the word *avah* (desire) <sup>1688</sup> (Ex. 10:27). It refers to sexual desire.

Rabbi Adonim ben Tamim Ha-Mizrachi, <sup>1689</sup> whose soul is in Eden, says that *aviyonah* is another name for man's spirit. <sup>1690</sup> [According to Rabbi Adonim,] the following is the grammatical explanation of *aviyonah*:]

*Evyon* (needy man) (Deut. 15:4) is a masculine adjective, and *evyonah* (needy woman) is a feminine adjective.

If you wish to minimize <sup>1691</sup> [the status of] an *evyonah* (needy woman), <sup>1692</sup> you use the term *aviyonah*. <sup>1693</sup> The same applies to *Aminon* (Amnon) (2 Sam. 13:20) <sup>1694</sup> and *Gashmu* (Geshem) <sup>1695</sup> in *Gashmu saith it* (Neh. 6:6).

This is a poor <sup>1696</sup> explanation, for we do not find any such words in Hebrew. <sup>1697</sup>

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<sup>1688</sup> According to this interpretation, the phrase means: “and sexual desire shall fail.”

<sup>1689</sup> A tenth century Babylonian grammarian and philosopher. I.E. places him along with Rabbi Saadiah Gaon and Rabbi Yehuda ben Kuraish among the “Elders of the Holy Tongue.”

<sup>1690</sup> Rabbi Adonim interprets *aviyonah* as meaning “a poor little spirit.” Our clause would then mean: “And the poor little spirit shall fail”; that is, be removed from the body.

<sup>1691</sup> Literally, “to make young.” Young people lack status.

<sup>1692</sup> Or anyone else. If you want to disparage someone, you add a *yod* or a *vav* to his or her name.

<sup>1693</sup> *Evyonah* means “a poor woman.” *Aviyonah* means “a poor little woman”; that is, a poor insignificant woman.

<sup>1694</sup> According to Rabbi Adonim, *Aminon* means “little Amnon.”

<sup>1695</sup> According to Rabbi Adonim, *Gashmu* means “little Geshem.”

<sup>1696</sup> This is a word play alluding to R. Adonim’s interpretation of *aviyonah* as “poor little soul.”

<sup>1697</sup> We do not find words (nouns or names) spelled differently in order to diminish their status. For example, we do not find the form *Yisra'elu* employed to diminish *Yisra'el*.

If it were in the basic structure of Hebrew to have such forms,<sup>1698</sup> then we would find hundreds and thousands of such words in Scripture.

In reality, *Aminon* (2 Sam. 13:20) and *Amnon* (ibid. 3:2) are two names for the same person. We find the same with *Salmah* (Ruth 4:20) and *Salmon* (ibid. 4:21), *Avshai* (2 Sam. 10:10) and *Avishai* (1 Sam. 26:6), *Avner* (1 Sam. 14:51) and *Aviner* (1 Sam. 14:40). The additional *vav* in *Gashmu* is like [the *vav* in *Yitro*;] compare *Yeter* (Ex. 4:18) and *Yitro* (ibid.).<sup>1699</sup>

I will now explain our verse.

After saying *And those that look out shall be darkened in the windows* (v. 3) and that the person will not eat and his voice will not be heard (v. 4), how can Kohelet go back and say, *Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high* in addition to all that he says [in our verse] concerning the hair turning white?<sup>1700</sup>

[The answer is:]

*Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high* does not refer to physical height. Our verse is to be interpreted in a different manner.<sup>1701</sup> This is the way it is to be understood:

*Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high* means: "Also when his thoughts shall be afraid of that which is high." For the spirit thinks that it<sup>1702</sup> is going to a high place, and it fears the journey [that it is about to undertake].<sup>1703</sup> The

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<sup>1698</sup> Literally, to make young.

<sup>1699</sup> The *vav* in *Gashmu* is like the *vav* in *Yitro*, who was also called *Yeter*. In both cases, the addition of the *vav* results in a slightly different name for the same person.

<sup>1700</sup> The fear of heights comes before the eyes darken and one stops eating. When one's eyes darken and he stops eating, he is house bound. He is beyond worrying about heights.

<sup>1701</sup> Literally, in truth it refers to a different subject. That is, it does not refer to physical height. It refers to a different sort of height.

<sup>1702</sup> Literally, she.

