

BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES - KOHELET
KOHELET: A LIVING DIALOGUE.

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ABSTRACT.

The book of Ecclesiastes or *Kohelet*, using its Hebrew title is one of the Five *Megilloth* (Scrolls). This Biblical book characterizes life as utter futility like "shepherding" or "chasing the wind".

Throughout the book one encounters teachings that stand in considerable tension with each other. For example in 7:3 *Kohelet* states: "Anger is better than happiness" while later in 8:15 he writes: "I praised Happiness. In 7: 1 he says: "Better the day of one's death than the day one is born" while in 11: 7 he states: "Light is sweet and good for the eyes so as to see the sun". Contradictions such as these are found throughout the book.

The following study of *Kohelet* will attempt to analyze previous studies of the book which have offered ways of interpreting these contradictions. Several responses have commended themselves to interpreters. Some see the author of *Kohelet* as citing traditional wisdom and then refuting it. Others see the book as reflecting a single author's changing viewpoints over the years as well as life's ambiguities. Some understand *Kohelet* as a book written by one author while later editors added their viewpoints.

After a critical analysis of these various approaches my work seeks to suggest a further way of understanding these contradictions. The essence of my thesis is that *Kohelet* is a book that opens a discussion between different personalities and different opinions. Understanding *Kohelet* as a dialogue and not a monologue gives the book logical consistency and cohesiveness. This work will use traditional commentators to help understand and harmonize the "so-called" contradictions. A commentary of the whole text will then be given which will give validity to my thesis.

My work identifies four characters of *Kohelet* - the builder, the philosopher, the man of pleasure and the G-d fearing individual who all attempt to answer the question - what is the meaning of life? It will be shown that each section or chapter of the book is a speech being made by one of these characters trying to prove that his view of life is correct.

Through debate and comment these characters finally come to an understanding of the truth. Hence a philological and literary analysis of the speeches of the characters supports my thesis. The following is the proposed chapter division:

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Chapter 2 - Approaches to the Contradictions in *Kohelet*

Chapter 3 - Commentary of the Book of *Kohelet*

Chapter 4 - Conclusion : The Dialogical Nature of the Book of *Kohelet*

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION¹

The *Talmud Bavli* in Tractate *Shabbat* 30b discusses the inherent contradictions in the Book of *Kohelet*. These contradictions concerned the Rabbis and led them to question the sacred status of the Book. The *Talmud* writes: "The sages sought to withdraw the Book of *Kohelet* because its words are mutually contradictory. Why then did they not withdraw it? Because it begins with words of *Torah* and it ends with words of *Torah*."

We see from this *Talmudic* source how seriously the Rabbis considered the contradictions in *Kohelet*.

The Ibn Ezra in his commentary on *Kohelet* 7:3 writes the following:

In this book are difficult words. In one place it may say something and in another the exact opposite is said. It is for this reason that the Sages sought to hide the Book of *Kohelet* because its words are mutually contradictory.

We shall list a number of these contradictions and discuss how scholars both ancient and modern have explained them.

1:TRANSCIENCE VERSUS STABILITY

In 1:2 we read: "*Hevel Havalim*" which seems to imply that everything in this world passes away while in 1:4 *Kohelet* states: "And the earth abideth for ever".

¹ The Biblical passages appear throughout in English translation. The English translation used is that of the Jewish Publication Society of America (1955) unless otherwise stated.

In 3:11 he writes: "He hath made everything beautiful in its time" while in 7:13 he asks the question: "Consider the work of G-d; for who can make that straight, which He hath made crooked?"

2: LIFE VERSUS DEATH

In 7:1 he writes: "A good name is better than precious oil; And the day of death than the day of one's birth" while in 9:4 he states: "For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope; for a living dog is better than a dead lion."

In 4:2 he says: "Wherefore I praised the dead that are already dead more than the living that are yet alive" while in 11:7-8 he states: "And the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun. For if a man live many years, let him rejoice in them all."

3: REJOICING VERSUS MOURNING

In 7:2 *Kohelet* writes: "It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting; For that is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to his heart" while in 3:12 he states: "I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to get pleasure so long as they live."

In 7:4 he says: "The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; But the heart of fools is in the house of mirth," while in 2:24 he writes: "There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink and make his soul enjoy pleasure for his labour. This also I saw that it is from the hand of G-d."

4: WISDOM VERSUS FOOLISHNESS

In 2:13-14 *Kohelet* writes: "Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness. 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" while in 6:8 he asks: "For what advantage hath the wise more than the fool? or the poor man that hath understanding, in walking before the living?"

In 8:1 he asks: "Who is the wise man? and who knows the interpretation of a thing? A man's wisdom makes his face to shine, and the boldness of his face is changed," while in 8:17 he states: "Then I beheld all the work of G-d, 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."

5: REWARD AND PUNISHMENT

In 8:12 - 13 he states: "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 G-d, that fear before Him; 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 G-d." However in 7:15 he writes: "There is a righteous man that perisheth in his righteousness and there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his evil-doing."

In 3:17 he says: "I said in my heart The righteous and the wicked G-d will judge for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work" while in 9:10 he states: "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."

These are examples of the contradictions that can be found throughout the Book.² In the next Chapter we will discuss the various approaches that have been given to explain these contradictions. In Chapter 3 we will suggest a commentary on *Kohelet* which will provide another way of understanding the contradictions in the Book. In Chapter 4 we will summarize our thesis which seeks to show the Dialogical nature of *Kohelet*.

² Mordechai Zer Kavod in his introduction to *Kohelet* (p. 25), discusses these contradictions in some detail.

CHAPTER 2

APPROACHES TO THE CONTRADICTIONS IN KOHELET

The traditional approach adopted by the *Talmud* and later Rabbinical sources is to reconcile the apparently conflicting statements in *Kohelet* by showing that they use words differently or deal with different topics. For example the *Talmud Bavli* in *Shabbat* 30b quotes the verse in *Kohelet* 8:15: "I praised happiness" and interprets it as referring to the happiness that comes from observing commandments, while the verse in *Kohelet* 2:2: "And rejoicing what does this accomplish" writes of pleasure that does not come from keeping the commandments.

This approach of harmonizing the supposed contradictions in *Kohelet* is developed systematically by the Ibn Ezra in his commentary on *Kohelet* verse 7:3. His basic premise is that: "Even the least of the wise would not write a book and contradict his own words in his book." He continues: "And after the verse itself says of Solomon that there was no man as wise as him we know that his words are not contradictory, and they are fully understood to one who has straight-forward reasoning." He also dismisses those who see various authors who wrote *Kohelet*. He writes "This is not correct because the verse itself says "And more *Kohelet* was wise" - implying he was one man! Furthermore the verse says in 1:12: "I *Kohelet* was King" showing conclusively that there is one author of the book."

The Ibn Ezra reconciles the contradictions in *Kohelet* by establishing four guiding principles.

- (a) Two sentences may in themselves be correct but in differing circumstances.
- (b) Two sentences one which may be correct and the other the view of a fringe group.
- (c) Two sentences one which is the rule and one is the exception.
- (d) Two sentences one that is the view of one group and the other the view of *Kohelet* himself.

We will examine each principle and see how each can be used to answer the contradictions listed earlier.

(a) *Kohelet* writes in verse 7:9: "For anger resteth in the bosom of fools" whereas in 1:18 he writes: "For in much wisdom is much vexation." The Ibn Ezra suggests that *Kohelet* does not attack the characteristic of anger as such only its manifestations. Therefore the fool is criticized for not being able to control his anger whereas the wise man has self control. Similarly when *Kohelet* writes in 1:2: "Everything passes" he is referring to people and their actions which are transient whereas in 1:4: "The earth always stands" is referring to the creations of G-d which are eternal. This is how Ibn Ezra interprets the apparent contradictions mentioned in Point 1 (Transience versus Stability.)

(b) *Kohelet* writes in verse 7:2: "Better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting" which is his true perception of the place of happiness in this world, whereas the verse in 5:17: "Behold I have seen it to be good to eat and to drink and to enjoy pleasure" is the view of the fool and is not to be taken seriously. Similarly the verse in 3:12: "I know there is nothing better for them than to rejoice" is referring to those people in this world who lack wisdom and can only enjoy physical pleasures. According to Ibn Ezra then, the contradictions mentioned earlier, in Point 3 under the heading Rejoicing versus Mourning, no longer exist.

(c) When *Kohelet* writes in 8:13: "But it shall not be well with wicked, neither will he prolong his days" he is giving the state of affairs as it normally is. The verse however in 7:15: "And there is a wicked man that

prolongeth his life" is the exception to the rule. This is how the Ibn Ezra will harmonize the contradictions in our section on Reward and Punishment (Point 5).

(d) When *Kohelet* writes in 9:4: "For a living dog is better than a dead lion" he is stating the opinion of others but not his own, whereas in 7:1: "Better the day of death than the day one is born " is reflecting *Kohelet's* own view. This is how the Ibn Ezra reconciles the conflict between Life and Death discussed in Point 2 (Life versus Death).

Mordechai Zer-Kavod in his introduction to *Kohelet* (p.26) discusses the Ibn Ezra's interpretation in great detail.

Ibn Ezra's approach of reconciling the apparent contradictions in *Kohelet* by applying his four principles to the conflicting texts is one that appears to me to have merit but has in my opinion substantial flaws as well. While his explanation does provide an answer to the contradictions when applied locally it does not provide for an inherent logical structure for the book as a whole. Even if Ibn Ezra's attempt at harmonization is correct it still does not explain the seemingly haphazard way in which the verses have been put together.

Other commentators have adopted different approaches to provide harmony to the book. Loader, for example, in his book "Polar Structures in the Book of Qohelet" (1979) examines the contradictions in the book and distinguishes in each a "pole" and a "contra-pole". These are balanced by what he calls a "tension." On p. 33, for example, he develops his theory of polar structures by noting the juxtaposition of life and death in the beginning of *Kohelet* Chapter 7. Life is the "pole" and death is the "contra-pole. *Kohelet's* purpose is to create a tension between them and to counter the ideas of general *hokhma*. Death is seen here to be preferable to life. This emphasizes the main theme of the book that all is *hevel*.

Loader emphasizes that the patterns of polarity share a basic similarity. On p.105 he writes: "Their contents are structured as pole A : : pole B

where G-d always works in such a way that a negative, unfavorable tension results (*hevel*)."

Loader develops his theme by rejecting those approaches that look for a logical structure in the whole book while at the same time not accepting those who see *Kohelet* as a collection of verses strung together with no coherent structure. Loader's approach sees the book composed of what he calls "separate pericopes." On p. 9 he writes:

We have no logical development of thought reflected in the composition of the book but there are various separate pericopes. These are structured carefully. Without contradicting my first point it can also be said that separate pericopes are compositionally related to each other. The basic idea running through all of them is the conviction of emptiness which purposely begins and ends the book.

I would agree with Fox's (1989) assessment of Loader's work when he writes (p. 20): "I do not always find both "poles" of a contradiction in a single passage. Moreover, even if Loader's conclusion is right, I do not think his analysis of specific passages leads to it." Furthermore, as Wilson cited in Fox (1987) points out, Loader's positive - negative schema often results in forced interpretations.

There are those who attempt to see the tensions in the book as a result of additions by another author. For example, James Crenshaw (1987) in his commentary on the book identifies various sections of the book as being added by another writer. In his analysis of the book's structure in the Introduction to his commentary (p. 48), he suggests that the Superscription (1:1), the epilogues and some glosses are not the result of *Kohelet's* own work but that of someone else. The first epilogue (12:9-11) he suggests was written by a close student of *Kohelet's* who aims at summarizing the purpose of the book, whereas the second epilogue (12:12-14) was added by a traditional writer who wanted to correct the radical impression created by some of *Kohelet's* observations.

This attempt by Crenshaw may be challenged on the following grounds. In Crenshaw's view *Kohelet's* world vision is that of a skeptic whose opinion on theological issues differs greatly from the traditional prospective. To prove this he cites the various examples in the book that refute traditional wisdom. "*Hevel havalim* says *Kohelet*" (1:2) shows that *Kohelet* sees the world as one which has no purpose and direction. "What profit has man for all his labour" (1:3) continues with this theme. *Kohelet's* logical conclusion according to Crenshaw is: "I said in my heart I will try you with mirth and enjoy pleasure" (2:1). If there is no purpose to life one might as well enjoy it as much as possible. When faced with the Epilogue which has a completely different message of: "The end of the matter all having been heard: fear G-d and keep His commandments for this is the whole man," (12 :13) Crenshaw is forced to explain that this is an addition. Why is it more logical for Crenshaw to see the beginning of *Kohelet* as being authentic and the epilogue an addition than to see the opening of the book as an addition and the epilogue as authentic?

Furthermore there are verses in the book which seem to support the traditionalist approach and which Crenshaw himself does not view as additions. For example in 8:5 *Kohelet* writes: "Who keeps the commandment shall know no evil" which is certainly a traditionalist view and in 8:12 he suggests that: "I know that it shall be well with them that fear G-d that fear before Him."

Crenshaw himself is aware of the difficulty of categorizing some passages as being authentic and others as being additions and therefore gives another explanation for the contradictions in *Kohelet*. He writes (p. 49) :

I believe the tensions of the book represent for the most part the fruit of a lifetime's research. Changing circumstances evoke different responses to conventional wisdom and to one's own former thoughts. Differences in societal concerns also dictate a variety of literary expressions. *Kohelet* bares his soul in all its twistings and turnings ups and downs and he invites readers to accompany him in pursuit of fresh discovery. But the contradictions suggest more than the

result of time's passage. They express the ambiguities of daily existence and the absurdity of human efforts to understand it.

This explanation of the contradictions in the book in my opinion, certainly seems more plausible and logical than the addition theory but in my view suffers one major drawback. It does not explain the fact that *Kohelet* lacks any discernible progression in thought. The book may indeed "express the ambiguities of daily existence", but it does so in a very haphazard way. Surely one would expect to see a book of this kind develop its ideas in some form of systematic way?

The addition theory has one further problem. If the book was seen to be so offensive in nature to traditional thought that it was felt necessary to add verses to correct the image of the book why did they copy it at all? Surely it would have been more effective to simply suppress the book? As Gordis writes (p. 71):

None of these scholars seeks to explain why the book was deemed worthy of this effort to "legitimatize" it, when it could so easily been suppressed... it was clear that a given book had been compiled after prophecy had ceased in Israel, or if it contradicted traditional *Halachah*... no elaborate effort was undertaken to counteract its heterodox features by glosses and interpolations, as is assumed for *Kohelet*. Instead, such works were withdrawn by the authorities from public use, by being stored away in the *genizah*, and thus consigned to oblivion and ultimate destruction.

If the purpose of the additions was to act as a counterbalance to *Kohelet's* skepticism then it is questionable whether they achieved their aim.

Another approach suggested by the commentators to tackle the problem of contradictions in the book is that of the use of quotations. Robert Gordis is the main protagonist of this view and in his book, "*Kohelet* - The Man and His World; a Study of Ecclesiastes" he devotes a whole chapter to

developing his theory. Gordis understands *Kohelet* to frequently quote other sources for various purposes. He suggests that this characteristic of the book is not unique to *Kohelet* but can be found in other sections of the Bible and in *Talmudic Literature*. Gordis (p. 96) defines his use of the term quotations as:

Words which do not reflect the personal sentiments of the author of the literary composition in which they are found but have been introduced by the author to convey the standpoint of another person or situation.

The use of quotations is, according to Gordis, especially common in Wisdom literature. Teachers of Wisdom would have occasion to quote conventional proverbs for a variety of purposes. These may be cited in order to serve as a text for an ironic or negating comment or they may be brought by the speaker who cites the words and sentiments of his opponents in order to disagree with them.

Gordis notes four types of quotations in the book that each have various sub-types. The first type he calls: (p.99) "The straightforward use of proverbial quotations." These quotations are brought to strengthen an argument and therefore require no expansion or comment because the writer accepts them as true. For example in *Kohelet* 11:1 he writes: "Send your bread upon the waters so that you may find it again after many days." According to Gordis *Kohelet* is here quoting conventional wisdom to suggest that it is wise to diversify one's undertakings. However as Gordis himself points out it is difficult to know whether *Kohelet* is quoting already existing proverbs or composing them himself.

A second type of quotation is used by *Kohelet* to buttress his argument with a proverb, part of which is apposite, while the rest is quoted for the sake of completeness. For example, *Kohelet* writes in 5:1-2: "Do not hasten to speak nor let yourself be rushed into uttering words before G-d; for G-d is in heaven and you are on earth - therefore let your words be few. For "As dreams come with many concerns so the fool speaks with

many words." The last sentence is the proverb brought by *Kohelet* while the rest of the saying is mentioned to complete the idea.

The third type of quotation characteristic of *Kohelet* is the use of proverbial quotations as a text. For example, in *Kohelet* 7:2 he writes: "Better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a banquet hall." This proverb warns against the immorality of the house of mirth. Another example used by *Kohelet*, emphasizes that love of money does not make for happiness. In *Kohelet* 5:9 he writes: "He who loves money will never have enough of it, and he who loves wealth will never attain it."

The fourth type of quotation which Gordis discusses is the use of contrasting proverbs by *Kohelet*. Proverbs frequently contradict one another. For example, *Kohelet* examines the theme of hard work. He himself has doubts on the subject by quoting the conventional view and following it with another proverb which has an opposite intent. Thus we find in 4:5-6: "The fool folds his hands and thus destroys himself. Better is a handful acquired with ease than two hands full gained through toil and chasing after wind." Often the proverbs contradicting each other are brief ones. For example: "Wisdom is better than strength" but "the poor man's wisdom is despised and his words go unheeded". (9:16)

Gordis's approach to the contradictions has much the same effect as the theory of additions. One fundamental problem is the absence of quotation marks in the text. This being so, it is difficult to know whether *Kohelet* brings a proverb to support his view or to reject it. We do not know therefore *Kohelet's* relation to the views that the proverbs express. As Fox points out (p.28): "unless we assume that *Kohelet* rejects the ideas he is quoting, the quotation hypothesis in itself takes us nowhere."

Of particular interest is Michael Fox's interpretation of the contradictions in *Kohelet*. In his book '*Qohelet* And His Contradictions' he attempts to come to an understanding of the contradictions of the book by defining the use of various terms by the author of *Kohelet*. He stresses that he does not attempt to explain all the contradictions but to give an understanding of the major ones.

Fox's major thesis is that (p. 10) :

Qohelet is not primarily concerned with the value of possessions or the worth of human striving but rather with the rationality of existence. This rationality he denies by calling everything *hevel*. But even in failure, rationality remains an irreducible value, one by which life must be judged.

Fox comes to this conclusion by examining the use of various terms in the book and in particular the use of the word *hevel*. In Chapter 1 of his book Fox examines the various uses of the word *hevel* in the Bible and comes to the conclusion that in *Kohelet*, *hevel* means absurd. *Kohelet* sees the world and witnesses phenomena that appear to contradict each other.

Kohelet, according to Fox, recognizes these contradictions and uses them for his claim that "everything is absurd".

Fox writes (p.11):

Qohelet uses contradictions as the lens through which to view life; it is appropriate, then, that we use his contradictions as the angle of approach to his thought. Exegesis has usually sought to push *Qohelet* to one side or the other, to show him consistently pious or consistently skeptical and pessimistic. I have tried to be faithful to the uneasy tensions that I see as characterizing *Qohelet's* attitudes and world view.

In other chapters of his book, Fox highlights areas of tension and contradiction that *Kohelet* sees exist in the world. For example in Chapter 2, Fox analyses how the word *a'mal* (toil) is used in the book of *Kohelet*. On the one hand *Kohelet* sees that toil is absurd and without any advantage, yet it provides wealth and is a source of pleasure. This contradiction leads *Kohelet* to praise toil on the one hand while criticizing it on the other. If toil is absurd how can it be good as well?

In Chapter 3, Fox examines *Kohelet's* understanding of wisdom. Here too we find a basic contradiction. On the one hand *Kohelet* affirms the value of wisdom and knowledge and on the other he seems to deny it. This tension arises out of *Kohelet's* life experiences and we are left with the question, what can we know and why should we know it?

In Chapter 4, Fox deals with *Kohelet's* understanding of G-d's judgment in the world. Here too we find basic contradictions. *Kohelet* has been brought up to understand G-d as being merciful and just, and he cannot understand how in life this does not always seem to be the case. Life is unjust but G-d is just. How then, he asks, are we to understand the moral quality of the world?

All these topics are dealt with in depth by Fox. His basic conclusion that *Kohelet* is dealing with the rationality of existence is one that has much worth. However I find two major difficulties with Fox's approach.

Firstly, like many other commentators we have discussed, Fox does not explain the inner structure and coherent logic of the book. The themes dealt with by *Kohelet* are fundamental to the meaning of life, but the connection between the themes does not seem to flow one to the other. Fox would counter that *Kohelet* deals with each theme separately and develops his view on each theme independently as he sees the world. However I think that there is more structure to the book and between the themes than Fox would have us imagine. My thesis shows how this is so.

Secondly, Fox's conclusion that *Kohelet* is dealing with the absurdities of life appears to me problematic when one considers the reason why *Kohelet* was included in the works of the *Bible*. For what purpose did the sages include *Kohelet* into the canon if it is a work which looks at the contradictions of life and leaves us with more questions than answers? Fox attempts to answer this question when he writes (p.138):

The book's conclusion helped its acceptance as sacred scripture, for it "ends with words of *Torah*" (*Bavli Shab.* 30b). Since it is the last word in the book, the familiar piety

of the conclusion could outweigh the uncomfortable observations of the preceding twelve chapters.

I question Fox's comment here. A closer look at the words of the *Talmud Bavli* in *Shabbat* 30b leads me to a different conclusion. The *Talmud* writes:

Rabbi Judah the son of R. Samuel b. Shilath 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.

This statement of the *Talmud* states explicitly that *Kohelet* was included in the canon because both its beginning and its end included words of religious teaching. The implication is that several verses at the end of *Kohelet* which emphasize "familiar piety" would not have on their own been enough to dispel the "uncomfortable observations" of the first twelve chapters. It was only because the sages saw that the beginning and the end of the book contained religious teaching that they decided to include it in the canon.

In my thesis, I attempt to show that there is an inner structure and cohesion to the book. The essence of my thesis is that *Kohelet* is a book that opens a discussion between and not as a monologue gives the book logical consistency and cohesiveness. Recent theories of literature will enable us to look at the book as a whole through a synchronic reading and help us to understand the "so called" contradictions. A commentary of the whole text will be given which will give validity to my thesis.

My thesis that *Kohelet* is a book that brings the argument of various personalities is not original. It different personalities and different opinions. Understanding *Kohelet* as a dialogue has its source in the words of the Meiri in his introduction to the Book of *Misle*.

He writes (p. 2):

Kohelet mentions opposing views and stands confused wondering which one is correct. He thus mentions in a number of places views that contradict fundamental beliefs such as reward and punishment, G-d's providence in this world. He mentions these views so as to search through knowledge which is the correct path.

My work identifies four characters of *Kohelet* - the builder, the philosopher, the man of pleasure and the G-d fearing individual. These four characters all attempt to answer the question - what is the meaning of life? It will be shown that each section or chapter of the book is a speech being made by one of these characters trying to prove that his view of life is correct. Through debate and comment these characters finally come to an understanding of the truth. Hence a philological and literary analysis of the speeches of the characters, demonstrated through traditional Jewish sources, supports my view.

CHAPTER 3

COMMENTARY ON THE BOOK OF KOHELET

(i) THE NEVER ENDING CYCLE OF NATURE

1:1: The words of *Kohelet*, David's son, king in Jerusalem.

1:2: *Hevel havalim* says *Kohelet*. *Hevel havalim* everything is *hevel*.

1:3: What profit has man of all his labour wherein he labours under the sun?

1:4: One generation passes away, and another generation comes; And the earth abides forever.

1:5: The sun also arises, and the sun goes down, And hastens to his place where he arises.

1:6: The wind goes toward the south, And turns about unto the north; It turns about continually in circuit, And the wind returns again to its circuits.

1:7: All the rivers run into the sea. Yet the sea is not full; Unto the place where the rivers, There they go again.

1:8: All things toil to weariness; Man cannot utter it, The eye is not satisfied with seeing, Nor the ear filled with hearing.

1:9: That which has been is that which shall be, And that which has been done is that which shall be done; And there is nothing new under the sun.

1:10: Is there a thing whereof it is said: 'See, this is new'? - it has been already, in the ages which were before us.

1:11: 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.

Kohelet opens his book with the thematic statement that "*Hevel havalim*". These words have purposely not been translated because of the wide variety of translations that have been given to them. The common translation, "Vanity of vanities" does not appear to the writer to give the full meaning that *Kohelet* wanted to convey. In the Bible we find various usages of the word "*Havel*". Its main usage derives from a root that connotes a breath or vapor. The earliest Greek translations of the Hebrew rendered the word "*atmis*" (breath). According to this view *Kohelet* is saying that ultimately all existence is like breath or vapor which has no substance. Through the following examples *Kohelet* shows the fleeting appearance and ephemerality of nature. Modern commentators such as Fox, have connected the term "*Havel*" to the English term "absurd" and have explained *Kohelet's* use of this term to show the absurdities of life. This writer will attempt to support the view that *Kohelet* is opening his book with a statement that life does not seem to lead to a clear destination and his examples from nature are brought to express this view.

Four examples from nature are brought by *Kohelet* to express his view. The earth stays forever whilst one generation moves on to another. The sun rises in the east and goes down in the west. The wind goes to the south and then to the north and then moves around in all directions. The rivers run to the sea, yet the sea is not full. It is fascinating that the writer uses these examples to explain the purposelessness of life. The common theme here is that there is an endless cycle of life which seems to lead nowhere. The question which is implicit in *Kohelet's* description is, what then is the purpose of life? The earth, the sun, the wind and the sea, cited here recall the four primal elements of creation according to Greek thought; earth, wind, fire and water. The question that needs to be asked is; How examples from nature come to teach us about the state of man? If nature does not seem to have purpose and direction, why should we reach the same conclusion about man? Yet *Kohelet* does seem to reach this

conclusion in 1:3 where he writes: "What profit hath man of all his labour wherein he laboureth under the sun?"

I attempt to show that there is great symbolism in the use of the four examples of nature and that they can be used as an allegory for man himself. "All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full" (1:7). Compare this to: "All the labor of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled"(6:7). In both these verses the expression: "is not filled" is used and one can make a clear comparison between the sea which is not filled and the human being who works and does not fill his desires.

Kohelet uses the example of the sun that rises and sets to explain the seeming purposelessness of life. Here too the Rabbinical commentators have searched for the allegory and its relationship to man. Rashi, in his commentary on the verse, sees the sun as a symbol for wisdom. We find clear examples of this in *Kohelet*. For example in 2:13 we read: "Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly as far as light excelleth darkness." In 7:11 we find: "Wisdom is good with an inheritance, even more a profit to them that see the sun." In both these examples we see how the sun is compared to wisdom. The wise person is able to discern what is right and to "see" the correct path to take.

The wind is another element of nature used by *Kohelet* and again we can find a parallel to the human being in the book. In 1:6 we read: "The wind goes to the south and turns to the north. It turns continually in its circuit and returns again to its circuit." The word "*rûah*" is used again in 3:21 in reference to man. "Who knows the "*rûah*" of man whether it goes up and the "*rûah*" of the beast whether it goes down?" In 12:7 *Kohelet* tells us: "And the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the "*rûah*" to unto G-d Who gave it." The "*rûah*" can thus be seen as both a natural element and representing the human soul.

The final aspect of nature used by *Kohelet* is the earth. "And the earth abides forever". Here to we see a clear parallel to the human being. In 2:7

we read: "And the dust (*a'far*) returns to the earth as it was and the *rûah* returns to G-d Who gave it."

In summary we can make a valid case for comparing the four elements of nature to four parts of man. The "*a'retz*" (*a'far*) can be compared to the human body. The sun to the human mind. The *rûah* to the human soul and the water to the human desire. In fact we can see that these four parts of man can be divided into four distinct characters who, I suggest, are in a process of dialogue with each other to answer the question, what is the meaning of life?

These four characters can be described as follows. The first character, the "*A'mel*", the builder, believes that the purpose of life is to build the world and to create wealth. He may correspond to the "*a'far*" or the quality of man which connects him to the ground. The second character, the "*Hakham*", the philosopher, corresponds to the character trait of wisdom, we have already described. The third individual is the "*Neheneh*" the man of enjoyment, who feels that the purpose of life is enjoy it. He corresponds to the characteristic of desire symbolized by the water. The fourth character is the "*Yare' Elokim*", the man who fears G-d, and he corresponds to the *rûah*, the soul of man. He feels that the purpose of life is to come close to G-d.

In short we suggest that the problem of the contradictions in *Kohelet* can be understood by seeing the book as a dialogue between these four personalities. Contradictions in the book therefore, are merely the different views of these four protagonists. The purpose of the introduction to the book, as outlined in the first eleven verses, is to set the stage for the dialogue on the meaning of life, which is the purpose of the book. The endless cycle of nature which does not seem to lead to anywhere is the allegory for mans' search for the meaning of life. Just like nature seems purposelessness so too does man. "*Hevel havalim*," cries *Kohelet* when he understands that man's life may have little meaning. But that is not the conclusion of the book. It is only the opening gambit which starts the "game" between our four players. The stakes are high because each has his own answer to the question posed at the outset. Each will argue

passionately for his philosophy of life and only through a process of rigorous intellectual debate do we find the outcome. That I believe is the beauty of this book and I will try to highlight this in my commentary.

(ii) **PRESENTATION OF THE CHARACTERS OF KOHELET**

1:12: I *Kohelet* have been King over Israel in Jerusalem.

1:13: 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 G-d has given to the sons of men to be exercised therewith.

1:14: I have seen all the works that are under the sun; and, behold, all is *hevel* and a striving after wind.

1:15: That which is crooked cannot be made straight; And that which is wanting cannot be numbered.

1:16: 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 has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.

1:17: And I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly - I perceived that this also was a striving after the wind.

1:18: For in much wisdom is much vexation; And he that increases knowledge increases sorrow.

Ch. 2:1: I said in my heart: 'Come now, I will try thee with mirth, and enjoy pleasure'; and, behold, this also was *havel*.

2:2: I said of laughter: 'It is mad'; and of mirth: 'What does it accomplish?'

It is universally agreed among the commentators that 1:12 begins a new section of the book. There is uncertainty however about the point at which this section ends. Some commentators like Crenshaw, see the passage

ending at 2:26. These commentators suggest that this section describes the life of the King and his successes and disappointments.

My suggestion is that the section should end with 2:3 and that we have in this section a presentation of three of the major characters of the book and the problems that each one encounters.

1:13 opens with a statement that the author is searching for the truth and he finds that what is done in the world is evil (*ra'*). The use of the word "*ra'*" in this section is pronounced. Altogether "*ra'*" and its comparable words are used seven times. In 1:14, he sees that all the works that are done are "*re'ût rûah*". In 1:17, he sees wisdom and knowledge as being "*ra'yon rûah*", striving after wind.

Despite this pessimistic outlook on life we will see that *Kohelet* develops his attitude to life through the course of the book, and this opening statement is not necessarily *Kohelet's* conclusion. What is interesting is the division within this section between three aspects of the life of man. In 1:14, he writes: "I have seen all the works that are done under the sun and behold all is *hevel*". In 1:16, he discusses the importance of wisdom in his life and says: "I have gotten great wisdom, more than all that were before me." In 2:1, he says: "come now I will try you with happiness and enjoy pleasure". What we have here, perhaps, are three aspects of life; work, wisdom and enjoyment. These aspects, we will show, are in fact a prelude to the three characters who are developed by *Kohelet* in the next few chapters. Labor, corresponds to the "*A'mel*" who sees work and the development of the physical world as the purpose of life. Wisdom corresponds to the "*Hakham*" who is the architect and thinker of how the world looks. Enjoyment corresponds to the "*Neheneh*", who feels that having fun and enjoying life is the purpose of living, in this world.

These three figures are presented in this section but each figure has a problem with his own view of life. The builder sees all his works, yet pronounces in 1:15: "That which is crooked cannot be made straight, and that which is wanting cannot be numbered." He sees the world that he has built, but also sees that there are short comings to his work, and that one

can never achieve perfection. The wise man sees wisdom as being central to the purpose of life but says in 1:18: "For in much wisdom is much vexation: And he that increases knowledge increases sorrow." The possession of wisdom merely serves to reveal more realistically the imperfections of the world order, thereby increasing one's weariness and unhappiness. The more one knows the more the despair because of the reality that the world cannot be perfected. Finally, the search for purpose leads *Kohelet* to the man of pleasure. Here too, however, there are short comings. *Kohelet* says: "I said of laughter it is mad; and of mirth what does it accomplish?" The man who drinks and enjoys his physical pleasures may indeed have a good time but this is only transitory. It does not last for long and often a person may feel worse after the enjoyment than before. If this is so, what then is the purpose of physical enjoyment?

Work, wisdom and enjoyment have each been presented as a possible answer to the purpose of life. *Kohelet* shows however that each one of these solutions has an inherent problem and only through debate and dialogue will we be able to expose and find the answer to the question that lies at the heart of the book: What is the purpose of life?

(iii) THESE CHARACTERS REPRESENTED IN THE LIFE OF SOLOMON

2:3: 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.

2:4: I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards;

2:5: I made me gardens and parks, and I planted trees in them of all kinds of fruit;

2:6: I made me pools of water, to water therefrom the wood springing up with trees;

2:7: I acquired menservants and maidservants, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of herds and flocks, above all that were before me in Jerusalem;

2:8: 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.

2:9: So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem; also my wisdom stood me in stead.

2:10: And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them; I withheld not my heart from any joy, for my heart had joy of all my labour; and this was my portion from all my labour.

2:11: Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do; and, behold, all was *hevel* and a striving after wind, and there was no profit under the sun.

2:12: 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 has been already done.

2:13: Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far light excelleth darkness.

2:14: 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.

2:15: 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?' Then I said in my heart, that this also is *hevel*.

2:16: 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!

2:17: So I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun was grievous unto me; for all is *hevel* and a striving after wind.

2:18: And I hated all my labour wherein I laboured under the sun, seeing that I must leave it unto the man that shall be after me.

2:19: 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 *hevel*.

2:20: Therefore I turned about to cause my heart to despair concerning all the labour wherein I had laboured under the sun.

2:21: For there is a man whose labour is with wisdom, and with knowledge, and with skill; yet to a man that hath not laboured therein shall he leave it for his portion. This also is *hevel* and a great evil.

2:22: For what hath a man of all his labour, and of the striving of his heart, wherein he laboureth under the sun?

2:23: For all his days are pains, and his occupation vexation; yea, even in the night his heart taketh no rest. This also is *hevel*.

In this section we find a possible solution to the problem posed previously. In verses 3, 4 and 5, we find mention of wisdom, enjoyment and work. However, they are not working separately as we have seen previously but together. *Kohelet* writes: "I searched in my heart how to pamper my flesh with wine, and, my heart conducting itself with wisdom." *Kohelet* attempts to find an answer to the question he posed at the beginning of the book by combining the strength of action, wisdom and enjoyment. Throughout this section we see mention of action; for example: "I made me gardens and parks", wisdom; for example: "also my stood me in stead" - verse 9, and enjoyment: "I withheld not my heart from any joy."

Most commentators see this section as ending at the end of Ch. 2. Whybray (p. 11) sees the section from 1:12 to 2:26 as all part of Solomon's

testimony. Crenshaw in his commentary (p. 68) follows similar lines and titles this section "The Royal Experiment." The suggestion offered here is to finish this section at the end of 2:23. I offer a number of reasons for this division.

Firstly, the whole section is spoken in the first person. From 2:24 the verses move predominantly to the third person. What is even more pronounced is the fact that the first person is used in this section ninety three times! There is no comparable piece in the Bible where the use of the first person is so pronounced. For example: "I made me pools of water;...I acquired men servants...I gathered silver and gold." The central motif of this section is "I". Here we have man who is constantly looking at himself.

Secondly, in this section there is no mention whatsoever of the name of G-d whereas from 2:24 we find repeated use of G-d's name. For example: "This also I saw that it is from the hand of G-d". (2:24) In 2:26 we find: "That he may leave to him that is good in the sight of G-d." This point is clearly connected to the previous one as the man who sees himself as center of the universe has no room for G-d in his life.

This section is so egocentric that *Kohelet* does not even mention his son. In verse 2:18 he writes: "And I hated all my labor wherein I labored under the sun seeing that I must leave it to the man that shall be after me." He refuses to use the more obvious term "son" and instead calls him: "The man that shall be after me". Compare the style in this section with the use in Proverbs of the term "*beni*"- my son. For example in Proverbs 1:8 we read: "Hear, my son, the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the teaching of thy mother." In Proverbs 3:11 we read: "My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord, neither spurn thou His correction."