<sup>1703</sup> The spirit fears the journey that it is about to undertake.

end of the verse shows that this is the case, for it reads: *because man goeth to his long home.*<sup>1704</sup>

The word *ve-yanetz* (shall blossom) is spelled with an *alef*.<sup>1705</sup> *Ve-yanetz* is similar to *va-yinatz* (and hath despised)<sup>1706</sup> in: *and hath rejected in the indignation of His anger* (Lam. 2:6). The meaning of *va-yinatz* is “and He despised.” This is so even though *ve-yanetz* and *va-yinatz* are two different forms.<sup>1707</sup>

*Ha-shaked* (the almond tree) is an adjective.<sup>1708</sup> *Shaked*<sup>1709</sup> follows the form of words that are vocalized like *dashen*<sup>1710</sup> (fat) and *shamen*<sup>1711</sup> (plenteous) in: *and it shall be fat and plenteous* (Is. 30:23). *Ha-shaked* (the almond tree) refers to the power which preserves the body's make up.<sup>1712</sup> *Shaked* is similar to *shikdu* (watch ye) in: *shikdu ve-shimru* (Watch ye, and keep) (Ezra 8:29), and *shakad* (watcheth) in: *the watchman watcheth but in vain* (Ps. 127:1). It is also similar to the word *shoked* (watcheth) in: *a leopard watcheth over their cities* (Jer. 5:6).

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<sup>1704</sup> This shows that man is afraid because he faces death.

<sup>1705</sup> The *alef* is silent. I.E. notes the spelling of *ve-yanetz* because he wants to compare *ve-yanetz* to *va-yinatz*, as both words come from the root *nun, alef, tzadi*.

<sup>1706</sup> Translated according to I.E.

<sup>1707</sup> *Ve-yanetz* is a *hifil*. *Va-yinatz* is a *kal*.

<sup>1708</sup> I.E. calls non-proper nouns “adjectives.”

<sup>1709</sup> *Shaked* is vocalized *kamatz, tzerei*.

<sup>1710</sup> Vocalized *kamatz, tzerei*.

<sup>1711</sup> Vocalized *kamatz, tzerei*.

<sup>1712</sup> What today we call the immune system.

The meaning of *ve-yanetz ha-shaked* (and the almond tree shall blossom) is: the power that usually protects the body will loath to watch over it.<sup>1713</sup>

*And the grasshopper shall drag itself along* means that it will be too hard for the power that preserves the body to provide enough strength to even bear a light grasshopper. How much more so will it be difficult for this power to bear the body?<sup>1714</sup>

The *tav* in the word *ve-yistabbel* (and shall drag along) is the *tav* of the *hitpa'el*.<sup>1715</sup> The *tav* is placed later in the word,<sup>1716</sup> as is the case in all words whose first root letter is a *samekh* or *shin*. Compare *mistolel*<sup>1717</sup> (exaltest thou thyself) (Ex. 9:17), and *mistolel* (maketh himself a prey) (Is. 59:15).<sup>1718</sup>

AND THE CAPERBERRY SHALL FAIL. It is known that the word *hafer* (he hath broken) (Ezek. 17:19) is always transitive.<sup>1719</sup> The meaning of *ve-tafer ha-aviyonah* is: “the counselor <sup>1720</sup> will break her counseling.” *Ha-aviyonah* (caperberry) refers to man's spirit.

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<sup>1713</sup> The power that protects the body will no longer "want" to watch over it, as evidenced by increasingly poor health.

<sup>1714</sup> Man's own body.

<sup>1715</sup> It is not a root letter. The root of *ve-yistabbel* is *samekh, bet, lamed*.

<sup>1716</sup> In most cases, the *tav* of the *hitpa'el* form is placed before the first root letter. However, when a stem has a *samekh, shin, or sin* as the first root letter, the *tav* follows the first root letter.

<sup>1717</sup> From the root *samekh, lamed, lamed*.

<sup>1718</sup> From the root *shin, lamed, lamed*.

<sup>1719</sup> According to I.E, *ve-tafer* in our verse is also transitive and means “will break.”

<sup>1720</sup> The counselor (man's spirit) will cease giving counsel. I.E. believes that *aviyonah* means “counselor.” He associates *aviyonah* with *binah* (understanding), which comes from the root *bet, yod, nun*.