Let us compare what is said in this section to what is written in Kings 1 about the life of King Solomon himself. We will see that the three aspects of life which we have discussed, work enjoyment and wisdom are reflected in Solomon's own life. For example, in Kings 1 Ch. 9, we read of the buildings which Solomon built: "The house of G-d and his house and the *Milo* and the wall of Jerusalem and the courtyard and the

Meggido...and all the cities that Solomon owned and the cities for the horsemen." (9:15-20) This parallels *Kohelet's* description in 2:4-5: "I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards; I made me gardens and parks, and I planted trees in them of all kinds of fruit."

The description of *Kohelet's* life of enjoyment also parallels Solomon's life. *Kohelet* writes 2:10: "I did not withhold my heart from any joy." The passage in Kings 1:11:1-3 describes Solomon's home life: "Now king Solomon loved many foreign women,And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart." Solomon has one thousand wives and we have the impression that Solomon does not want to leave this world without tasting of all its pleasures. The phrase in *Kohelet* 2:10: "I withheld not my heart from any joy" precisely describes Solomon's own philosophy. *Kohelet's* conclusion in 2:17: "So I hated life because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me" is very much the conclusion that Solomon himself came to at the end of his life. Finally *Kohelet* turns to wisdom to find meaning in life. In 2:12 we read "And I turned myself to behold wisdom." We will now see how this is also reflected in the life of Solomon. This section achieves its greatest depth of understanding when compared historically to King Solomon's life. In particular the dream that Solomon has in Givon can help us appreciate this connection.

In Kings 1:3:5-14, Solomon has a dream in which G-d asks him: "What shall I give you?" Solomon asks for wisdom (*Hokhma*). In verse 9 we read: "And give to your servant an understanding heart to judge your people to understand the difference between good and evil". G-d grants Solomon's request and says: "Because you asked for this thing and you did not ask for many days and you did not ask for wealth... behold I will do as your word...and because you did not ask for wealth and honor I will give it to you."

It is interesting to see that just those areas that were given by G-d to Solomon as a gift are those areas which *Kohelet* himself complains about at the end of this section. Solomon had everything, buildings, gardens,

wives and all the enjoyments of life, yet this did not bring him closer to understanding the meaning of life. We read in Kings 1: 11:5:

And Solomon went after *Ashtoret* the gods of Ziddon and after *Milkom* the abomination of Ammon. And Solomon did evil in the eyes of G-d and did not follow the ways of G-d as did David his father.

Kohelet's anguish is well reflected in this episode in Solomon's life. The verse in *Kohelet* 2:18: "And I hated all my labour wherein I laboured under the sun", is the voice of a man who has had everything in his life and still has nothing. What happened to Solomon that he should reach such a conclusion? If we understand that the characteristics of Solomon and his life story are being reflected in the book of *Kohelet* and that the author of the book is suggesting at this stage that wealth, enjoyment and wisdom together are not an answer to the meaning of life, then *Kohelet's* message here can be more easily appreciated.

Kohelet in this section is describing to us that the gifts of wisdom, money and honor do not in themselves give meaning and purpose to life. What good is all that man does if he has to leave it to the man who comes after him? In 2: 21 he writes, "For there is a man whose labor is with wisdom and with knowledge and with skill; yet to a man that has not labored shall he leave for his portion."

(iv) **THE SPEECH OF THE NEHENEH # 1**

2:24: There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and make his soul enjoy pleasure for his labour. This also I saw, that it is from the hand of G-d.

2:25: For who will eat, or who will enjoy, if not I?

2:26: For to the man that is good in His sight He giveth wisdom, and knowledge, and joy; but to the sinner He giveth the task, to gather and to

heap up, that he may leave to him that is good in the sight of G-d. This also is *hevel* and a striving after a wind.

Ch. 3:1: To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

3:2: A time to be born, and a time to die; A time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;

3:3: A time to kill, and a time to heal; A time to break down, and a time to build up;

3:4: A time to weep, and a time to laugh; A time to mourn, and a time to dance;

3:5: A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

3:6: A time to seek, and a time to lose; A time to keep, and a time to cast away;

3:7: A time to rend, and a time to sew; A time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

3:8: A time to love, and a time to hate; A time for war, and a time for peace.

3:9: What profit hath he that worketh in that he laboureth?

3:10: I have seen the task which G-d hath given to the sons of men to be exercised therewith.

3:11: 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 G-d hath done from the beginning even to the end.

3:12: I know that there is nothing better for them, than to rejoice, and to get pleasure so long as they live.

3:13: But also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy pleasure for all his labour, is the gift of G-d.

3:14: I know that, G-d doeth, it shall be for ever; nothing can be added to it, nor any thing taken from it; and G-d hath so made it, that men should fear before Him.

3:15: That which is hath been long ago, and that which is to be hath already been; and G-d seeketh that which is pursued.

3:16: 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.

3:17: I said in my heart: 'The righteous and the wicked G-d will judge; for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work.'

3:18: I said in my heart: 'It is because of the sons of men, that G-d may sift them, and that may see that they themselves are but as beasts.'

3:19: For that which 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 *havel*.

3:20: All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all return to dust.

3:21: Who knoweth the spirit of man whether it goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast whether is goeth downward to the earth?

3:22: 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?

In this section we find one theme. Unlike the previous section where we see work, wisdom and enjoyment being suggested as a solution to the question of the meaning of life, here we deal with the theme of enjoyment. I shall show in this thesis that much of the work in *Kohelet* is to understand how the sections are divided. It is my basic assumption that we are dealing here not with isolated verses of Wisdom literature that contradict each other but a dialogue between four individuals who each have their own philosophy of life. It is this assumption that I will try to prove in my work. In the previous section we were presented with three of these characters and saw how they were personified in the life and personality of Solomon. In this section we meet one of these characters who, we suggest, is advancing his own philosophy of life. We will call him the "*Neheneh*".

The *Neheneh* is the one who sees in enjoyment and fun the purpose of life. In this section this theme is repeated continuously. In 2:24 we read: "There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and make his soul enjoy pleasure for his labour." In 3:13 we continue this theme: "But also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy pleasure for all his labour." The section concludes with this theme: "Wherefore I perceived that there is nothing better than a man should rejoice in his works."

The philosophy of the *Neheneh* is to enjoy life now, and not to think of the consequences of his actions. "For who shall bring him to see what shall be after him." This verse (3:22) summarizes in many ways the philosophy of the *Neheneh*. No one knows what happens to a person after he has died says the *Neheneh*. Therefore don't worry about it now. Live your life for the present for that is the only thing that matters now. This philosophy which we could call "Nowism", lies at the heart of the *Neheneh's* argument. There is no mention here of buildings or wisdom. These have no place in the world view of the *Neheneh*. Buildings and monuments can be destroyed but no one can take the enjoyments you have had away from you.

However there is more to the *Neheneh's* argument than pure hedonism. In this section mention is made of G-d. For example in 3:10 we read: "I have

seen the task which G-d has given to the sons of men." In 3:13 we read: "But also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy pleasure for all his labour is the gift of G-d". He continues in verse 14: "I know that whatever G-d does, it shall be forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it." In verses 15, 17 and 18 there is continuous mention of G-d's name.

The linguistic style in this section is very different to the previous one. Whilst the previous section emphasized the first person this section is noticeably different, with the third person mostly being used. When *Kohelet* uses the first person here he does so as an observer or as a person watching from the side. For example the term "I have seen" in verse 10 and "I know" in verse 12, are there to make comments and observations about the world around the speaker. Furthermore in the previous section no mention is made of G-d whilst here the name of G-d, as we have shown, is a motif that repeats itself throughout. What is more surprising is the combination of enjoyment and fun with sentences that obviously show a deep connection to G-d.

As we shall show, the *Neheneh's* philosophy of life is one that sees G-d as central to his belief. We can see this more clearly in the section beginning with 3:1-8. This section called by Crenshaw, "A Time For Everything" (p. 91) and by Whybray, "Man Does Not Know His Time" (p. 65), has been interpreted in various ways by the commentators. Some have interpreted this section that *Kohelet* is informing us that it is wise to do the right thing at the right time. However when we look at the context in which *Kohelet* writes this section we can see that this explanation does not fit into his train of thought. Furthermore, if these commentators are correct what is this section coming to teach us? What do we now know after reading this section that we did not know before?

What is more likely and suggested by many commentators including Crenshaw, Whybray and Cohen is the view that *Kohelet* is proposing here that man is not in charge of his own fate but is in the hands of G-d. We concur with this explanation especially because it relates well to the argument that *Kohelet* is putting forward. "A time to be born, and a time to

die," is the verse that begins this section. These two most important events in a person's existence, birth and death are beyond his control. The message of the section is that whatever happens will happen and man has no control over his destiny. This philosophy is very much part of the *Neheneh's* belief. Since man has no control over his life, then all that he is left to do is to enjoy life and make the most of the time that he is in this world.

What is wrong with this philosophy of life? The section beginning with 3:16-17, we suggest, answers this question. Many commentators such as Crenshaw and Whybray end this section with verse 15, but their approach does not explain the connection between what has been said and what is described in verses 16 and 17. "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." The *Neheneh* here expresses a basic flaw in his own argument. How are we to explain a world which is flawed and imperfect, a world in which there is evil and injustice? It is true that we must accept the will of G-d, but how are we to accept the injustices that men do to each other? Here we cannot explain as we did in 3:1: "To everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under the sun."

In 3:17 we read: "I said in my heart the righteous and the wicked G-d will judge; for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work." In this verse *Kohelet* through the voice of the *Neheneh* gives an answer to his question. It is true that injustices are done in this world by man himself but that will ultimately be judged by G-d as well. When will G-d judge the wicked? *Kohelet* answers with the use of the word "*šam*" meaning "there." Some commentators, such as Crenshaw (p. 102), understand this as meaning that there is no Divine judgment for those who have committed injustices. Rashi understands this as meaning "an unspecified time". We suggest as does the Targum, the Ibn Ezra and Ginsburg that here is an allusion to the judgment that will take place after death. It is fascinating to note the connection that the Seforno makes between the word "*šamayim*" and the word "*šam*". In his commentary on Genesis 1:1, the Seforno gives his explanation of the word "*šamayim*". He explains that the word

"šamayim" is connected to the word "šam". "šam" meaning there refers to a place distant from the speaker. "šamayim" is the plural form of "šam", meaning that it is a place even more distant from the speaker. In his interpretation of the verse "In the beginning G-d created the šamayim and the a'retz" he explains that the verse is describing the creation of two worlds. The earth which is here, and the "šamayim" which is there - "šam". We only have cognizance of this world, but there exists another world of which we know nothing except that it exists.

The Seforno's explanation gives us a fascinating insight into the word "šam" and its connection to "šamayim". We can now understand that according to this *Kohelet*, through the voice of the *Neheneh*, is telling us that judgment for the wicked will take place in the world to come as well as the reward for the righteous.

It is interesting to note that *Kohelet* is the only book in the Bible that has reference to the world to come. In 12:6 we find the verse: "And the dust returneth to the earth as it was, And the spirit returneth unto G-d who gave it." Whereas other books of the Bible describe reward and punishment as happening in this world, *Kohelet* alludes to the possibility of judgment in the next world.

The *Neheneh's* conclusion is that if man is to be judged in the next world then in the meantime he must enjoy life to the full. "I said in my heart it is because of the sons of men that G-d may sift them, and that they may see that they themselves are but as beasts." The *Neheneh* is coming to the conclusion that if judgment only takes place "there", then he should enjoy the world anyway even if it means there being little difference between man and beasts. This pessimistic conclusion leads him to the statement that "For that which befalls the sons of men befalls beasts; ... as the one dies so dies the other...so that man has no pre-eminence above a beast." In verse 20 he continues: "All go into one place all are of the dust and all return to dust." He himself is unsure about what exactly will happen after death. He writes in verse 21: "Who knows the spirit of man whether it goes upwards and the spirit of the beast whether it goes downwards to the earth?"

In summary the *Neheneh* has moved quite a distance in his argument. He began with an appreciation of G-d's world and suggested that man's duty is to enjoy that world. When met with the problem of evil in the world, the *Neheneh* suggests that this will only be solved in the next world. This leads him to the conclusion that in the meantime man must enjoy life in this world. His questioning of what will happen after man dies leads him to repeat his assertion that: "There is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his works for that is his portion, (verse 22). "

(v) THE SPEECH OF THE A MEL # 1

Ch. 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.

4:2: Wherefore I praised the dead that are already dead more than the living that are yet alive;

4:3: But better than they both is he that hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under sun.

4:4: Again, I considered all labour and all excelling in work, that it is a man's rivalry with his neighbour. This also is *hevel* and a striving after wind.

4:5: The fool foldeth his hands together, and eateth his own flesh.

4:6: Better is a handful of quietness, than both the hands full of labour and striving after the wind.

4:7: Then I returned and saw *hevel* under the sun.

4:8: There is one that is alone, and he hath not a second; yea, he hath neither son nor brother; yet is there no end of all his labour, neither is his

eye satisfied with riches: 'for whom then do I labour, and bereave my soul of pleasure?' This also is *hevel*, yea, it is a grievous business.

4:9: Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour.

4:10: 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.

4:11: Again, if two lie together, then they have warmth; but how can one be warm alone?

4:12: And if a man prevail against him that is alone, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

4:13: Better is a poor and wise child than an old and foolish king, who knows not how to receive admonition anymore.

4:14: For out of prison he came forth to be King; although in his kingdom he was born poor.

4:15: 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.

4:16: There was no end of all the people, even of all them whom he did lead; yet they that come after shall not rejoice in him. Surely this also is *hevel* and a striving after wind.

In this section we witness a change of style. Here the use of the first person is again pronounced unlike the previous section where the emphasis was on the third person. Besides this grammatical difference the name of G-d is not mentioned in this section unlike the previous one. These two major differences makes this section a distinct one.

Many commentaries do not see one thematic section in this chapter. Crenshaw (p.107), for example, connects the first three verses with the

chapter before and sees the tears of the oppressed as what connects these verses. Likewise he puts verses four to six together and gives them the title "Proverbial Insights About Toil and Its Opposite." In verses seven to twelve he sees the theme as being the advantages of companionship whilst the chapter concludes with verses thirteen to sixteen which he titles "The Fickle Crowd". In Crenshaw's thought the verses have important messages of wisdom but they are not part of one thematic whole.

Similarly, Whybray (p.83) divides the chapter into various subject headings. He sees verses one to three as describing the plight of the oppressed whilst the following verses four to six he titles "The Folly of Overwork". He writes: "This passage appears to be unrelated to verses one to three. It does however, share a common topic with verses seven to twelve". Whybray attempts to find a common theme in the verses but as he writes himself, attempts to do so, seem to him to be forced.

Gordis, in his commentary (p.240) notes the fact that this chapter has generally been understood as a collection of unconnected verses rather than a thematic whole. Gordis, using his own concept of quotations, has his own explanation for this chapter. He writes: "The unity and meaning of the entire section have been overlooked, largely because *Kohelet's* use of quotations to reproduce conventionally accepted ideas has not been noted." He continues: "In this passage *Kohelet* is concerned with refuting three arguments usually advanced in favour of hard work."

We too will suggest that the passage can be understood as a unified whole and not as a collection of unconnected verses. The idea that different characters are in dialogue with each other may help us in understanding the passage as a unified structure. As the commentators have noted the general theme is the purpose of toil. What we suggest however, is that this is being said by an individual who believes that toil is an answer to the never ending cycle of life as described in the beginning of the book. We will call this individual the "*A'mel*". Once we understand that individuals with differing ideologies to life are in dialogue with each other then the verses can be understood as a thematic whole.

We suggest that the *A'mel* is responding to the words of the *Neheneh* in the previous section. The *Neheneh* dealt with problem of injustice by saying that G-d will deal with this "*šam*" - in the next world. The *A'mel* cannot except this. He says: "But I returned and considered all oppressions that are done under the sun; and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter." The *A'mel* sees a world full of injustices and rejects the approach of the *Neheneh* that one should enjoy life's pleasures in this world for ultimately G-d will punish the wicked in the next world. "How can you sit and enjoy the world when you see the tears of the oppressed," cries the *A'mel*! One cannot ignore the existence of evil in the world and one cannot sit by and enjoy life acting indifferently to the injustices suffered by others.

Kohelet is not the only book in the Bible which deals with questions of reward and punishment. Job deals with this question and in 15:17-35, Eliphaz says to Job that if one sees a wicked person who succeeds in this world it does not mean that his life is necessarily good. If you were to look carefully into his heart you would see that life is not really good for him. Wickedness itself does not allow man to enjoy his achievements. Similarly, one cannot enjoy the pleasures of this world, says the *A'mel* when the tears of the oppressed are all around. One cannot divorce this world and the next by saying that the spiritual world is "*šam*" whilst the physical world of enjoyment and pleasure is here. Man's conscience will not let him enjoy earth's pleasures knowing that there is wickedness and injustice in this world. If all judgment is there as the *Neheneh* believes then says the *A'mel* in 4:2: "Wherefore I praise the dead that are already dead more than the living that are yet alive." If all justice is meted out "*šam*" then this world should also be "*šam*"! The *A'mel* arrives at two conclusions. It is better to be "*šam*" and to die rather than live in this world which has no significance. Better still rather not be born than to come into a world which is purposeless. "But better than they both is he that has not yet been who has not seen the evil work that is done under the sun."

The statement in 4:3 can be compared to a famous passage in the *Talmud Bavli Erûvin* 13b. There a discussion is held between the school of Shamai

and the school of Hillel. The former assert that it were better for man not to have been created than to have been created, and the latter maintain that it is better for man to have been created than not to have been created. Finally a vote is taken and it is decided that it were better for man not to have been created than to have been created, but now that he has been created, let him investigate his past deeds and examine his future actions.

After responding to the words of the *Neheneh* in the previous chapter the *A'mel* now turns to discuss his own philosophy of life and points out flaws within his own thought. It is interesting to compare the use of the terms "*re'ut r'vah*" in verse 4, '*re'ut r'vah*' " in verse 6, and "*i'nyan ra'*" in verse 8 with these same phrases in Chapter 2. For example in 2:17 we read: "So I hated life; because that is wrought under the sun was grievous unto me for all is '*hevel*' and '*r'e'ut r'vah*'." In both places the *A'mel* is speaking and comments in both about the difficulties of life with similar expressions. He writes, "The '*kesil*' folds his hands together and eats his own flesh. Better is a handful of quietness than both the hand full of labour and striving after wind." Who is the "*kesil*" - "the fool" that *Kohelet* is referring to? Various interpretations have been given.

Crenshaw (p.108) suggests that we are talking here of the fool who does not appreciate the necessity to work hard for a livelihood, and folds his hands in idleness when he should be working to make a living. Crenshaw compares the verse to Proverbs 6:10: "A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep," where the folding of hands is clearly used to symbolize idleness. Cohen (p.132) sees him to be a person who is slow at his work and does not have the drive and ambition to beat his competitors.