This linguistic detail <sup>1721</sup> was already explained by Rabbi Judah son of David,<sup>1722</sup> the master grammarian whose soul is in Eden. Rabbi Judah son of David taught that the words *kam* (arose) (Josh. 8:19), *shav* (returned) (Gen. 18:33),<sup>1723</sup> and similar words <sup>1724</sup> come from a three-letter root whose middle stem letter is a *yod*. The word *kiyyem* (confirmed) in: *confirmed these matters of Purim* (Est. 9:32) shows that this the case.<sup>1725</sup> The word *binah* (understanding) is like the word *kimatam* (their rising up) in: *their sitting down, and their rising up* (Lam. 3:63).<sup>1726</sup> *Hevin* (understanding) (Is. 29:16) <sup>1727</sup> is like *hekim* (causeth to stand) (Num. 30:15).<sup>1728</sup> *Bantah* (Thou understandest) in: *Thou understandest my thought* (Ps. 139:2)<sup>1729</sup> is like *kamta*<sup>1730</sup> (thou didst rise) (2 Sam. 12:21). *Kam*, which is an

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<sup>1721</sup> The basis for relating *aviyonah* to *binah* (understanding). I.E. explains that certain Hebrew words like *binah* come from a three-letter root even though they often appear to come from two letter roots. He stresses this because not everyone of his readers was aware of this point. In fact, many believed that words like *kam*, *shav* and the like come from two letter roots.

<sup>1722</sup> Rabbi Judah ibn Chayuj.

<sup>1723</sup> Which appear to come from two-letter stems.

<sup>1724</sup> Literally, their comrades. Other verbs which similarly appear to be based on two-letter roots.

<sup>1725</sup> That *kam* and *shav*, which appear to come from two-letter roots, are based on three-letter roots whose middle stem is a *yod*. For *kam* also appears with a *yod*, as in *kiyyem*. I.E. now gives other examples of such words.

<sup>1726</sup> *Binah* like *kimah*, comes from a three-letter root. *Kimatam* is the word *kimah* plus the third person plural pronominal suffix.

<sup>1727</sup> From the root *bet, yod, nun*.

<sup>1728</sup> From the root *kof, yod, mem*.

<sup>1729</sup> From the root *bet, yod, nun*.

<sup>1730</sup> From the root *kof, yod, mem*.

adjective,<sup>1731</sup> is like *shav*<sup>1732</sup> (turn) in *I will turn the captivity of Jacob's tent* (Jer. 30:18).

The complete form of *kam* (established)<sup>1733</sup> is *kayyam*. *Kayyam* is vocalized like *gannav*.<sup>1734</sup> The full [present] feminine form of *kam* is *kayyemet*. When spelled with a *heh* [rather than with a *tav*] it is *kayyamah*.<sup>1735</sup> The accent is placed on the last syllable in *kayyamah*.

I now will backtrack and explain the word *aviyonah*. I believe<sup>1736</sup> that the *alef* of *aviyonah* is superfluous.<sup>1737</sup> It is like the *alef* in *ekdach* (carbuncles) (Is. 54:12),<sup>1738</sup> *ezro'a* (arm) (Jer. 32:21),<sup>1739</sup> and *eznichu* (shall become foul) (Is. 19:6).<sup>1740</sup>

According to this interpretation, *aviyonah* is an adjective meaning “understanding.” It is an expression for the spirit of understanding.<sup>1741</sup>

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<sup>1731</sup> I.E. refers to the present form as an adjective.

<sup>1732</sup> From the root *shin, yod, bet*.

<sup>1733</sup> The present form in which the middle root letter, *yod*, is present.

<sup>1734</sup> It is vocalized *pattach, kamatz*.

<sup>1735</sup> The full feminine present form of *kam* is *kayyemet* or *kayyamah*.

<sup>1736</sup> Literally, I will say.

<sup>1737</sup> According to I.E., the root of *aviyonah* is *bet, yod, nun*, which means “understanding.” In other words, *aviyonah* is a variant of *binah*.

<sup>1738</sup> From the root *kof, dalet, chet*. See I.E. on Is. 54:12.

<sup>1739</sup> The usual word for arm in Hebrew is *zero'a*, from the root *zayin, resh, ayin*.

<sup>1740</sup> From the root *zayin, nun, chet*.

<sup>1741</sup> According to this interpretation, *ve-tafer ha-aviyonah* (and the caperberry shall fail) means “and understanding shall fail.” That is, man's sense of reason shall fail.