We suggest that the "*kesil*" referred to here is the *Neheneh* who enjoys life and it is he who is the voice of 4:6 and says that: "Better is a handful of quietness, than the hands full of labour." The *A'mel* rejects this view of the *Neheneh*. Man is responsible for his own actions and he must take responsibility for his own successes and failures. Man cannot just fold his hands and place responsibility for his life on G-d. He has to work through his own efforts to make the world a better place. Therefore no mention is

made of G-d in this section because He has no place in the world of the *A'mel*. It is man who is ultimately responsible for his own successes and failures.

The *A'mel* has two problems with his own philosophy. Firstly, man's desire to excel and to build in this world is spoilt by rivalries that exist between men. Jealousy destroys the good work that is often done. He writes: "Again I considered all labour and all excelling in work that it is a man's rivalry with his neighbor." This evil he describes as '*re'ût rûah*'. It is this evil which leads the '*kesil*' to fold his hands and prefer a life of leisure rather than toil for his labours. Secondly, the *A'mel* is concerned with the fact that he may work hard in this world but to whom will he leave the fruits of his labours. In 4:8 he writes: "There is one that is alone and he has not a second; Yea he has neither son nor brother...for whom then do I labour and bereave my soul of pleasure." It is interesting to compare this statement with what we read in Ch. 2. There, he was not willing to work knowing that he will leave it all to the person who will come after him (2:18). Here he is prepared to toil and to leave the fruits of his labour to his successor but he is concerned that he may not have one. From here we can see that work as such is considered in a positive light but the question of: "For whom then do I labour" is one which has to be answered.

It is interesting to note that the phrases "*hevel ûre'ût rûah*" in verse 4 and in verse 8 come immediately after these two concerns which have been expressed. We suggest that 4: 9-12 come as an answer to these two problems posed by the *A'mel*.

In 4:9 we read: "Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their labour." A partnership or cooperative will solve the two problems mentioned. If people work together then there will be no rivalry because instead of competing with one another they will be helping each other. Furthermore if two work together the chance that both of them will have no heir or successor is extremely small. The more partners one has then the smaller these two problems become. Therefore he writes in 4: 12: "And a threefold cord is not quickly broken." If there are three people in

an enterprise then the difficulties of jealousy and lack of succession are minimized even more.

To summarize, the *A'mel* has found a solution to his problem unlike the one suggested in Ch. 2. There he saw himself as an individual who worked for himself and was concerned only for himself. Here he sees work as part of an enterprise that will help society to develop and grow. The more people who work together the greater will be the success and the more will be the benefit to society as a whole. If man is the center of his own universe, as we are suggesting is the philosophy of the *A'mel*, then who is the ultimate power in the world? Who will decide what is right and wrong? If the *Neheneh* perceived G-d as the ultimate judge of good and evil in the next world, we suggest that this task according to the *A'mel* is performed by the King. We then can understand the connection between this section and the following verses beginning with 4:13. "Better is a poor and wise child than an old and foolish king, who knows not how to receive admonition anymore."

The commentators are in disagreement over the understanding of these verses. To whom is *Kohelet* referring to as "a poor and wise child" and "an old and foolish king"? The *Targum* on the verse identifies these characters with Abraham and Nimrod. Others have seen an allusion to Pharaoh and Joseph in Egypt. The use of the word "*yeled*" here and in Genesis 37:30 when referring to Joseph, suggests that a comparison can possibly be made. In addition the phrase "For out of prison he came forth to be king" can certainly be applied to the life of Joseph. The *Midrash Kohelet Rabah* (4:13) gives the verse a homiletic interpretation: "the poor and wise child" is the good inclination in the human being. Why is it called "child"? Because it attaches itself to a person only from the age of thirteen years onward. Why is it called "poor"? Because all do not obey it. Why is it called wise? Because it teaches the right way. "The old and foolish king" is the evil inclination. Why is it called "king"? Because all obey it. Why is it called old? Because it attaches itself to a man from youth to old age. Why is it called foolish? Because it teaches the way of evil.

Many modern commentators have come to the conclusion that *Kohelet* is stating a hypothetical case of the instability of the throne which finds many illustrations in history. Gordis (p. 243) writes: "What we have here, as in 9:13, is probably not a historical reference but a typical incident invented by *Kohelet* to illustrate his point." Whybray in his commentary (p. 88) concurs with this point of view:

Various attempts have been made to find here an allusion to historical events; but it is now agreed by most commentators that all these episodes although quite plausible in terms of the political realities of *Kohelet's* time are examples of the fictional story or parable which was one of the devices commonly employed by the wisdom writers.

We suggest that we have one thematic section rather than a collection of unconnected verses of wisdom literature. An attempt is made again by the author of the book to mirror Solomon's life, and in particular, his struggles with his rival Jeroboam in the text of *Kohelet*.

Jereboam and Solomon were rivals at the end of Solomon's life and what is described in this verse fits very easily into the story of their rivalry. The relationship between Jereboam and Solomon can be described as one between a child and an old man because Jereboam was one generation younger than Solomon. The description of the "poor and wise child" fits in precisely to Jereboam's life. He was the son of a widow who fled to Egypt but was later recalled by the people to be King over them. It was he, who in Kings 1:9:15-23, has harsh words to say about Solomon's refusal to free the people from the tax of building the Temple and used them instead to build his own edifices for the daughter of Pharaoh. Jereboam revolts against the King as we read in Kings 1:11:27. He has no objection to the King taking a tax of workers to build buildings for the needs of the people, but he objects to these workers being used for the private desires of the King.

The mention of "an old and foolish king" can be easily understood in this context to be King Solomon himself. It is during this period that his wives

turned his heart away from G-d and began the gradual breakdown of his rule which led eventually to the division of the kingdom. When we read Kings 1:11:14-28 we see how his kingdom deteriorated and how he lost the wealth and power that he had in the beginning.

If one thought that this young wise lad would make a better king than Solomon himself then one unfortunately is mistaken. The destruction at the end of Jereboam's life is total. An army of eight hundred thousand men is completely destroyed and tens of cities are laid to waste. Experience has shown that a king is unable to succeed in what he has taken upon himself to achieve. *Kohelet's* conclusion in 4:16 is: "There was no end of all the people, even of all them who he did lead; yet they that come after shall not rejoice in him".

In summary, the *A'mel* has tried to argue that he can provide an answer to the question posed at the beginning of *Kohelet* concerning the never ending cycle of life. Toil provides man with the ability to create great things in this world. Unfortunately man is met with problems of rivalry and uncertainty about who will benefit from his labours after he dies. He attempted to find a solution to these problems through the idea of partnership and cooperation. The focus of the *A'mel's* argument is in this world and the king has ultimate responsibility for the establishment of righteousness and justice. Unfortunately, this does not always provide an answer to man's problems. Even Solomon himself, the wisest of kings, failed in his life and instead of providing for the needs of his people looked first after his own personal pleasures. The attempt to see in his failure the result of being an old and foolish king does not succeed because his successor, Jereboam, does not fair much better than Solomon himself. The *A'mel* is thus left with a question, which for the moment remains unanswered.

(vi) THE SPEECH OF THE YARE' # 1

Ch. 4:17: Guard thy foot when thou goest to the house of G-d, and be ready to hearken; it is better than when fools give sacrifices; for they know not that they do evil.

Ch. 5:1: Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thy heart be hasty to utter a word before G-d; For G-d is in heaven and thou upon earth; therefore let thy words be few.

5:2: For a dream comes through a multitude of business; and a fools voice through a multitude of words.

5:3: When thou vowest a vow unto G-d do not defer to pay it; for He hath no pleasure in fools; pay that which thou vowest.

5:4: Better is it that thou shouldest not vow than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.

5:5: Suffer not thy mouth to bring thy flesh into guilt, neither say thou before the messenger, that it was an error; wherefore should G-d be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thy hands?

5:6: For through the multitude of dreams and *havalim* there are also many words; but fear thou G-d.

5:7: 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.

5:8: But the profit of a land every way is a king that makes himself servant to the field.

5:9: He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance, with increase; this also is *hevel*.

5:10: 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?

5:11: Sweet is the sleep of a labouring man, whether he eat little or much; but the satiety of the rich will not suffer him to sleep.

Most commentators agree that this section begins with 4:17. This verse appears to be connected with what follows in subject matter. The commentators have given various titles to this section but in essence they agree on what direction *Kohelet* is taking the reader. For example, Cohen in his commentary (p.136) titles this section "Morality And Divine Worship", while Crenshaw (p.114) titles it "Religious Obligations." Whybray in his commentary (p.91) takes a similar view and titles the section "Advice on Worship." According to Gordis (p.246): "*Kohelet* reflects here the proto-Sadducean upper-class viewpoint, which regards the Temple as essential to the accepted order and therefore required."

It is clear that this section is in many ways different from the previous one. For the first time in the book the second person is used. The style used here is very similar to that used in Proverbs. Whybray (p. 91) points out that:

Here for the first time *Kohelet* employs the form of the admonition - expressed by the imperative, positive or negative- in which an instructor gives direct advice to pupil. There are many examples of the admonition in Proverbs.

It is interesting to highlight the difference in style between *Kohelet* and Proverbs. In *Kohelet* the central motif is "*Ani*" or "I", whereas in Proverbs we find the term "*Beni*" or "My Son" to be prominent. At the end of *Kohelet* in 12:12 we find a verse that is written distinctly in the style of Proverbs; "And furthermore, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh."

There are those commentators who consider the Epilogue, from where this verse is taken, an editorial addition by a scribe who sought to defend the worth of *Kohelet's* writing as a "holy" book at a time when the question was the subject of debate. One of the reasons why we reject this view is the style and subject matter of the first part of chapter five. Both here and

in chapter 12 we are introduced to a different element in *Kohelet's* writing, that of "*Yira't Hašem*" or "fear of G-d." He writes in 5:6: "For through the multitude of dreams and *havalim* there are also many words but fear thou G-d." This aspect which we will call "*Yira't Hašem*" is common to the Book of Proverbs. In Proverbs 9:1 we read: "The beginning of wisdom is the fear of G-d," and in 10:27 we read: "The fear of G-d will add days." We will show that in 7:29 of *Kohelet* we again find mention of this idea: "Behold this only I have found, that G-d made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions".

We suggest that this new approach of "*Yira't Hašem*" is said by a third character who *Kohelet* has introduced into his book. The "*Yare' Hašem*" as we will call him has a very definite approach to life and to the question of the never ending cycle of life posed at the beginning of the book. Once we understand that different characters are in dialogue with each other we can better understand the changes of mood, style and content within the book.

The *Neheneh* speaks in the third person; he is not involved in changing the world only in enjoying it. The *A'mel* speaks in the first person. This corresponds to his philosophy of life which puts him at the center of the world as the one who is changing and building that world. The *Yare'* speaks in the second person. He suggests, reproves and advises others. His duty is to fulfill the mitzvah of directing others to the right path in life. It is he who says in 4:17: "Guard thy foot when thou goest to the House of G-d."

In order to understand the words of the *Yare'* it is important to see him in dialogue with the *Neheneh* and the *A'mel* who have already expressed their own philosophies. The *Yare'* is not speaking in a vacuum but as a response to the ideas of others. The central verse which expresses his thoughts is 5:7 where he writes:

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.

The word of particular interest here is the Hebrew word "*hefez*" which we translate as "the matter." It occurs at the beginning of the words of the *Neheneh* in 3:1 "To everything there is a season and a time to every '*hefez*' under the heaven." It occurs again at the end of the words of the *Neheneh* in 3:17: "For there is a time for every '*hefez*' and for every work, '*šam*'". The *Neheneh* as we have seen saw that the answer to the problem of injustice is "*šam*"- there in the next world. The *A'mel* saw that man must deal with this problem and rejected the *Neheneh's* approach. The *Yare'* develops his philosophy to this question by saying that there is a hierarchy of those who are responsible for meting out justice. He agrees with the *A'mel* that the king has responsibility for ensuring justice in his country but points out that there is one power above him who is also responsible for this. He is G-d. In this way we explain 5:7: "For one higher than the high watcheth, and there are higher than they."

It is fascinating when we compare this relationship between king and G-d to the structure of the Temple and the king's palace. In Kings 1:6 we are given a detailed account of the structure of the Temple and later a description of the king's palace is outlined. The Temple stood where the Dome of the Rock stands today whilst the king's palace stood where the Al Mosque is situated today. The city of David was where the population of the time lived and they had a clear view of both the king's palace and the Temple from their homes. The Temple lay highest on the mountain followed by the king's palace and the rest of the city, lay below. Therefore one looking from below would see the Temple above the king's palace. Thus the concept of "one higher than the high watcheth" was put into practice not only on a spiritual level but on a physical level as well.

In many ways the Temple resembled the king's palace. The Table, the *Menorah*, the abundance of gold in the Temple, all in many ways mirror the articles in a king's palace. In this way the Temple was more than a place of worship; it represented G-d's home in this world. The earthly king lives in the shadow of the Heavenly King. The earthly king judges in this

world, but above him is the ultimate King, G-d himself. Once we have understood this idea then we can understand how the other verses in this section blend into the argument of the *Yare'*.

In 4:17 we read: "Guard thy foot when thou goest to the House of G-d and be ready to hearken: it is better than when fools give sacrifices; for they know not that they do evil." The *Talmud Bavli* in *Berakhot* 23a, understands this verse as follows; be not like the fools who sin and bring an offering and know not whether they bring it for the good they have done or for the evil they have committed. The Holy One Blessed Be He, says "they are unable to discern between good and evil and they bring an offering into my presence!" This Rabbinical interpretation stresses the integral connection between divine worship and morality.

Most commentators understand that this verse recommends a policy of restraint in speech. As Crenshaw (p.115) suggests: "*Kohelet* believes that talkativeness increases the chances for affront, just as dreams generate anxiety." The sentiments expressed in this verse are mirrored in Samuel 1:15:22 where the prophet says: "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice and to listen is better than the fat of rams." Similarly in Jeremiah 7:22-23 we read: "I did not speak to your fathers...about words concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices but this I did command them, listen to my voice." In Proverbs 21:27 we read: "To do righteousness and justice is preferred by the Lord over sacrifice".

This theme, of the importance of listening to the words of G-d over and above the bringing of sacrifices, is a common one in the Bible. Sacrifices have their place in the Temple service but they are sacrificed outside in the courtyard rather than in the Temple building itself. The holiest place in the Temple is the "Holy of Holies" and in this place no sacrifices are brought. In the Holy of Holies rests the "*A'ron*" which contains within it the Tablets of Stone from Sinai and a copy of the Torah. It is from the Holy of Holies that G-d speaks from between the two cherubs standing on the lid of the *A'ron*. We can see the order of priorities in the Temple service. Sacrifices have their place in the Temple ritual but only outside the Holy of

Holies. It is the voice of G-d emanating from the Holy of Holies inside the Temple building that takes precedence.

The connection between this verse and what follows now becomes clearer. In 5:1 we are told: "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thy heart be hasty to utter a word before G-d; for G-d is in heaven and thou upon earth; therefore let thy words be few." In this verse as well as the next four verses the importance of thought before speech is emphasized. Whereas 4:17 emphasized the importance of listening, these verses continue this theme but the emphasis here is on the importance of silence. Rashi in his commentary, explains 5:1 as a warning against rebellious speech in criticism of G-d when He permits evil to happen in the world. Yehuda Halevi in his work "The Kuzari"(5:20) continues with this theme and writes: "A person who is convinced of the justice of the creator and His all embracing wisdom will pay no attention to apparent cases of injustice on earth."

The Ibn Ezra and Seforno, in their respective commentaries on this verse, interpret this statement as relating to man's prayers. They translate the verse: "Do not make thy mouth precipitate with the utterance of supplications."

We suggest a different explanation to these verses based on our assumption that *Kohelet* is a dialogue between characters rather than unconnected verses of wisdom. The *Yare'* is responding to the words of the *A'mel* in the previous chapter. As we have shown the *A'mel* sees himself at the center of the world. He feels that he has the power to build and correct the imperfections of the world. The experience of kings does not encourage him in this approach but his basic philosophy stands. The *Yare's* response to the *A'mel* is "Be not rash with thy mouth." Do not think that man has the power to correct the world for "G-d is in heaven and thou earth; therefore let thy words be few". You cannot ignore the place of G-d in the world. You may not understand everything that happens in this world but know that G-d sees everything because He is higher than you are.

The *Yare'* continues with this theme in 5:4. "Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay." Do not make too many promises says the *Yare'*. You do not know how many of these promises you will be able to fulfill. There is something presumptuous on the part of one who makes promises. He thinks that he will be able to meet his commitments. How can you be so sure, says the *Yare'*? Therefore says the *Yare'*, "Guard thy foot when thou goest to the house of G-d." A man who brings sacrifices can believe that he in some way is supporting G-d. He is the one who is giving and G-d is the one who is accepting. Sacrifices are therefore problematic as they can distort the relationship between man and G-d. It is for this reason that the Prophets raised their concerns about the bringing of sacrifices. It is for this reason too that *Kohelet* writes: "And be ready to hearken: it is better than when fools give sacrifices."

Kohelet's message through the voice of the *Yare'* is that listening to the words of G-d comes before sacrifices. The center of the Temple is the Holy Ark from where G-d speaks and not the Altar where sacrifices are brought. The Altar symbolizes the action of man and can lead man to think that it is he who is feeding G-d. The Temple courtyard is in danger of looking like a slaughtering house rather than a place where man comes to listen to the voice of G-d. *Kohelet* emphasizes this theme in the beginning of chapter five where he exhorts man to stop donating sacrifices and rather learn to listen to the voice of G-d.

In summary, the *Yare'* in this section is responding to the words of the *A'mel* before him. Whereas the *A'mel* saw himself as able to deal with the problems of the world the *Yare'* replies to the *A'mel* that he should not be so presumptuous as to believe that man has such power. G-d is the ultimate power and the king is subordinate to him. Responsibility for ensuring justice in the world lies with the king and G-d together, "For one higher than the high watcheth." It is man's duty to listen to the words of G-d and to fear Him. "For through the multitude of dreams and vanities there are also many words; but fear thou G-d."

5:8 is obscure and difficult to explain. Various interpretations have been given to explain it. The Ibn Ezra comments, "The advantage of land is supreme even a king is indebted to the soil." He continues; "Having discoursed on the fear of G-d, Solomon reverts to the theme of which occupation is best, and most sin free. Agriculture yields the most reward. Even a king is sustained by the soil." Whoever tills the land, living a righteous life and providing honestly for his own sustenance is assured a life of dignity likened to a king, who must himself be sustained by the produce of the earth. Gordis in his commentary (p. 250) sees this explanation as the most satisfactory. He concludes:

Not only is this view in harmony with the emphasis on agriculture in Josephus and Rabbinic literature, but it would anticipate the stand point of the Sadducees, who identified themselves with the country party against the urban Pharisees. Verses 7 and 8 would thus constitute a brief if not fragmentary comment on the political and the economic system of the day.

Gordis comments on the emphasis placed in the verse on agriculture and sees the background of *Kohelet* as set during the Second Temple period. We have already mentioned in this work (p.27) of the effort made by the author of the book to reflect the life and times of Solomon in *Kohelet*.

We suggest that these verses (8-11) continue the dialogue between the *Yare'* and the *A'mel*. We would agree with the commentaries mentioned that verse 8 is praising the value of agricultural labour but see in this verse and those following it the thoughts of the *Yare'* to the *A'mel*. The critical word in this verse is "*nee'vad*". Both here and in verse 11, *Kohelet* uses the root "*a'ved*". "Sweet is the sleep of the *o'ved*." In the whole book we find the use of the word "*a'mel*" as meaning work. It is only in these two verses that use of the root *a'ved* is made. *A'vodah* and *a'mel* do not mean the same thing.

In the Bible *a'mel* has a negative connotation. For example in Job 5:6-7 we read: "For from the dust will not leave wickedness and from the earth will

not grow trouble. For man *'lea'mal yôlad'*." Many have interpreted the term *'lea'mal yôlad'* as a positive one, suggesting that man's purpose in life is to work and develop the world around him. However, looking at the context in which this verse is written we can see that it has a very negative connotation. Eliphaz is explaining to Job that he has no reason to complain about his lot. Eliphaz explains that suffering does not come from the ground but is developed from man himself. In this sense the phrase "for man *'lea'mal yôlad'*" means that man is the origin of the evil which comes into the world.

In *Kohelet* the use of *a'mel* is also in a negative context even though it is not as negatively used as in the Book of Job. We have already seen in 2:18: "and I hated all my *a'mel* that I laboured under the sun." In 2:22 we find: "for what has a man of all his *a'mel* and of the striving of his heart, wherein he laboured under the sun?" In 3:9 we read: "what profit has he that works in that he laboured (*a'mel*)?" In 4:8 we find: "for whom then do I labour (*a'mel*) and bereave my soul of pleasure?" What is common to all these verses is that the word *a'mel* is used to denote work which seems to have no purpose.

The word *a'voda* however, has a completely different connotation. *A'voda* is not mentioned often in the Bible, but when it is used it generally has a positive meaning. For example, in Genesis 2:15 we read: "And G-d took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden, to work it (*le'a'vda*) and to guard it." In Exodus 20:9 we read: "Six days shall you work (*ta'avod*)." Here the *Torah* commands man to work and to rest on the seventh day. There are some commentaries who learn from here that man has a positive commandment to work as part of G-d's plan to develop the world which He created. Hertz, for example, in his commentary on the verse (p. 297) writes:

Work during the six days of the week is as essential to man's welfare as is the rest on the seventh. No man or woman, howsoever rich, is freed from the obligation of doing some work, say the Rabbis, as idleness invariably leads to evil thoughts and evil deeds.

In *Kohelet* the context in which *a'voda* is used is also a positive one. Based on our understanding of the continued dialogue between the *Yare'* and the *A'mel*, the *Yare'* here is positing the advantages of physical labour as an end in itself. The *A'mel* believes that work gives purpose to life but he sees the fruits of his labours as being the objects that he has made. For him what is important is the money that he has earned and the profits that he has secured. The *A'mel* himself saw the weakness of his philosophy when he said in 4:8: "For whom then do I labour and bereave my soul of pleasure." What good is all the money in the world if I have no one to leave it to? He sees all the benefit of his labour as being the financial rewards that it offers. If no good use can be made of his wealth then what purpose is his work in the first place.

The *Yare'* in his argument is continuing here the *A'mel's* own train of thought. The value of work is not in the wealth that is produced but in the work itself. Therefore he praises agricultural work because it provides an honest way for man to earn his living. Through agriculture man is assured a life of dignity likened to a king. However, if a person's aim is to acquire wealth then he will never be satisfied with what he has amassed. As we read in 5:9: "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver." The *Yare'* continues with his argument when he says in 5:10: "When goods increase, they are increased that eat them." The more a person produces the more people he has to feed. If so what is the value of man's labour? The *Yare'* answers this question in 5:11, "Sweet is the sleep of a labouring man whether he eat little or much; but the satiety of the rich will not suffer him to sleep." The man who tills the ground, who has no large possessions to worry about will be able to lie down at night without the worries that prevent him sleeping. However the riches of the wealthy man will cause him anxiety and make it difficult for him to sleep. One is reminded here of the famous statement in *Ethics of The Fathers* in 4:1: "Who is rich? He who rejoiceth in his portion."

It is enlightening to compare the language in 2:23 to that of 5:11. In 2:23 the *A'mel* writes "For all his days are pains, and his occupation vexation; Even in the night his heart takes no rest." Here the *Yare'* offers a solution

for the *A'mel's* insomnia problems! Work which is done honestly and for its own sake will enable man to find peace and will help him sleep at night. It is interesting that this positive value of work should emanate from the *Yare'* of all the characters in *Kohelet*. The man who puts fear of G-d before all else does not abdicate his responsibilities to this world. G-d has created a world in which He forms a partnership with man to develop and cultivate that world. It is man's duty as G-d's partner to continue the building of the world that G-d began. Work as such is "sweet" because it is part of the service of G-d.

This attitude to work differs with that of the *Neheneh's* view. He sees life as eating and enjoying the world that G-d created. G-d will work for you. In the *A'mel's* view the value of work is only in the wealth it produces. We thus see another point of contention between three of the characters in *Kohelet*. At this point the *Yare'* ends his speech with the knowledge that he has given both the *A'mel* and the *Neheneh* many points to ponder.

(vii) **THE SPEECH OF THE A'MEL # 2**

Ch. 5 verse 12: There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept by the owner thereof to his hurt;

5:13: And those riches perish by evil adventure; and if he hath begotten a son, there is nothing in his hand.

5:14: As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he go back as he came, and shall take nothing for his labour, which he may carry away in his hand.

5:15: 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 laboureth for the wind?

5:16: All his days also he eateth in darkness, and he hath much vexation and sickness and wrath.

5:17: 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 labour, wherein he laboureth under the sun, all the days of his life which G-d hath given him; for this is his portion.

5:18: Every man also to whom G-d hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour - this is the gift of G-d.

5:19: For let him remember the days of his life that they are not many; for G-d answereth him in the joy of his heart.

6:1: There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is heavy upon men:

6:2: A man to whom G-d giveth riches, wealth, and honour, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet G-d giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it; this is *hevel*, and it is an evil disease.

6:3: 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, and moreover he have no burial; I say, that an untimely birth is better than he;

6:4: For it cometh in *hevel*, and departeth in darkness, and the name thereof is covered with darkness;

6:5: Moreover it hath not seen the sun nor known it; this hath gratification rather than the other;

6:6: Yea, though he live a thousand years twice told, and enjoy no good; do not all go to one place?

6:7: All the labour of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled.

6:8: For what advantage hath the wise more than the fool? Or the poor man that hath understanding, in walking before the living?

6:9: Better is the seeing of the eyes than the wandering of the desire; this also is *hevel* and a striving after the wind.

6:10: 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.

6:11: Seeing there are many words that increase *hevel*, what is man the better?

6:12: For who knoweth what is good for man in his life, all the days of his life which he spendeth as a shadow? For who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?

Chapter 5:12 begins a new section. We see a change of use in language between the previous section and this one. Whereas before use was made of the second person we have in this section a return to the use of the first person. As we have pointed out earlier we suggest that the use of the first person is an indication of the speech and ideas of the *A'mel*.

This section begins with the phrase: "There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun." 6:1 begins in similar fashion: "There is an evil which I have seen under the sun." We suggest that these two sections are the words of the same speaker and that there is a development of thought from the first to the second section. We will first examine the section from 5:12 to 5:19 and then chapter six will be considered.

Within 5:12 to 5:19 we can see a development in thought. The *A'mel* begins with stating a problem: "There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept by the owner thereof to his hurt." Various interpretations have been given to this verse. According to the Ibn Ezra the translation is "Riches hoarded not by the owner but by a guardian for their owner." Thus, when the riches are lost, as described in the next

verse, it is a double catastrophe. The Metzudath David suggests that the report that he possesses this wealth may be the occasion of a false charge made against him by a ruler who aimed at confiscating it. Whybray (p. 100) understands that the very idea that the possession of a fortune could lead to misfortune is in itself a shocking one, and its discovery justified the author in calling this a difficult state of affairs.

If we understand that these words are a continuation of a character who has already been introduced to us in a previous section then verses 12 and 13 can be more easily understood. The *A'mel* has already shared with us the problem of how the wealth he has acquired will benefit him after his death. In 2:18-19 he phrased this problem as follows: "And I hated all my labour wherein I laboured 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?" In other words the *A'mel* wonders whether it is worthwhile for him to work in this world if ultimately he is to die and will not benefit from the fruits of his labour. He is not prepared to work if someone else will enjoy the product of his efforts. In 4:8 he writes: "There is one that is alone and he has not a second; yea he has neither son nor brother...for whom then do I labour, and bereave my soul of pleasure?" In 4:8 the *A'mel* is concerned that he will have no heir who will be able to inherit the fruits of his work. In the verses in our section he writes: "and those riches perish by evil adventure; and if he hath begotten a son, there is nothing in his hand. Here the *A'mel* is concerned that he will not have what to leave to his heirs.

If we examine these three sections we can observe a progression in the development of the *A'mel's* argument. In Ch. 2 his words are egocentric. The use of the term "*ani*" emphasizes how the *A'mel* sees himself as all important. He even calls his son in 2:18: "the man who will be after me". At this stage the *A'mel* sees as useless work which he himself will not benefit from. In Ch. 4 the *A'mel* views the world in a different light. Here he attempts to find a solution to his problems through viewing himself as part of society. Here he mentions a son but he is worried that he may not have one to whom he may leave his possessions. In Ch. 5 we have a further development in his thought. He is now prepared to work for

someone else but here the concern is that he may not have what to leave after he dies. This concern is certainly more realistic and less self centered. With this understanding of the development in the *A'mel's* thought we can now move to an appreciation of the verses themselves.

The verses can be understood when we appreciate that the *A'mel* is referring both to the words of the *Yare'* in the previous section and to his own ideas in Ch. 4. For what purpose does man work so hard if in the end he will have nothing to leave to his children? The *Yare'* discussed the idea of the value of work for its own sake. The *A'mel* dismisses this idea. Is it possible that a person comes to this world and spends so much of his time and energy on a project then dies and leaves the world with nothing to show for it? Job satisfaction or work as an ideal in itself is a goal that is not realistic and does not satisfy the effort put in to the work done. He continues in 5:14: "As he came forth of his mothers womb, naked shall he go back as he came, and shall take nothing for his labour, which he may carry away in his hand." Is it possible, asks the *A'mel* that a man works all his life and returns to the grave empty handed? This verse reminds us of Job 1:21: "Naked came I out of my mothers womb, and naked shall I return thither."

The *Midrash Kohelet Rabah* 5:14, illustrates this verse with the following parable. It is like a fox who found a vineyard which was fenced in on all sides. There was one hole through which he wanted to enter, but he was unable to do so. He fasted for three days until he became lean, and so got through the hole. Then he ate of the grapes and became fat again, so that when he wished to leave the vineyard he could not pass through the gap. He fasted another three days until he grew sufficiently thin, and went out. When he was outside, he gazed at the vineyard and exclaimed, "All that is inside is indeed beautiful, but what advantage has one from you? As he enters so he leaves." This *Midrash* highlights the problem which the *A'mel* is expressing.

This verse is said at a funeral ceremony by the grave. In Rabbinical literature, for example in the *Talmud Bavli Niddah* 21a, the womb is called "*kever*". A person leaves his mother's womb (*kever*) and returns to the

kever. This cycle of life reminds us of the opening of *Kohelet* and in particular 3:20: "All go into one place; all are of the dust and all return to the dust."

The argument of the *A'mel* not only relates to the words of the *Yare'* but to his own ideas in Ch. 4. In that section the *A'mel* attempted to see society with the king at its helm as a solution to the problems of man. In this section the *A'mel* has moved away from this solution. Neither can he accept the *Yare's* point of view which emphasizes the positive value of work. The word *a'mel* is used rather than the *Yare's* concept of *a'voda*. The *A'mel* is left with his original idea that is based on the individual. He will attempt to find a solution to the question of the meaning of life by concentrating on the individual rather than his place in society.

It is interesting to note that in the Bible there is usually an attempt to solve the problems of man by placing him in the context of society as a whole. For example, in Job Ch. 38 and Ch. 39 G-d answers Job's question by asking him to see the bigger picture. In 38: 33-35 we read:

Do you know the ordinances of heaven? Can you its
dominion in the earth? Can you lift up your voice to the
clouds, that abundance of waters may cover you? Can you
send lightnings, that they may go, and say to you, here we
are?

Job is a man with many wounds. He is looking at each wound rather than seeing the bigger picture. He does not see the beauty of nature the birds, the trees, the sun rising, the harmony of all creation. Job is told to examine all the things that G-d does for the world and by so doing he will find an answer to his questions.

Kohelet's approach to this problem is very different. He attempts to find a solution not through society but by concentrating on the individual. Looking at the bigger picture may be running away from the problem itself. Chapters 4 and 5 were an attempt to use society as a solution but this approach failed and we now return to the world of the individual. This

being so the *A'mel* retracts his ideas in Ch. 4 and returns to his approach of Ch. 2. However he now is less extreme than he was. He moves from a concern that he will not be able to enjoy the work that he has done and will leave it to someone else, to a concern that he will have nothing to leave that heir. This concern is more realistic and less self centered.

The *A'mel*'s question in 5:15 is: "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 laboureth for the wind?" Here we have perhaps an allusion to the never ending cycle of nature that we began the book. In 1:6 we read: "The wind goes toward the south, and turns about unto the north; it turns about continually in its circuit, and the wind returns again to its circuits." Just as nature does not seem to progress but to move in endless futile cycles so too man seems to follow the same meaningless cycle. The *A'mel* comes to the conclusion in 5:16 that, "All his days also he eats in darkness, and he has much vexation and sickness and wrath." These terms used by the *A'mel* are connected to work. Work only leads to anger and sickness. This again is a response to the *Yare'* who had said in 5:11 "Sweet is the sleep of a labouring man whether he eat little or much." What then is the conclusion drawn by the *A'mel*? What will happen if he has nothing to leave to those who come after him? He writes in 5:17:

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 labour, wherein he labours under the sun, all the days of his life which G-d has given him for this is his portion.

The *A'mel* suggests solving his problem by saying that at least enjoy what you have now. If you are worried that someone else will enjoy your work, make sure that you enjoy your work now. If you are concerned that you will have no heir, make sure that you enjoy the fruits of your labour before you die. If you are worried that you may have not what to leave to your descendants, make sure that you enjoy your work now.

It is interesting to compare the argument that the *A'mel* puts forward now with the view of, another one of the characters we have mentioned in

Kohelet. The *A'mel* has moved full circle and is now basically upholding the view of the *Neheneh*! If we compare 5:17 with 3:13 we will see the similarities between them. In 3:13 the *Neheneh* argued: "But also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy pleasure for all his labour, is the gift of G-d." Compare this with 5:17 and the end of 5:18: "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 labour...for this is the gift of G-d." Although the *A'mel* seems to have reached the same conclusion as the *Neheneh* their reasons for seeing enjoyment as important are different. The *Neheneh* sees enjoyment as an ideal within itself. The *A'mel* however sees enjoyment as a product of his labours and a reward for the hard work which he has done.

Their conclusions however about the meaning of life are the same. The *Neheneh* writes in 3:22 at the end of his speech: "For who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?" The *A'mel* writes at the end of this chapter in 5:19: "For let him remember the days of his life that they are not many." They both agree that life is short and no-one can be sure what awaits man in the hereafter so enjoy the years that you have at your disposal.

In summary, the *A'mel* began with the problem of death and his concern that he will not enjoy the fruits of his labours. He searched in Ch 4 for a solution in looking at man within society as a whole. This too failed. He returned to his original standpoint with the individual but was faced with a problem that he may not have what to leave to his heirs. He could not accept that work itself has intrinsic value for when man dies what does he have to show for all his efforts? He reaches the conclusion that enjoyment and pleasure is the only answer to his problem; a conclusion reached by the *Neheneh* himself.

In the following section 6:1-12 we continue with the argument of the *A'mel*. We suggest that this chapter is a continuation of Ch 5 for two main reasons. Compare the language of 5:12 to 6:1. Both begin with a similar refrain. "There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun" can be compared to 6:1: "There is an evil which I have seen under the sun." Furthermore a comparison between 5:18 to 6:2 shows how there is

continuity between one section and the other. The Hebrew words "*o'šer*", "*nekhasim*", and the root "*šalat*" are used in both verses. Chapter 5:18 encourages man to enjoy the riches and wealth which G-d has given him. Chapter 6:2 speaks of a man who has been given riches and wealth by G-d, yet does not enjoy the fruits of his labour.

The *A'mel*, we suggest, is questioning himself and finds a further problem in his own argument. What happens if a person cannot enjoy the product of his work? There are times when a person is not given the opportunity to enjoy what he himself has done. G-d may not give him the strength to eat or a stranger may come and take away everything that he has achieved.

He continues with this theme in 6:3. Not only does "his soul have not enough of good," but "even a burial is not given to him." In this situation a stillborn child is better than this man for the stillborn has never lived at all and does not suffer the disappointment of not being able to enjoy what he has worked so hard to achieve. The stillborn child does not see the sun and will never see the sun. He in some ways is more fortunate than the man who sees the endless cycle of nature and does not understand the purpose of it all. This we suggest is the meaning of 6:5: "Moreover it has not seen the sun nor known it; this has gratification rather than the other." "This" refers to the stillborn child who has never seen the sun while "the other" refers to the *A'mel* who has seen the sun but has not enjoyed the world on which the sun shines.

The *A'mel* has returned to the place where he began in 4:2-3. There he wrote: "I praised the dead that are already dead more than the living that are yet alive. But better than they both is he that has not yet been." Both here and there he reaches the conclusion that it is better for not to have been born than to have lived through this world. Better to stand at the first point and not to move than to make the whole journey through life and end at the same point with which you began.