BECAUSE MAN GOETH TO HIS LONG HOME. The reference is to the grave. The grave is the home in which man dwells forever.<sup>1742</sup>

The word *olam* (long) is also found meaning “a fixed time.”<sup>1743</sup> Compare: *and there abide forever* (ad *olam*) (1 Sam. 1:22), and: *he shall serve him forever* (le-*olam*) (Ex. 21:6).

AND THE MOURNERS GO ABOUT THE STREETS. When they carry the deceased. Compare: *He is borne upon the shoulder, he is carried* (Is. 46:7).

**6. BEFORE THE SILVER CORD IS SNAPPED ASUNDER, AND THE GOLDEN BOWL IS SHATTERED, AND THE PITCHER IS BROKEN AT THE FOUNTAIN, AND THE WHEEL FALLETH SHATTERED, INTO THE PIT.**

BEFORE THE SILVER CORD IS SNAPPED ASUNDER. This is a very esteemed parable.

[AND THE GOLDEN BOWL IS SHATTERED] The bowl is at the head of the wheel<sup>1744</sup> which is turned by the rope.<sup>1745</sup> The head of the rope is tied to the bowl.<sup>1746</sup>

*Ve-yeratek* (is snapped asunder) is related to *ha-rattok* (the chain) in: *make the chain* (Ezek. 7:23).<sup>1747</sup>

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<sup>1742</sup> According to this interpretation, *olam* means “forever,” and thus *bet olamo* (long home) is “his eternal home.”

<sup>1743</sup> It is possible that this interpretation alludes to the doctrine of resurrection. The grave is not the eternal home of man; but he is there for a fixed time. See I.E. on Dan. 12:2 (R. Goodman).

<sup>1744</sup> I.E. understands “wheel” as referring to a pulley placed over a well. The pulley draws up water in a bowl that is attached to it by means of a rope. The wheel breaks and falls into the well. The bowl is dashed to pieces, and no water can be drawn.

<sup>1745</sup> When the rope is lowered or raised it turns the wheel/pulley.

<sup>1746</sup> The bowl is lowered and raised by the rope which is attached to the pulley.

[BEFORE THE SILVER CORD IS SNAPPED ASUNDER] When the rope, which is compared to a chain [by Kohelet], is tied [to the pulley] and is lowered [into the well], it will not reach the fountain of water.<sup>1748</sup>

The same interpretation applies to the tradition which reads *yerachek* (it will be distanced) in place of *yeratek*.<sup>1749</sup>

The word *ve-tarutz* (shattered) is related to the word *ve-taritz* (and broke) in: *and broke his skull* (Judges 9:53). It is related in meaning to *va-yerotzetz* (and crushed) (ibid 10:8).

[The meaning of *ve-tarutz gullat ha-zahav, ve-tishaver kad al ha-mabu'a, ve-narotz ha-galgal el ha-bor* (and the golden bowl is shattered, and the pitcher is broken at the fountain, and the wheel<sup>1750</sup> falleth, shattered into the pit) is:] When the bowl is shattered, and the pulley is smashed in the pit, the pitcher is broken and water is not brought up.

*Ve-narotz* (broken) is a *nifal*.<sup>1751</sup> It is similar to *nakhon* (established) (Gen. 41:32), which is a singular in the perfect.<sup>1752</sup> *Nakhon* is related to the word *nakhonu* (prepared) in: *Judgments are prepared for scorners* (Prov. 19:29).<sup>1753</sup>

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<sup>1747</sup> The rope to which the bowl is attached is compared to a chain.

<sup>1748</sup> That is, before the rope, which is compared to a chain [by Kohelet], is tied [to the pulley] and is lowered [into the well], the attached bowl does not reach the fountain of water.

<sup>1749</sup> The *keri* (the traditional oral version) reads: *ad asher lo yeratek chevel ha-kesef*. The *ketiv* (the traditional written version) reads: *ad asher lo yerachek chevel ha-kesef*, meaning: “before the silver rope is distanced.” According to I.E., the *keri* and *ketiv* express the same idea. Both speak of the rope with the bowl attached to it being lowered and failing to reach the water.

<sup>1750</sup> The pulley.

<sup>1751</sup> From the root *resh, tzadi, tzadi*.

<sup>1752</sup> *Narotz* (broken), like *nakhon*, is a singular *nifal* in the perfect.

<sup>1753</sup> *Nakhonu*, like *enakhon*, comes from the root *kaf, vav, nun*.

*The silver cord* refers to the spinal cord. It is called the silver cord because it is white.