We are reminded here of the never ending cycle of nature which began the book. If we look closely at Ch. 5 and Ch. 6 we will see that the four elements of nature, the sun, the earth, the water and the wind are alluded

to in this section. In 6:6 we read: "Yea, though he live a thousand years twice told, and enjoy no good do not all go to one place?" This reminds us of 1:4: "One generation passes away and another generation comes; and the earth abides forever." The element of the wind is alluded to in 5:15: "And what profit hath he that he laboureth for the wind?" In 6:4-5 we read: "For comes in *hevel*, and departs in darkness, and the name thereof is covered with darkness; moreover it has not seen the sun nor known it." There is a clear allusion here to the sun of which we mentioned in 1:5: "The sun also arises and the sun goes down." In 6:7 we read: "All the labour of man is for his mouth and yet the appetite is not filled." Compare this to 1:7: "All the rivers run into the sea yet the sea is not full." Here we can compare the sea which never fills to man's desires which cannot be satiated.

Just like the cycle of nature does not begin nor end but seems to continue in its path without purpose or guidance, so too says the *A'mel* is the life of man. His conclusion, that it is better for man not to have been born than to live a meaningless life, is one that has brought him back to the place where he started. Not to be born cannot be a solution to the question on which the whole of *Kohelet* is based. As we have seen, all the characters attempt to find a purpose and meaning to life and the *A'mel* has failed to find a purpose for his life. At this point the *A'mel* understands that he has been defeated and leaves the discussion. We do not find him again in *Kohelet*.

(viii) SUMMARY OF PART ONE OF KOHELET

Chapters 1-6 form one unit in *Kohelet*. We began in Ch.1 with the never ending cycle of nature. We were introduced to the four elements of nature expressed in the sun, wind, the earth and the sea. These elements seem to act in a way which shows no direction or purpose. Man can reach the conclusion by studying this process that his life too has no purpose.

For *Kohelet* it is not nature which is problematic but man's place in a seemingly purposeless world. We saw how each of the elements in nature was paralleled by a similar trait in man. For example the sea that is not filled can be compared to man's desires that cannot be satiated.

By the end of chapter 6 *Kohelet* has reached the same conclusion as when he began. In 2:3 he writes:

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.

His conclusion at this stage is 6:12: "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?" He began by asking what is the good that man should choose for his life. He answers with a question, "Who knows what is good for man in his life?" Obviously, at this stage we have not reached a satisfactory answer to the central question on which the book is based.

The first part of *Kohelet* can be divided into the following sections:

1:1-11 - First introduction - The Never Ending Cycle Of Nature.

1:12-2:23 - Second introduction - A Presentation Of The Characters Of *Kohelet*.

2:24-6:12 - A Discussion Between These Characters.

In section 2:24 - 6:12 we were introduced to the *Neheneh*, the *A'mel* and the *Yare'*. The central character in this section is the *A'mel* and it is he who does most of the speaking. The *A'mel* is the character who builds the world and has influence over it. He sees himself as central to that world and takes upon himself all responsibility for justice and righteousness. The *Yare'* and the *Neheneh* put the responsibility for justice and righteousness on G-d himself, whilst the *A'mel* puts this responsibility on himself, thereby minimizing the role played by G-d.

Summary of the *Neheneh's* arguments.

The *Neheneh* is fatalistic in his approach to the world. He sees that everything is destined and planned by G-d and that man has a small role in deciding his future. Central to his philosophy is the refrain at the beginning of Ch. 3: "To everything there is a season". Man's duty in this world is to enjoy it.

The *Neheneh* does not hide from the fact that there seem to be injustices in this world but puts the responsibility for this firmly in the hands of G-d. G-d will ultimately reward the righteous and punish the wicked in the next world. In 3:17 he says: "The righteous and the wicked G-d will judge; for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work."

The *Neheneh's* ideology, based on enjoyment and pleasures, brings him to question the purpose of this world and leads him to ask whether in fact there is a difference between man and beast. His conclusion is not optimistic. In 3:19 he writes: "So that man has no pre-eminence above a beast; for all is *hevel*."

Summary of the *A'mel's* arguments.

The *A'mel* sees himself as central to the world. He is concerned with the "tears of the oppressed" and the fact that their problems do not seem to be addressed. He attempts to find a solution in society working together for the benefit of all its members, but does not see this as practical. He returns in Ch. 5 to the world of the individual but again is met with the problem that he may not have what to leave to his heirs. His concern that he will not be able to enjoy the fruits of his labour leads him to question whether it was worthwhile for him to be born at all. This is his conclusion and with it he finishes his argument and leaves the discussion. He has been defeated for he understands that not to be born at all is not an answer to the question posed at the beginning of the book: What is the purpose of life?

Summary of the *Yare's* arguments.

The *Yare*" argues with the philosophies of both the *Neheneh* and the *A'mel*. To the *A'mel* he points out that man should not think that he is able to solve the world's problems. Man should stop making promises and think that it is he who is supporting G-d. He thus argues with those who see sacrifices as being central to the service of G-d. It is the Holy of Holies with the Tablets of Stone in the Holy Ark which lies at the center of the Temple. Man's duty is to listen to the words of G-d emanating from the Holy of Holies. The *Neheneh* saw that judgment would be exercised "*Sam*" in the next world. The *Yare*' disagrees. He sees a system of "*gavoha mea'l gavoha*", a hierarchy in which the king is subservient to G-d in meting out justice. In this world man must do his best and work in order to provide for himself. The *Yare*' sees "*a'voda*" as a positive ideal which strengthens man and gives him satisfaction and purpose in his life. This is in contrast to the term "*a'mel*" which is used in a negative light.

The second part of *Kohelet* will continue through dialogue and discussion to answer the question posed at the beginning of the book; What is the purpose of life?

(ix) THE SPEECH OF THE HAKHAM #1

Ch. 7:1: A good name is better than precious oil; And the day of death than the day of one's birth.

7:2: It is better to go to the house of mourning, Than to go to the house of feasting; For that is the end of all men, And the living will lay it to his heart.

7:3: Vexation is better than laughter; For by the sadness of the countenance the heart may be gladdened.

7:4: The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; But the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

7:5: It is better to hear the of the wise, Than for a man to hear the song of fools.

7:6: For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, So is the laughter of the fool; This also is *hevel*.

7:7: Surely oppression turneth a wise man into a fool; And a gift destroyeth the understanding.

7:8: Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof; And the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.

7:9: Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry; For anger resteth in the bosom of fools.

7:10: 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.

7:11: Wisdom is good with an inheritance, Yea, a profit to them that see the sun.

7:12: For wisdom is a defence, even as money is a defence; but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom preserveth the life of him that hath it.

7:13: Consider the work of G-d; for who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked?

7:14: In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider; G-d hath made even the one as well as the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him.

7:15: All things have I seen in the days of my *hevel*; there is a righteous man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his evil doing.

7:16: Be not righteous over much; Neither make thyself over wise; why shouldest thou destroy thyself?

7:17: Be not overmuch wicked, Neither be thou foolish; why shouldest thou die before thy time?

7:18: It is good that thou shouldest take hold of the one; yea, also from the other withdraw not thy hand; for he that feareth G-d shall discharge himself of them all.

7:19: Wisdom is a stronghold to the wise man more than ten rulers that are in a city.

7:20: For there is not a righteous man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.

7:21: Also take heed unto all the words that are spoken lest thou hear thy servant curse thee.

7:22: For often times also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise has cursed others.

7:23: All this have I tried by wisdom; I said "I will get wisdom but it was far from me."

7:24: That which is far off, and exceeding deep who can find it out?

7:25: I turned about and applied my heart 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.

7:26: And I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands; who so pleases G-d shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her.

7:27: Behold, this have I found, says *Kohelet*, adding one thing to another to find out the account.

7:28: 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.

7:29: Behold, this only have I found, that G-d made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.

Most commentators believe that verses 1-14 form a distinct section of the book. Gordis in his commentary (p. 265) writes the following :

This section is a collection of proverbial statements similar to Proverbs in much of its subject matter, in the use of parallelism... in the employment of contrasts, in the lack of logical connection between the sayings and in the conventional ideas expressed... Actually, we have here a collection of proverbs containing some original elements of *Kohelet's* thought as well as more conventional ideas reflecting his career as a wisdom teacher.

Whybray in his commentary (p. 112) agrees for the most part with Gordis's conclusions. He titles the section from verses 1-14: "The Limitations Of Human Life." He does not see a logical progression of thought throughout the section and sees it held together partly by the repetition of certain forms. For example, the use of "*tov*" is pronounced in this section. It is mentioned here altogether eleven times.

Crenshaw in his commentary (p.132), titles this section: "A Collection Of Proverbs." He too sees this unit as a distinct section in the book and writes: "This unit emphasizes the relative worth of many things, using the key word 'better', sometimes in the sense of 'good'."

We suggest that it is possible to divide this chapter in a different way than is proposed by these commentators. We have shown that changes in grammatical style in *Kohelet* often precipitate changes of thought and ideas. Verses 1-22 are neutral or written in the second person whilst verses 23-29 are written in the first person. Whereas 1-22 is written in a style

similar to that of Proverbs, where ideas and suggestions about life are taught, verses 23-29 are written from a personal stance.

It is our underlying assumption in *Kohelet* that we have not a monologue but a dialogue between characters. This can explain the changes of linguistic style and content between various sections of the book. We suggest that Chapter 7 introduces us to a new character who joins the dialogue surrounding the question, "what is the purpose of life?" We will name this character "The *Hakham*". If we examine verses 1-22 we will see that the subject of wisdom repeats itself often in this section. For example in 7:4 we read: "The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth." In 7:10 we read: "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." In 7:11 we continue: "Wisdom is good with an inheritance." We will see that verses 23-29 form a distinct unit within themselves and is the voice of another of the characters of *Kohelet*.

What is the underlying message of the *Hakham*? In 6:12 the question was asked "For who knows what is good for man in his life?" The *Hakham* comes to answer this question. His use of the word "good" in the first part of Ch. 7 is his attempt to explain what he believes is good in this world. This also reminds us of 2:3 where *Kohelet* asks: "I searched in my heart how to pamper my flesh with wine... till I might see what is good for the sons of men that they should do under the heaven the few days of their life." With this understanding we can begin to look at the verses and attempt to find common themes. The *Hakham* is not only giving his own view of what is good in life but is in dialogue with the other characters of *Kohelet* who have already spoken. We will show that it is possible to divide the *Hakham's* speech into three sections in which he speaks to each one of the characters we have mentioned previously.

In 7:1 we read: "A good name is better than precious oil; and the day of death than the day of one's birth." There is a noteworthy assonance and alliteration in the Hebrew for name (*šem*) and oil (*šemen*). The use of oil reminds us of Ezekiel 16:4-9 which describes the young girl who is

washed in water and whose skin is covered with oil. The oil is the first liquid that is used to soften the skin of the newly born child. The good name reminds us of the eulogies that are made by the grave when a person has passed away. According to this understanding the phrase means "Better the eulogies by the grave on the day of death than the covering of oil on the day of one's birth." This explanation connects the first part of the verse to the second part: "And the day of death than the day of one's birth."

The *Midrash Kohelet Rabah* 7:1 illustrates the verse with a parable. It is as if there were two ocean going ships, one leaving the harbor and the other entering it. As the one sailed out of the harbor everyone rejoiced, but none displayed any joy over the one which was entering the harbor. A shrewd man remarked: "The opposite is true! There is no cause to rejoice over the ship which is leaving because nobody knows what storms it may encounter; but when a ship returns in safety that is an occasion for rejoicing." Similarly, when a person dies all should rejoice that he reached his haven with a good name and in peace.

This subsection ends with the same thought that it began: "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof" (verse 8). The end of a thing reminds us of the day of death and the beginning of a thing makes us think of the day one is. In fact the first eight verses form one thematic whole. They discuss the pleasures of man and their shortcomings.

We suggest that in this subsection the *Hakham* is discussing with the *Neheneh* about his way of life and the *Hakham* is offering his suggestions about what is good in this world. The references to "The house of feasting", "laughter", "the song of fools", reminds us of the *Neheneh* and his ideas at the beginning of the book. The use of oil can also be understood in this context. Oil is seen as one of the pleasures of man and as such the *Hakham* belittles its importance. The *Hakham* argues with *Neheneh* about his philosophy of life. "Do not think that the world is such a pleasant place", says the *Hakham* to the *Neheneh*. The world is not as beautiful as you may think. There is death in the world and much suffering and sadness. "It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the

house of feasting." He continues: "The heart of the wise, is in the house of mourning."

In 7:6 he continues: "For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of fools." The *Hakham* here is continuing with his speech to the *Neheneh*. If you listen to the thorns burning under the pot you will hear lots of noise. However despite the noise and the seeming hubbub of activity everything turns quickly into ashes. However a tree that burns does not make much noise but burns for a time. In this parable the *Hakham* is suggesting that the mirth and joy of the *Neheneh* does not last him for very long as it is quickly dampened with the advent of death.

From the second part of verse 7:8 we can detect a change in style and subject. We suggest that the *Hakham* is speaking in these verses to the *A'mel*. The second part of 7:8 is connected to the first part of 7:9; "And the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry." *Kohelet* here is advising man to control his temper and not make a rash retort when provoked for which he will afterwards be sorry. This message relates directly to the *A'mel* who questioned the injustices in the world and felt that it is man who is ultimately responsible for enforcing justice.

As we continue we have an even clearer indication that the *Hakham* is speaking in these verses to the *A'mel*. The central verse that leads us to this conclusion is 7:13, "Consider the work of G-d; for who can make that straight, which He has made crooked." The *A'mel* saw himself as the center of the world and put the responsibilities of improving that world on man himself. In the opinion of the *Hakham* the world is indeed not so good. G-d made the world with both good and evil. Man cannot change this reality not should man simply enjoy this world ignoring the injustices within it. The *Hakham* believes that the most that man can do is to study the world and to try and understand G-d's works. Thus the phrase: "Consider the work of G-d" is central to this section.

The *Hakham* says to the *A'mel*, in 7:14 "In the day of prosperity be joyful and in the day of adversity consider; G-d has made even the one as well as

the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him." In consequence of this plan, the human being cannot forecast what lies in store for him in the future, whether his prosperity will last, or whether his ill-luck will end. That being so, says the *Hakham* to the *A'mel*, submit to your fate; make the most of the good fortune while you can and do not be excessively worried when times are bad. With this understanding of the section we can return to the earlier verses and explain them.

7:8-9 discuss pride and anger. A person is angry when the world does not work out how he wants it to. He believes that he has the power to make changes in the world and he is frustrated when this does not work out. This is the problem with anger. The *Hakham* points out that life does not always work out how man wants or thinks it should.

In Rabbinical tradition anger is compared to idol worship, for in anger man suggests that he ultimately is the power in the world. Maimonides, for example, writes in Ch. 2 of his work *Hilkhot Deot* that anger is a very negative attribute and that the early Rabbis had said, "Whoever becomes angry, is considered as if he worshipped idols. "Patience however is a virtue which has the opposite effect. A person who is patient and accepts the fact that not all his plans come to fruition understands that the world does not go only around himself. It is for this reason that *Kohelet* through the voice of the *A'mel* praises patience and criticizes anger.

7:10 is a continuation of this theme. "Do not say how was it that the former days were better than these?" The *Hakham* admonishes the *A'mel* and tells him that he should not think that he has the power to change the past. What has been is no longer under our control, and all we can do is to accept the world as it is with all its faults.

In 7:11 we read: "Wisdom is good with an inheritance, yea a profit to them that see the sun." Various interpretations have been given to this verse. The *Midrash Kohelet Rabah* 7:11 has understood it in the following way. "Wisdom is good when it is an inheritance." Wisdom transmitted from teacher to student, or from father to son for several generations, is the superior kind of wisdom, for any possible errors will have been sifted out

over a period of many years. Rashi in his commentary on the verse understands this to mean that wisdom is good when it is accompanied by ancestral merit which is acquired by 'inheritance'. A further *Midrashic* explanation on the same verse in *Kohelet Rabah* connects this phrase with 2:2 of Ethics Of The Fathers which says "Excellent is Torah study together with a worldly occupation."

Commentators have differed quite widely about the meaning of this verse. The discussion, according to Crenshaw (p. 138) surrounds the meaning of the word "*I'm*" in the context of the verse. If it is used here in the sense of "with", then the author is saying that wisdom together with wealth is more desirable than wisdom on its own. If however "*I'm*" has the meaning of "as, as good as", then *Kohelet* is saying something quite different. Wisdom is then seen as a value on par with wealth with the emphasis then shifting to a down playing of the value of riches.

We suggest that the *Hakham* is making another point to the *A'mel*. We have already explained that the use of "the sun" in *Kohelet* can be understood metaphorically. In the first chapter we saw Rashi's explanation of the sun as referring to wisdom. With this understanding this verse takes on new light. Better a person should have wealth and wisdom together. But if that is possible and one can choose only one of these, then wisdom, referred to here by the sun, is better. This theme is continued in verse 12 and now we can understand the logical connection between these two verses. Both wisdom and money can act as a defense. Both can bring a measure of security. But says the *Hakham* it is wisdom that: "Preſeryeth the life of him that has it". The Metzudath David explains that wisdom can be the means of saving a man's life when it is in danger, whereas riches may be the cause of the owners death at the hands of men who seek to rob him. We see that the *Hakham* is attempting to persuade the *A'mel* of the advantages of wisdom over the accumulation of material goods.

We can summarize the words of the *Hakham* to both the *A'mel* and the *Neheneh* in this section in the following way. All these characters are attempting to deal with the problem of death in the world. The *Neheneh* ignores death. He now is alive and he intends to enjoy the pleasures of this

world. The question, what will happen when a person has died, is not relevant to him. After all he writes in 3:22: "There is nothing better, than a man should rejoice in his works; for that is his portion; for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?" The *A'mel* also deals with the problem of death and attempts to fight death. He does so either by positing the value of society or suggesting that man will inherit what he has done to his children after him.

The *Hakham* argues with both these approaches in this section. He does not fool himself into believing that one can ignore the problem of death as does the *Neheneh*. Nor does he believe that he is capable of perfecting the world as does the *A'mel*. All he can do is resign himself to the fact that death exists and accept this as a fact of life.

7:15-22 have been understood in various ways by the commentaries. For example Cohen (p. 154) understands this section as giving rules of living. He writes:

By advising submission to the order of things in the world, *Kohelet* did not imply that man must be completely passive. Within circumscribe limits he has freedom of movement and action, as well as the choice between alternative courses. He accordingly prescribes a few guiding principles.

Gordis in his commentary (p. 275) understands that *Kohelet* now urges the doctrine of the "Golden Mean". He writes:

This characteristic idea of Greek Philosophy...exercised a profound fascination upon many Jewish minds in the Middle Ages, notably that of Maimonides, who built his entire ethical system upon it... righteousness is no guarantee of happiness or success in life and wisdom is often a source of misery. Hence both these goals must not be pursued too zealously.

Crenshaw in his commentary (p. 140) agrees in principle with Gordis's analysis and writes "This unit deals with the dangers of excess, whether good or evil. *Kohelet* argues that extreme virtue produces self righteousness and excessive vice and endangers ones life." Whybray in his commentary (p.120) argues with this approach. He understands that *Kohelet's* warning is not against righteousness and wisdom but against self righteousness and pretensions to wisdom.

We suggest that in this chapter we do not have a collection of unconnected verses but the continuation of the speech of the *Hakham* to the individuals discussing the meaning of life. In verses 15-22 we can identify one theme. The *Hakham* is in discussion with the *Yare'* about the *Yare'*'s philosophy of life. Having dealt with the *Neheneh* and the *A'mel* the *Hakham* turns to the *Yare'* and says: "There is a righteous man that perishes in his righteous, and there is a wicked man that prolongs his life in his evil doing". If so, suggests the *Hakham*, what then is the purpose of observing the commandments? If there are righteous people who die early then what benefit does the *Yare'* have in studying *Torah* and keeping *Mitzvoth*? For this reason he writes: "Be not righteous over much...why shouldest thou destroy thyself?" Neither is it wise to be too much of a wicked person for why should one die before one's time.

The *Hakham* reaches the following conclusion in 7:18: "It is good that thou shouldest take hold of the one; yea also from the other withdraw not thy hand; for he that feareth G-d shall discharge himself of them all." A little righteousness, a little wickedness, are both necessary at different times. Both have their place according to the *Hakham* and both must be practiced. The fact that it is the *Hakham* who is speaking can be attested to in verse 19, "Wisdom is a stronghold to the wise man more than ten rulers that are in a city."

The *Hakham* tells the *Yare'* that it is impossible to be a completely righteous person for as verse 20 states: "There is not a righteous man upon earth that does good and sins not." The world is full of sin and a completely righteous person cannot succeed in this world. Verses 21 and 22 continue this thought and show how problematic it is to be a *Zadik*- a

righteous person . "Also take not heed unto all words that are spoken, lest thou hear thy servant curse thee." If a *Zadik* lives in a closed world and does not involve himself in the outside world then it is likely that he will be hurt by those less righteous than himself. There are many imperfect people who enjoy slandering and hurting the feelings of others. The *Zadik* who has not been exposed to such people will not be able to handle the taunts of such men. Know, that even your trusted servant can curse you and consider that you yourself may not be as holy as you may think. Thus he writes in verse 22: "For often also thine own heart knows that thou thyself likewise have cursed others."

To summarize, the *Hakham* tells the *Yare'* in this section that it is not worth being too much of a *Zadik* in this world. The righteous man finds it difficult to deal with society and with people who do not behave as he would expect. The *Hakham* believes that the *Yare'* is wasting his time trying to improve man. Man is incomplete and wickedness exists in the world. The only way to deal with this reality is to accept this fact.

(x) THE SPEECH OF THE YARE' # 2

7:23-29 are a new section and have been interpreted in various ways by the commentators. Crenshaw in his commentary (p.144) understands that this section discusses two profound mysteries: wisdom and woman. He writes: "Both mysteries defy understanding, wisdom because of its remoteness and woman because she cannot be found."

The introduction of the reference to woman has perplexed commentators from very early times. Whybray in his commentary (p.125) discusses the various opinions regarding this section. He writes:

In particular, it is not clear (1) whether *Kohelet* is talking about women in general or about a particular type of woman; and (2) whether or not at least part of the verse is a quotation

from conventional wisdom. The Revised Standard Version implies that the reference is to a particular kind of woman: the immoral woman against whose temptations men are constantly warned in ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature. In Proverbs we have a number of references to this type of woman for example in 2:16-19 and 5:3-6.

Others like Gordis (p. 282) understand that this is a male indictment of women in general. He writes: "Their physical charms and their emotional appeal are alike dangerous to man, because honor, rare among men, is non-existent among women." However in verse 9:9 we read: "Enjoy life with the wife whom thou lovest" which clearly suggests a different attitude towards woman. Gordis explains this inconsistency by viewing 9:9 as the ideal while the sentiment expressed here is the cynical reality. Whybray (p.125) suggests that the phrase: "Woman is more bitter than death" may be a quotation from a conventional saying which *Kohelet* has elaborated, quoting it without necessarily agreeing with it.

The Rabbinic commentators have their own commentary for this verse. They understand that *Kohelet* is referring only to evil licentious women who erotically trap men into evil ways. Rashi, for example, understands the phrase "Her arms are chains" as referring to a woman who performs no useful task and becomes lazy which leads her to wrong paths.

It is our suggestion that this new section continues the dialogue we have begun earlier between the characters in *Kohelet*. The *Hakham* had finished his speech by suggesting that it was not worth being too righteous in this world for man cannot anyway achieve perfection. In this section the *Yare'* is responding to the *Hakham's* remarks. We can understand this, especially when we notice the change in style and language in this section.

In the previous verses we had seen how the speaker praises wisdom and its importance in life. Here however we have the opposite view. Wisdom is seen to be far away and impossible to reach. This however makes greater sense when we understand that we have a dialogue between various characters and here the *Yare'* is responding to the *Hakham*. The

Yare' says that he too has followed this path but the wisdom that the *Hakham* talks about does not enable man to reach his destination. The connection between searching for wisdom and *Kohelet's* remarks on women is one which at first glance is perplexing. We will attempt to offer an explanation based on traditional sources which connects wisdom and woman in this section.

We have to understand the symbolic meaning of "woman" in Wisdom Literature. The Book of Proverbs discusses wisdom in great detail and also deals with the role of women. The phrase, "A woman of valour who can find?" in Proverbs 31:10 connects women in general to the concept of wisdom. The Vilna Gaon in his commentary on this verse in Proverbs understands this section as a metaphor for wisdom. We will show that his explanation in Proverbs is very plausible and can be used to understand various passages in Proverbs as well as our passage here in *Kohelet*.

If we examine the Book of Proverbs we can see that it is divided into two main parts. The first nine chapters form one whole. These are introduced by the verse: "The proverb of Solomon the son of David, King of Israel. Ch. 10:1 begins in a similar vein: "The proverbs of Solomon." The first nine chapters introduce us to the concept of wisdom and its relationship to the fear of G-d. In Ch. 7 wisdom is compared to woman. In verses 4-5 of this chapter we read: "Say to wisdom, 'you are my sister' and call understanding 'friend'. That they may preserve you from the strange woman, from the alien woman who makes her words smooth." Here we see a clear connection between woman and wisdom. In verse 4 wisdom is compared to a sister and is given a positive connotation. However in verse 5 we are introduced to the strange woman of whom one must be wary. Obviously a comparison is being made between two types of women and, as we shall see, between two types of wisdom.

Chapter 7:10-11 of Proverbs describe the ways of a woman whose reputation is in doubt:

And, behold, there met him a woman with the attire of a harlot, and wily of heart. She is riotous and rebellious, her

feet abide not in her house. Now she is in the streets, now in the broad places, and lieth in wait at every corner.

Chapter 8 of Proverbs continues the comparison between wisdom and woman. Unlike the previous chapter which describes the call of the harlot who haunts the streets and squares and hovers outside, this chapter describes another type of woman in positive terms. In 8:1-4 we read:

Doth not wisdom call, and understanding put forth her voice?
In the top of high places by the way, where the paths meet she standeth. Beside the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors, she crieth aloud: Unto you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men.'

In this Chapter wisdom is again compared to a woman but here she is not standing in the streets but at the entrance to the house. The harlot leaves her home and stands in the street whilst the good woman stands at the entrance of her home.

Ch. 9 of Proverbs continues the comparison between wisdom and woman. In 9:13-14 we read: "The woman of folly is turbulent, a woman of witlessness and knows nothing. And she sits at the entrance of her house, on a seat on the city's heights. To call to those who pass by who are going straight on their roads."

In other places in the Bible we find a connection between wisdom and woman. For example, the phrase "to know" (*lada'at*) is used both as acquiring wisdom and as a description of sexual intercourse. When Adam has his first union with Eve his wife the verse says in Genesis 4:1: "And Adam knew Eve his wife." This term is often used to describe sexual relationships. In Genesis 4:17 we read: "And Cain knew his wife and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch."

We have described so far how Proverbs compares the good and bad woman and how woman is compared to wisdom. What we will discover is that just like there is a reputable woman and a disreputable one so too

there is a positive wisdom and a negative one. Just as the good woman stays around her home so too positive wisdom can be found close to home by G-d himself. The woman of disrepute however, hovers outside and keeps away from her home. So too wisdom which is not positive can be found away from home, distanced from G-d.

We can now understand the use of the term woman in *Kohelet*. He is not saying that all woman are evil or are of disrepute but that there some types of wisdom whose source is not close to G-d. The "strange" woman is being compared to wisdom which is foreign to the traditions. Thus in 7:26 when we read: "I find more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands;" it is referring to the unscrupulous type of woman who sets out to lure a man into her toils to his undoing. *Kohelet* continues: "But the sinner shall be taken by her." Since like is attracted to like, only an evildoer will be attracted by a debased woman. The mention of "the sinner" supports our view that *Kohelet* here, through the voice of the *Yare'*, is referring only to a vicious woman.

The *Yare'* in this section is thus not decrying all women or all forms of wisdom. His contention is that the wisdom described by the *Hakham* is not true wisdom. Just like the good woman can be found at the entrance to her home so too true wisdom can only be found close to G-d. We suggest, according to this, that 7:24 can be understood in a clearer light. "That which is far off, and exceeding deep; who can find it out?" The *Yare'* is referring to wisdom. Why however is wisdom seen as being far away?

If we examine Proverbs 8:22-29 and Job 28:1-28 we may find an answer to this question. In Proverbs 8:22-29 we read:

The Lord made me as the beginning of His way, the first of his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; When there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills, was I brought forth. While as yet He had not yet made the earth, nor the fields, nor the beginning of the

dust of the world. When He established the heavens, I was there.

What is being described here is the foundations of the world. However before anything was created, Proverbs says that wisdom existed and set out the guidelines for the whole structure of creation. We can now understand *Kohelet's* description of true wisdom as being "far off and exceeding deep."

Similarly in Job 28 we find a description of the natural elements of the earth. It is possible to reach the place where gold and silver can be found under the ground but there are some things that cannot be found. In 28:12 he writes: "But wisdom, where shall it be found and where is the place of understanding?" In verse 28: 20 he repeats this theme: "From where will wisdom come and where is the place of understanding?" He answers this question in 28: 28: "And unto man He said: Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; And to depart from evil is understanding."

This idea is constantly repeated throughout the Book of Proverbs. In 1:7 we read that: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." In 2:6 we read: "For the Lord giveth wisdom, out of His mouth cometh knowledge and discernment." In 9:10 we learn: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the All holy is understanding."

We now have a better appreciation of the difference between true wisdom and false wisdom. True wisdom as described by the *Yare'* as being "*rahok*", has G-d as its source. False wisdom however is not connected to G-d. In a similar way a good woman is connected to her home whilst a bad woman walks the streets. Fear of G-d is the channel by which man makes his connection to G-d. Man will achieve true wisdom by opening this channel and developing this relationship of fear of G-d.

The *Yare'* in *Kohelet* admits that he went in search of wisdom. He writes in 7:25: "I turned about, and applied my heart 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." However what does man find

when he goes and searches for wisdom? He finds the harlot the woman "who is more bitter than death." True wisdom does not have to be searched for. According to the *Yare'* true wisdom can be reached through the fear of G-d which is the source of all things.

In summary, in this section, the *Yare'* dismisses the *Hakham*. He does not discuss the arguments of the *Hakham* himself but rejects the *Hakham* because his wisdom is not based on the fear of G-d. The wisdom of the *Hakham* is based on external knowledge and as such it is the foreign woman who cannot be accepted.

The final verse in 7:29, can now be understood. "Behold, this only have I found, that G-d made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions." Cohen in his commentary (p.159) makes the following remark:

G-d had endowed them with faculties and instincts which He designed for the perpetuation of the human race and its true progress; but these have been corrupted and employed for their own ends. In the same spirit the Rabbis declared that even "the evil inclination" was created for a good purpose, for 'wit not for that impulse, a man would not build a house, marry a wife, beget children or conduct business affairs'.

Maimonides makes a similar comment when he writes that G-d made man with a perfect nature capable of high attainments. Man's perversions spring from his own devices, which in turn cause his downfall. According to our understanding the *Yare'* is telling the *Hakham* that it is man, by creating all types of wisdom in this world which is foreign to the will of G-d, who in fact turns himself away from being wholehearted in his attitude towards G-d.

(xi) THE ARGUMENT BETWEEN THE YARE' AND THE HAKHAM

Ch. 8:1: Who is 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.

8:2: I [counsel thee]: keep the king's command, and that in regard of the oath of G-d.

8:3: Be not hasty to go out of his presence; stand not in an evil thing; for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him.

8:4: Forasmuch as the king's word hath power; and who may say unto him: 'What doest thou?'

8:5: Whoso keepeth the commandment shall know no evil thing; And a wise man's heart discerneth time and judgment.

8:6: For to every matter there is a time and judgment; for the evil of man is great upon him.

8:7: For he knoweth not that which shall be; for even when it cometh to pass, who shall declare it unto him?

8:8: There is no man that hath power over the wind to retain the wind; neither hath he power over the day of death; and there is no discharge in was; neither shall wickedness deliver him that is given to it.

8:9: 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.

8:10: 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 *hevel*.

8:11: 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;

8:12: 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 G-d, that fear before Him;

8:13: 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 G-d.

The commentaries are varied in their explanation of this section and in particular the meaning of the first verse. Most connect the first nine verses of Ch. 8 together and understand that the section examines the complex issues involving rulers and subjects. For example, Crenshaw in his commentary (p.149) understands that this section emphasizes the absolute power of a monarch and the consequent necessity for caution in his presence. He continues:

However *Kohelet* concedes that careful individuals can escape royal fury by loyal adherence to the kings will as expressed in decrees. The unit ends with some reflection about the great imponderables that render all human beings subject, specifically life and the moment of death.

Gordis in his commentary (p. 285) also understands that the section is dealing with loyalty to the king. He discusses which king is referred to in this section but reaches no definitive conclusion. He writes:

It is not easy determine which king is meant in this section, but the advice would be appropriate for those having relations with either the Ptolemaic or the Seleucid rulers, or with their deputies in Palestine. The existence of such relationships between Jewish patrician families and the foreign courts is strikingly demonstrated in the history of the Tobiades.

Cohen in his commentary (p. 160) also understands that advice here is given regarding relationships with a king. He writes:

After a brief tribute to the pre-eminence of a wise man, *Kohelet* gives sound advice on the attitude one should adopt towards the king. At a time when a persons life and fortune might depend upon royal caprice, the Wisdom writers felt it necessary to dwell upon this subject.

We shall suggest another approach to understanding this section. One of the main problems that we find here that is not discussed in detail in the commentaries are the contradictions in this section. For example, in 8: 11 we read: "Because sentence (*pitgam*) against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." Here he is suggesting that the wicked are not punished immediately for their actions. However in 8: 13 he writes: "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 G-d." Here, on the other hand, he suggests that there is punishment for the wicked!

We suggest that in this chapter we continue with the dialogue that we have seen so far in *Kohelet*. We have seen how supposed contradictions in the book have been explained by suggesting that different sections are being said by different personalities. This theory continues to validate itself in this section as we shall explain.

The first verse has been explained in various ways. Whybray, in his commentary (p.128) writes:

This verse presents almost insuperable difficulties to the interpreter with regard both to its intrinsic meaning and its connection with its context. Some commentators regarded as the beginning of the next section about behaviour in the presence of the king: a wise man will not show his true feelings, but will try to preserve an amiable expression on his face. Others attempt to interpret it as the conclusion to the previous section.

The first verse is certainly problematic but we would agree with those who see a continuation between Ch. 7 and the first verse of Ch. 8. We have already explained that Ch. 7 described the argument between the *Yare'* and the *Hakham*. The *Yare'* emphasized that true wisdom can only be found when wisdom is based on the fear of G-d. The *Hakham* in this chapter responds: "Who is like the wise man?" We follow Rashi's explanation that a rhetorical question is being posed; "Who in this world is as important as the man of wisdom?" The *Hakham* continues "A man's wisdom maketh his face to shine." Because of his wisdom man gains the admiration of all who know him. This gladdens his heart and causes his countenance to beam. If the first verse is indeed the continuation of the words of the *Hakham*, 8:2 does not continue the *Hakham's* train of thought. "I [counsel thee]: keep the king's command and that in regard of the oath of G-d." The argument that one should listen to the king because that is an obligation that comes from G-d is not an argument that the *Hakham* would use.

We suggest that within this section there is a dialogue between the *Hakham* and the *Yare'*. The *Hakham* asks the rhetorical question in 8:1 and the *Yare'* replies and continues his speech until 8:9. This style of writing differs from what we have seen up till now in *Kohelet*. Whereas before we divided whole sections between various characters, each character speaking for a whole section, here within one section we can identify a dialogue between characters.

The *Yare'* cuts off the words of the *Hakham* and begins 8:2. The word "*ani*" is problematic in this verse and the commentators have offered various explanations. The problem is the omission of a verb in this verse. The Ibn Ezra and Metzudath David add the words "counsel thee" in this verse and this has been reflected in our translation. However some commentators have felt that because "*ani*" does not make sense in the context, it is probably a textual error. The Revised Standard Version leaves it untranslated. Some see the word as connected to "*a'marti*" but this is only one possibility. Once we understand that it is the *Yare'* who is responding to the words of the *Hakham* then we can explain the whole section in a new light. The "*ani*" is an intuitive response by the *Yare'* to the *Hakham* and he feels that he must reply immediately to the *Hakham*.

We can understand the words of the *Yare'* in this section when we compare them to his first speech in Ch 5. In the end of Ch. 7 the *Yare'* had argued with the *Hakham* but he did not explain his own philosophy of life. His main argument was that the *Hakham* was not presenting true wisdom but false external wisdom. Here the *Yare'* presents his own view which is remarkable when compared to his thoughts in Ch. 5. When we approach *Kohelet* as a book which represents coherent arguments that develop between characters and within characters themselves then we can appreciate the fact that at times characters continue their arguments from previous sections.