*The golden bowl* refers to the brain. The brain is compared to gold because the membrane that covers it is red.

The *pitcher* symbolizes the gall. It is referred to as the *pitcher* because the red bile is gathered there.

*The fountain* stands for the liver.

*The wheel*<sup>1754</sup> stands for the skull,<sup>1755</sup> which was always above.<sup>1756</sup> It falls shattered into the pit below the earth.<sup>1757</sup>

**7. AND THE DUST RETURNETH TO THE EARTH AS IT WAS, AND THE SPIRIT RETURNETH UNTO GOD WHO GAVE IT.**

AND THE DUST RETURNETH TO THE EARTH. Nothing of the body will remain except for the bones. They, too, shall turn into dust.

AND THE SPIRIT RETURNETH UNTO GOD WHO GAVE IT. This verse repudiates those who say that the spirit is an accident, for an accident does not return.<sup>1758</sup>

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<sup>1754</sup> Hebrew, *galgal*.

<sup>1755</sup> Hebrew, *gulgolet*. *Galgal* alludes to *gulgolet*.

<sup>1756</sup> Above the earth.

<sup>1757</sup> The grave.

<sup>1758</sup> By accident, I.E. means something that does not have an independent existence. For example, a table may be painted red. Red is an accident.” The table could be any color and would still be a table. If the soul were an accident, without an independent existence, it would die with the body. There would be nothing returning to its source, as opposed to Kohelet’s statement. Hence, the soul is something that has its own independent existence.

## 8. VANITY OF VANITIES, SAITH KOHELETH; ALL IS VANITY.

VANITY OF VANITIES [*HAVEL HAVALIM*]. It is possible that there are two forms for the Hebrew word for “vanity.”<sup>1759</sup> One of them follows the form of *zahav* (gold) (Gen. 24:22) [and is pronounced *haval*].<sup>1760</sup> The second is the more usual form. It follows the form of *eretz* (earth) (Gen. 1:24) [and is vocalized *hevel*].<sup>1761</sup>

[We find the same with the Hebrew word for “smoke.”]<sup>1762</sup> Compare: *and the smoke thereof* (ashano)<sup>1763</sup> *ascended as the smoke* (ke-eshen)<sup>1764</sup> *of a furnace* (Ex. 19:18).

When the word *haval* is in the construct, it is vocalized with a *tzerei* [that is, *havel*] like the word *chalev* (milk of) in: *milk of the goats*<sup>1765</sup> (Prov. 27:27).

Some say that *havel* is an imperative.<sup>1766</sup> Its meaning is “forsake.”<sup>1767</sup>

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<sup>1759</sup> Our verse reads: *havel havalim*. The usual term for vanity is *hevel*. Thus, our verse should read *hevel havalim*. This is because words vocalized *segol*, *segol* do not change their vocalization when in the construct. *Havel* is a construct of *haval*. Thus, the word for vanity in our verse is *haval*. Hence I.E.'s comment that it is possible that there are two forms for the Hebrew word for vanity.

<sup>1760</sup> It is vocalized *kamatz*, *kamatz*.

<sup>1761</sup> It is vocalized *segol*, *segol*.

<sup>1762</sup> There are two forms of the Hebrew word for smoke: *ashan* and *eshen*.

<sup>1763</sup> *Ashano* is the word *ashan* with the third person masculine singular pronominal suffix.

<sup>1764</sup> Here, the word for “smoke” is *eshen*.

<sup>1765</sup> Translated literary.

<sup>1766</sup> As it is in the phrase *havel havalim*. See Chapter 5, footnote 84.

<sup>1767</sup> Nachmanides accepted this interpretation. See his sermon on Kohelet in *Kitvei Ha-Ramban*, edited by, Chayyim Dov Chavel, *Volume 1*, (Ktav, 1963) pp. 179-210. . According to this interpretation, *havel havalim* means: “Forsake vanity,” or more literally, “Treat vanity as vanity.”

The word *Kohelet* [in our verse] has a *heh*, indicating the direct object, prefixed to it.<sup>1768</sup> [This is] because “Kohelet” [here] is an adjective. The *heh*<sup>1769</sup> indicating the direct object is not placed before a proper noun.

After Kohelet mentions the death of man (v. 7), he goes on to note: “It is now clear to you that I was correct in stating [at the opening of this book]: *Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.*”

**9. AND BESIDES THAT KOHELETH WAS WISE, HE ALSO TAUGHT THE PEOPLE KNOWLEDGE; YEA, HE PONDERED, AND SOUGHT OUT, AND SET IN ORDER MANY PROVERBS.**

AND BESIDES THAT KOHELETH WAS WISE, HE ALSO TAUGHT THE PEOPLE KNOWLEDGE. The meaning of *od* (also) is “consistently.”<sup>1770</sup> Compare, *od* (is yet) in: *his uncleanness is yet (od) upon him* (Num. 19:13).

AND PONDERED.<sup>1771</sup> *Ve-izzen* (he pondered) means: [he composed balanced] songs.<sup>1772</sup> *Ve-izzen* might also mean: he composed books which pondered wisdom.<sup>1773</sup> On the other hand, *ve-izzen* (and sought out) might be related to *oznayim* (ears) [in: *opening ears*] (Is. 42:20). It means he lectured.<sup>1774</sup>

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<sup>1768</sup> Our verse reads *amar ha-kohelet*, literally: “says the Kohelet.”

<sup>1769</sup> Literally, because the *heh*.

<sup>1770</sup> I.E. renders our phrase: He consistently taught the people knowledge.

<sup>1771</sup> Hebrew, *ve-izzen*.

<sup>1772</sup> *Izzen* comes from the root *alef, zayin, nun*, meaning “weighed” or “balanced (as on a scale)” I.E. renders *ve-izzen* as “he balanced,” and interprets “he balanced” as short for “he balanced poems.” That is, he composed poems whose lines are divided into two parts. Each half of the line has the same number of accents as the other half. The poems thus consisted of balanced lines.

<sup>1773</sup> According to this interpretation, *ve-izzen* means “he weighed.” That is, he weighed the teachings of wisdom, or he pondered wisdom.

<sup>1774</sup> According to this interpretation, *ve-izzen* means “he made the ear to hear.” That is, he taught.

AND SOUGHT OUT. He taught the people various ways to investigate knowledge.<sup>1775</sup> According to this interpretation, *ve-chikker* (and sought) has two objects.<sup>1776</sup>

AND SET IN ORDER MANY PROVERBS. Compare: *And he spoke three thousand proverbs* (1 Kings 5:12).

**10. KOHELETH SOUGHT TO FIND OUT WORDS OF DELIGHT, AND THAT WHICH WAS WRITTEN UPRIGHTLY, EVEN WORDS OF TRUTH.**

KOHELETH SOUGHT TO FIND OUT WORDS OF DELIGHT. The reference is to supernal wisdom.<sup>1777</sup>

Kohelet sought [supernal wisdom] until he found it.

[WORDS OF DELIGHT] The reference is to understanding why something is created in a certain way<sup>1778</sup> and not in another way, and why this is so.

AND THAT WHICH WAS WRITTEN UPRIGHTLY. The reference is to[ a book of] explanations.<sup>1779</sup> The Book of Yashar<sup>1780</sup> (Josh. 10:13; 2 Sam. 1:18) is similar.<sup>1781</sup> This book is not found among us.<sup>1782</sup>

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<sup>1775</sup> According to I.E., *ve-chikker* (and sought) means: he taught people how to seek knowledge. I.E. renders thus because the verse speaks of Kohelet as a teacher.

<sup>1776</sup> It is a causative. It applies to 1) Kohelet, who taught people how to seek knowledge, and 2) the people who were taught how to seek it. *Ve-chikker* is a *pi'el*, an active form. It is not usually causative. Hence, I.E. points out that here it is a causative.

<sup>1777</sup> I.E. will soon explain “supernal wisdom” as: understanding why something is created in a certain way not in another way, and why this is so.

<sup>1778</sup> Literally, in this way.

<sup>1779</sup> A book that comments on the right path to take in life. In his Introduction to his commentary on Kohelet, I.E. paraphrases this verse as follows: The Lord God of Israel stirred up the spirit of His friend Solomon, to explain words of delight... and to teach the straight path (*ha-derekh ha-yesharah*). It seems that I.E. explains *ve-katuv yosher* (and that which was written uprightly), as meaning and wrote a work explaining the correct path that a person is to take (R. Goodman).

**11. THE WORDS OF THE WISE ARE AS GOADS, AND AS NAILS WELL FASTENED ARE THOSE THAT ARE COMPOSED IN COLLECTIONS; THEY ARE GIVEN FROM ONE SHEPHERD. THE WORDS OF THE WISE ARE AS GOADS.** There are among the teachings of the ancients words that are like goads which are used to prod cattle. These words correct and awaken the soul.

[AND AS NAILS WELL-FASTENED ARE THOSE THAT ARE COMPOSED IN COLLECTIONS] There are also among the teachings of the ancients<sup>1783</sup> words that are like well-fastened nails,<sup>1784</sup> [that is] large nails that connect<sup>1785</sup> the boards that make up the doors,<sup>1786</sup> and ensure that the boards do not separate. This is the law of man.<sup>1787</sup>

Others say that *ba'alei asuppot* (those that are composed in collections) refers to those who gather information from many books and produce compositions.<sup>1788</sup>

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<sup>1780</sup> Literally, The Book of the Straight.

<sup>1781</sup> It too contained instructions on the straight path that one should take.

<sup>1782</sup> The book has been lost.

<sup>1783</sup> Literally, “among them.”

<sup>1784</sup> This interpretation renders *masmerot netu'im* (well-fastened nails) as “large nails.”

<sup>1785</sup> Literally, gather.

<sup>1786</sup> I.E. renders *ba'alei asuppot* (those that are composed in collections) as: nails which are capable of gathering; that is, holding together the planks which make up the doors. 1 Chron. 22:3 speaks of nails holding doors together. Hence, I.E.'s interpretation.

<sup>1787</sup> The words of the wise teach one how to live. See I.E.'s comments on v. 13.

<sup>1788</sup> According to this interpretation, *ba'alei asuppot* means: “those who gather,” or “those who specialize in gathering,” or “masters of gatherings.”

Now even though they<sup>1789</sup> differ one from the other, they were all taught by one Creator.<sup>1790</sup>

Our verse reads: *They are given from one shepherd.* Kohelet<sup>1791</sup> compares men to sheep. Hence, he spoke of the need for prods [to move them] (v. 11).<sup>1792</sup>

**12.. AND FURTHERMORE, MY SON, BE ADMONISHED: OF MAKING MANY BOOKS THERE IS NO END; AND MUCH STUDY IS A WEARINESS OF THE FLESH.**

AND FURTHERMORE, MY SON. *Hi-zaher asot sefarim* (be admonished: making ...books)<sup>1793</sup> should be read as if written: *hi-zaher me-asot sefarim* (be admonished of making many books). Compare: *hi shameru lakhem alot ba-har* (take heed to yourselves, that ye go up into the mount)<sup>1794</sup> (Ex. 19:12) [which is to be read as if written: *hishameru lakhem me-alot ba-har* (take heed to yourselves from going up into the mount)].

The word *asot* (making) means “buying” or “writing.” [Kohelet admonishes not to make or buy many books] because there is no end [to writing or buying books.]

The *lamed* of *lahag* (study) is a root letter. It is like the *lamed* of *limmad* (taught)<sup>1795</sup> in *limmad da'at* (taught knowledge) (v. 9). *Lahag* is vocalized like

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<sup>1789</sup> The wise men.

<sup>1790</sup> Compare the Rabbinic statement, “These and these are the words of the living God.” (Eruvin 3b). Wise men may differ in the specific words they use, but the general principles they teach are in full agreement with each other, since the source of their words is God.

<sup>1791</sup> In our verse.

<sup>1792</sup> Literally, it needs prods.

<sup>1793</sup> Translated literally. Hence, I.E.'s comment.

<sup>1794</sup> Translated literally. Hence, I.E.'s comment.

<sup>1795</sup> The *lamed* of *limmad* is a root letter.

*lahat* (flaming)<sup>1796</sup> in *lahat ha-cherev* (the flaming sword) (Gen. 3:24). The word does not appear again in Scripture.<sup>1797</sup> In Arabic, the word *lahag* means "reading."<sup>1798</sup>

**13. THE END OF THE MATTER, ALL HAVING BEEN HEARD: FEAR GOD, AND KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS; FOR THIS IS THE WHOLE MAN.**

THE END OF THE MATTER, ALL HAVING BEEN HEARD. [The meaning of all *having been heard* is:] You have heard all that I have to say.<sup>1799</sup> Or: You heard all the differences of opinion of the wise men. Now that you have heard all of this, do the following: *fear God*, [*and keep His commandments*].

FOR THIS IS THE WHOLE MAN. Kohelet goes back and comments on what he spoke about; namely, that man is a vanity in his life and in his death. *For this is the whole man* means: "This is what happens to all men." On the other hand, for *this is the whole man* might refer to *fear [of] God*, the revered and the awesome.

**14. FOR GOD SHALL BRING EVERY WORK INTO THE JUDGMENT CONCERNING EVERY HIDDEN THING, WHETHER IT BE GOOD OR WHETHER IT BE EVIL.**

FOR GOD SHALL BRING EVERY WORK INTO THE JUDGMENT. The secret regarding why Scripture employs the name *Elohim* for God but does not employ the proper name of the Lord (YHVH) in the Book of Genesis before the

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<sup>1796</sup> It is vocalized *pattach*, *pattach*.

<sup>1797</sup> Literally, there is nothing similar to it. Hence, we can only guess its meaning.

<sup>1798</sup> Our verse would then be understood to mean: And much reading is a weariness of the flesh.

<sup>1799</sup> Literally, I have made you hear everything.

conclusion [of the chapter<sup>1800</sup> beginning with the] word *va-yekhullu* (were finished) (Gen. 2:1)],<sup>1801</sup> is the secret of the book of Kohelet.<sup>1802</sup>

The meaning of *every hidden thing* [*whether it be good or whether it be evil*] is: In accordance with that which is hidden. That is, in accordance with the intention of the heart<sup>1803</sup>—be it good or evil.<sup>1804</sup>

Others say that the meaning of *concerning every hidden thing* is: Even everything that is hidden from you.<sup>1805</sup>

The first interpretation appears to me to be correct.

Blessed be the One Who knows the truth.

I ask:

May forgiveness for my errors be among His acts of loving kindness.

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<sup>1800</sup> I. E. speaks of the masoretic chapters. These chapters do not coincide with the chapters that appear in contemporary editions of the Bible.

<sup>1801</sup> Genesis 2:3 correspond to the chapter beginning with the word *va-yekhullu*. The name YHVH does not appear in Genesis until 2:4.

<sup>1802</sup> According to I.E., the name *Elohim* refers to God Who laid down the unchangeable laws of nature. The name YHVH refers to God Who interferes with the laws of nature. See I.E. on Ex. 3:15: "It is with the name YHVH that new signs and wonders come into this world. Therefore, this name is not found in the Book of Kohelet, as this book speaks of things concerning which nothing can be added nor taken away. It deals with those things concerning which there is nothing new under the sun." Kohelet deals with the world as it is governed by the laws of nature. So does Scripture from Gen. 1:1 to Gen. 2:3.

<sup>1803</sup> The intention of the heart is hidden.

<sup>1804</sup> God's judgment is based on the intention of one's heart. According to this interpretation, the meaning of our verse is: For God shall bring every work into judgment in accordance with the hidden intention of its perpetrator. That is, whether one's intentions were good or evil

<sup>1805</sup> According to this interpretation, the meaning of our verse is: For God shall bring every work, even things hidden from you, into judgment, whether it be good or whether it be evil. In other words, God will judge one's actions even if the person didn't notice performing them.

May He awaken my glory and teach me the way of life.

**THE BOOK [INTERPRETING KOHELET] IS COMPLETED.**

**ALL HIDDEN THINGS HAVE BEEN EXPLAINED WITH THE HELP OF  
GOD THE ETERNAL, THE SOURCE OF ALL KNOWLEDGE.<sup>1806</sup>**

**A MULTITUDE OF PRAISES TO HIS NAME.**

**ALL LOVING KINDNESS IS WITH HIM.**

**HE WILL SEND<sup>1807</sup> TO HIS PEOPLE REDEMPTION AND SALVATION.**

**ACCORDING TO THE CALCULATIONS OF THOSE WHO KNOW THE  
DELIGHTFUL DOCUMENT<sup>1808</sup> THERE ARE NOW NINE HUNDRED  
PLUS FOUR THOUSAND YEARS [SINCE] THE CREATION OF THE  
WORLD<sup>1809</sup> ].<sup>1810</sup>**

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<sup>1806</sup> Literally, who teaches all knowledge.

<sup>1807</sup> Literally, command.

<sup>1808</sup> See Prov. 8:30. According to the Rabbis, the reference is to the Torah.

<sup>1809</sup> I.E. completed his commentary in the year 4900 since Creation, 1140 C.E.

<sup>1810</sup> I want to thank Dr. Rick Strassman for his help in editing this translation. If you have any comments or corrections please contact me at: Strickmans@gmail.com

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