We can find the following common points between what is said by the *Yare'* in Ch. 5 and what is said by him in Ch. 8. In 5:3 we read how one should not make promises that one cannot fulfill. In this connection the word "*neder*"- a vow - is used. The idea is that one must honor one's vows and promises. Here too in Ch. 8 the *Yare'* expresses the importance in his belief of keeping the oath of G-d. Whereas Ch. 5 discussed the vow of man, Ch. 8 discusses the oath of G-d. In 5:1 he expresses the importance of being careful with one's words especially in relation to criticism of G-d. In 8:4 he again mentions the importance of accepting the "King's" word and accepting His authority without question for "Who may say unto Him, what doest thou?" In 5:7 he writes that there is a system of justice in the world where, "for one higher than the high watcheth and there are higher than they". In 8:6 he uses the word "*hefetz*" which he mentioned in 5:7 and again refers to the fact that, "For to every matter there is a time and judgment." In 5:7 he understood that there was a hierarchy of those meting out justice with the king at the bottom and G-d at the top. In 8:9 he also sees a hierarchy but here man is pitted against man; "What time one man had power over another to his hurt."

The similarities between these two sections can be clearly seen as well as their differences. One can explain the differences by understanding that whereas it is the *Yare'* who is speaking in both sections, his partner in dialogue is different in each case. In Ch. 5 the *Yare'* is responding to the words of the *A'mel*. The *Yare'* as we have shown felt that he has a responsibility to manage the world and deal with its problems. At first he

felt that he could deal with this himself, then he searched for a solution within society as a whole and when this failed he returned to his family.

The *Yare'*, as we have explained in Ch. 5, tries to calm the *A'mel* and to tell him that he should not expect too much of himself nor make too many promises. There is justice in the world and someone who is higher than man who is organizing that world. And like the *Neheneh* who believed that one should not even look to find justice in this world the *Yare'* suggests that there is justice but one must search to find it. In this section the *Yare'* is speaking to the *Hakham*. The *Hakham* builds his argument on the fact that he searches the world to be able to understand it. Through life's experience he begins to understand life's perplexities. The *Yare'* argues with the *Hakham's* basic assumption. "I [counsel thee]: keep the king's command and that in regard of the oath of G-d." The *Yare'* explains here that there is one vow that man must keep and that is the promise that he made to keep the *Torah* and its commandments. This we suggest is what is meant by "the oath of G-d". The *Yare'* understands that this oath is unconditional. Whatever we may feel or experience in life we must unconditionally accept G-d's *Torah* and observe His commandments. This philosophy of life conflicts with that of the *Hakham*. For him the fulfillment of vows and promises is conditional. Therefore he can conclude in Ch. 7 that: "Be not righteous overmuch." He has looked at the world from his own perspective and has reached his own conclusion. These are the ones that ultimately matter to him.

The *Yare'* continues his argument in verse 3: "Be not hasty to go out of his presence." We suggest that the *Yare'* is warning the *Hakham* that he cannot expect to be able to run away from G-d. We find a similar argument being used in Job and in Psalms.

In Job 10:8-22, G-d is described as being all powerful and being able to understand every part of man. As such it is impossible to hide from G-d. As such man has no rest from G-d because He will always find man wherever he hides. He writes therefore: "If I have sinned woe to me."

meaning of the verse. "A man cannot forge a weapon and deliver himself from the Angel of Death." Whichever explanation one prefers it is clear that according to the *Midrash* what is being expressed here is the idea that man cannot escape death as it is bound to come to everyone. This phrase can also be understood to mean that when a war is raging and people are being killed one cannot expect to send a peace delegation (*mišlahat*). It is only when the war has died down and the killing has stopped that one can seriously discuss peace. As such death is the most powerful ruler.

Death however is not the end. The *Yare'* continues at the end of 8:8 "neither shall wickedness deliver him that is given to it." Death catches up on everyone and then man stands before G-d in judgment.

Kohelet is unique amongst all the books of the Bible in its treatment of the question of death. Ch. 12, which we will discuss later in greater detail, describes the process of aging and the decomposing of the body in the ground.

However that is not the end. In 12:7 we read "And the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to G-d Who made it." He continues "For G-d shall bring every work into the judgment concerning every hidden thing, whether be good or whether it be evil." Man will ultimately be judged after his death (*šam*). It is impossible for man to run away from G-d's judgment and this is the *Yare's* argument at the end of verse 8.

We can now understand 8:5-6. "Who keeps commandment shall know no evil thing; and a wise man's heart discerns time and judgment. For to every matter there is a time and judgment; for the evil of man is great upon him." He began in 8:3 by stating: "Stand not in a evil thing" and continues in 8:5 with: "shall know no evil thing". One who observes G-d's commandments will protect himself from evil and will succeed in the judgment. The terms "*mišpat*", "*hefez*" and "*et*" are all familiar to us from the previous words of the *Yare'* in Ch. 5.

However there is a difference between his ideas there and here. In Ch. 5 he describes a system of judgment which is carried out in this world by the

king with the ultimate King, G-d above him. In this chapter however the "*mišpat*" referred to is in the world to come.

We can summarize that in *Kohelet* we have four different approaches to death. The *Neheneh* ignores death and believes that he must enjoy this world to the full and live for today. The *A'mel* fights death and searches for ways in which he can overcome it. The *Hakham* recognizes death but suggests that one must learn to live with the reality of its inevitable occurrence. The *Yare'* also recognizes the inevitability of death but suggests that man should use this knowledge to make his life worthwhile in this world and to fear G-d and His commandments.

The *Hakham*, as a result of understanding the inevitability of death, suggests that man should not strive for too much in this world and thus this phrase "Be not righteous over much." The *Yare'* however answers him in this section by saying that death is only part of this world. It is not the end. Death brings with it the day of judgment and man cannot run away from this final reckoning. Therefore the *Yare'* suggest that man do his utmost in this world so that he comes prepared to the next, "I [counsel thee]; keep the king's command and that in regard of the oath of G-d."

8:9 can be understood as completing the *Yare's* theme, "What time one man had power over another to his hurt." It is true that in this world one man may be cruel to another but this is not a true reflection of how ultimately justice will be meted out. There is also a time for judgment and it is also meted out "*šam*".

There is no contradiction between the *Yare's* implication that in Ch. 5 justice is meted out in this world and the understanding in Ch. 8 that judgment is given out after death. Certainly there is judgment in this world. But if one succeeds in evading this judgment know that there is also judgment in the world to come.

8:10-12 form a new line of thought and can be understood when seeing these verses as responding to what has been already written. 8:10 is

especially difficult to understand and we will offer various possibilities as expressed by the commentators.

The major difficulty in these verses and the ones immediately following them is that two totally opposing views seem to stand side by side. In the first part of verse 12 it is conceded that a habitual sinner may attain long life which is normally reserved for the wise or the righteous. However verse 13 declares unequivocally that the life of the wicked person who does not fear G-d will be short and miserable.

Whybray in his commentary (p. 135) summarizes the three main solutions to this difficulty that have been proposed. Some commentators, including Galling and Lauha regard verses 12b-13 as a gloss added to the book by a later editor to protest against *Kohelet's* heretical view. According to others, including Lortz and Loader, *Kohelet* cites the traditional view only to refute it in verse 14. Gordis holds a third view. Although verses 12b-13 express a point of view which *Kohelet* cannot accept without serious qualification, he does not reject it entirely. It is the frequent exceptions to the rule which lead him to characterize this aspect of human life as "*hevel*" and to recommend once more the joyful acceptance of whatever things G-d sees fit to bestow (verse 15).

Following our understanding of *Kohelet* as a dialogue and not a monologue we have a very plausible suggestion which deals with this problem. Verses 10-12a are being said by the *Hakham* whilst verse 12b-13 is the response of the *Yare'* to the words of the *Hakham*. We will explain these verses with the underlying assumption that it is these two characters who are speaking to each other but first we will attempt to understand verse 10 which has been interpreted in various ways by the commentators.

Verse 10 is one of the most semantically difficult verses in the entire book. The Ibn Ezra offers the following explanation:

I saw the wicked who rule over their fellow men, and tyrannize over them, die without anguish, and they came into the world a second time (their children succeed to their

places and perpetuate them); whilst those who departed from the holy place (the holy ones) die without issue and are forgotten in the city where they were, and these are they who executed justice.

According to his explanation a comparison is being made between the wicked who die peacefully and leave a legacy of evil behind them and the righteous whose good deeds are forgotten. He understands the term "*ken*" as meaning "right". This follows the interpretation of the verse in Numbers 27:7: "The daughters of Zelafchad speak right (*ken*)."

We suggest that the *Hakham* in this verse is responding to the ideas of the *Yare'*. The *Yare'* claimed that death will catch up to everyone including the wicked and it is impossible to run away from it. The *Hakham* responds by noting that there are many wicked people who are walking around the world and who do not die. How is it that they have not died? This then is a possible explanation of verse 10. "I have seen many wicked who are dead walking (*vavaou*)."
How is it possible that dead men are walking? Obviously, says the *Hakham*, he is seeing a revival of the dead!

The *Hakham* is thus answering the *Yare'* in a cynical fashion. The *Yare'* cannot say that the wicked are punished by death as there are so many of them walking the streets. The *Hakham* continues "They have walked away from the holy place and can be found in the city doing what they wish." The holy place here can be understood as a euphemism for the cemetery. The wicked who should be dead are thriving and doing whatever they want. The *Yare'* suggests that they will receive their judgment "*šam*" in the next world. The *Hakham* cannot accept this. In the meantime the wicked man is enjoying his life and does not care about the consequences of his actions.

The *Hakham* continues in 8:11: "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." The wicked assume that because punishment does not befall them immediately after their sin they will escape altogether. One cannot build a system of justice in judgment is meted out long after the

crime has been committed. Justice has to be seen to be done otherwise there is no deterrent for doing evil. It makes no sense to punish a person when he is ninety for what he did when he was twenty.

The *Yare'* responds to the *Hakham's* comments in 12b-13. The change in style and content of these verses indicates a change of speaker. G-d will punish the wicked in this world. "It shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall He prolong his days, which are as a shadow, because he feareth not before G-d." The *Yare'* agrees that there must be retribution for the wicked in this world. Otherwise they will continue in their evil ways and will not return to the path of righteousness. He says that in fact in most cases this is true and the wicked do not enjoy a good life in this world. However those who do escape retribution in this world will be punished after death in the next world.

The *Hakham* and the *Yare'* are arguing on what in fact is the reality of the situation. The *Hakham* sees "A sinner doeth evil a hundred times, and prolongeth his days", whilst the *Yare'* sees "It shall not be well with the wicked neither shall he prolong his days."

In summary both the *Yare'* and the *Hakham* see the need for retribution in this world. One cannot delay punishment for many years as this will take away the deterrent effect of the punishment. The *Hakham* however does not see this retribution as taking place in this world. There are many wicked people who should be dead who are walking the streets. This leads him to the philosophy of coming to terms with the world as it is without expecting too much from oneself. The *Yare'* however sees that there is retribution in this world. He agrees that there are cases where the wicked are successful but that these are the exceptional cases. G-d will punish the wicked who escape retribution in this world when they die and are judged in the "*mišpat*" in the world to come. Thus according to the *Yare'* there are two tiers of judgment (*gavoah me'al gavoah*). Judgment meted out in this world and judgment carried out in the next.

(xii) **THE SPEECH OF THE NEHENEH #2**

Ch. 8:14: There is a *hevel* 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 *hevel*.

8:15: So I commended mirth, that a man has 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 G-d hath given him under the sun.

8:16: 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.

8:17: Then I beheld all the work of G-d, 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.

Ch. 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 G-d; whether it be love or hatred, man knoweth it not; all is before them.

9:2: 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 unclean; 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.

9:3: 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.

9:4: For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope; for a living dog is better than a dead lion.

9:5: For the living know that they shall die; but the dead know not anything, neither have they anymore a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten.

9:6: As well their love, as their hatred and their envy is long ago perished; neither have they anymore a portion for ever in anything which is done under the sun.

9:7: Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for G-d hath already accepted thy works.

9:8: Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no oil.

9:9: Enjoy life with the wife who thou lovest all days of the life of thy *hevel*, which He hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy *hevel*; for that is thy portion in life, and in thy labour wherein thou labourest under the sun.

9:10: 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.

9:11: 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 favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.

9:12: 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.

9:13: This also have I seen as wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great unto me.

9:14: 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.

9:15: Now there was found in it a poor man and wise, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man.

9:16: Then said I "wisdom is better than strength; nevertheless the poor mans wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard."

This section has been divided in various ways by the commentators. There is wide disagreement between them about how this section should be understood. Whybray in his commentary (p. 138) connects 8:16-17 and titles this short passage "The Inscrutability Of G-d's Work." He writes:

In this short passage *Kohelet* reiterates a theme which appears frequently in the book. In its present position it may be seen as a comment on the previous section: the reason for the apparent unfairness frequently experienced in life is beyond human understanding. It also has some relevance to the passage which follows...verse 16-17 may have been placed here by an editor who wished thereby to give a more systematic presentation of *Kohelet's* thought.

Whybray sees 9:1-10 as a separate section and titles it "Enjoy Your Life For Death Levels All". Cohen in his commentary takes a similar approach and titles 8: 16-17 "G-d's Ultimate Purpose Is Unfathomable". He writes, "So much of the divine plan for the human being, mentioned in the last verse, is comprehensible, but His ultimate design in devising the scheme of life is beyond man's understanding." Crenshaw in his commentary (p. 153) connects verses 16-17 to the previous section and titles it "The Mystery Of Divine Activity". He agrees however with Whybray's analysis that 9:1-10 is one section. He titles it "The Shadow Of Death". He writes: (p. 159)

A lengthening shadow extends the book, becoming especially dark in this unit. *Kohelet* thinks no-one can ascertain the deity's disposition towards humans, for a common fate befalls everyone regardless of religious performance or its absence.

Gordis in his commentary (p. 292) sees the section from 8:10 - 9:3 as one thematic whole. In it he shows how *Kohelet* deals with the failures of the retributive process. As such he differs from the commentators previously mentioned who begin a new section with 9:1. Zer-Kavod in his commentary sees 9:1-18 as one section and titles it "Man Does Not Know".

We suggest that there is one speaker from 8:14 - 9:16. As we have shown the contradictions within *Kohelet* can best be understood when we explain that different characters with different philosophies of life are in dialogue with each other. The underlying theme in these verses is emphasized in 8:15:

So I commended mirth, but 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 G-d has given him under the sun.

We have already been introduced to a character who believes that this is his philosophy in life. This is the *Neheneh*. We will show that this is the *Neheneh's* final speech and in it he defines his approach to life which differs somewhat from his original ideas in Ch. 3.

Clearly, 8:15 is in line with the *Neheneh's* philosophy. What is more difficult to understand is how 8: 14 is connected to the *Neheneh's* thought. The *Yare'* and the *Hakham* discussed the question of G-d's retribution in the world. The *Hakham* did not deny the fact that G-d may be judging the world but argued that because this judgment is not seen to take place in this world and is pushed off to the next there is little value in this judgment as a deterrent for the wicked. The *Yare'* argued and said that the wicked are indeed punished in this world but occasionally their retribution is meted out in the world to come.

The *Neheneh* in this verse argues with both these philosophies. He has searched to find whether there is retribution in the world and has searched

in vain. He finds "that there are righteous man 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". In this verse he uses the word "*hevel*" twice. This indicates to us the measure of his despair in not finding order in the way the world is run.

In the Bible we find various books that deal with the problem of reward and retribution. Some discuss the problem of bad things happening to the righteous and some mention the problem of good things happening to the wicked. For example, the Book of Job deals at length with the problem of Job's misfortunes and why they should befall a man who appears to be moral and righteous. In Jeremiah 12:1 we find the opposite problem - why there are wicked people who succeed in this world. He writes: "Why is the way of the wicked successful?" In Jonah 4:2 we read: "For I knew that Thou art a gracious and compassionate G-d, long-suffering, and abundant in mercy, and repentest Thee of the evil." G-d here is described as having compassion for the wicked.

Two separate questions are asked in the Prophets. Firstly, how is it that the righteous suffer in this world? There seems to be too much strict justice meted out by G-d. Secondly, how is it that the wicked prosper in this world? There seems to be too much mercy in the world. Rarely do we find in the Bible that the question is asked both on the evil happening to the righteous and the good happening to the wicked. What the *Neheneh* is really saying is that there seems to be no system of justice at all! As such the *Neheneh's* argument is far more damning than the *Hakham's*. If there is no judgment at all as the *Neheneh* claims then we can understand his conclusion in verse 15 that man should enjoy himself in this world for that is the only thing he has left. No-one seems to know the correct direction in life and therefore the most you can do is to enjoy it!

In 8:16 he directs his comments to the *Hakham*. The *Hakham* has tried to understand the world. The *Neheneh* tells him that all his efforts will not bear fruit "For neither day nor night do men sleep with their eyes".

He continues in 8:17 by turning both to the *A'mel* and to the *Hakham*. To the *A'mel* he says "Then I beheld all the work of G-d, 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." To the *Hakham* he continues "Yea further, though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it." To both he is indicating that there is no possibility for man to understand the ways of G-d whether there is or there is not punishment for man's deeds.

In Ch. 9. we reach one of the low points in *Kohelet*. From the *Neheneh's* conclusion that there is no reward or retribution he says the following in 9:2:

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 unclean; 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.

Rashi, following the *Midrash* provides examples of actual diverse personages in Scripture who are illustrative of the descriptions in this verse and who shared common fates. For example, "righteous" refers to Noah and "wicked" refers to Pharaoh both of whom suffered towards the end of their lives.

The examples given in this verse reminds us of 5:1-5 which describe the futility of making promises that one cannot keep. The terms '*tamei*', '*tahor*', '*zoveah*', are ones which have previously used by the *Yare'*. However he uses these very same terms to prove the opposite. Whether one is righteous or wicked in this world the same fate occurs to both. Death is unavoidable and as such there is no retribution or reward after death.

What is his conclusion from this unhappy fact? He continues in 9:4: "For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope". The only hope for man is to keep hold of life because that is the only thing that man has certainty

of. Ibn Ezra comments that this verse is a citation of the common rationale of mankind: "While there is life there is hope". *The Neheneh* continues: "For a living dog is better than a dead lion".

Whybray in his commentary (p. 142) suggests that this is probably a popular saying quoted by *Kohelet* with approval as a support for his view. The dog was the most despised and most wretched of animals according to ancient Near Eastern ideas, whereas the lion was then as now "the king of beasts". *Kohelet* therefore is saying that life however wretched, is preferable to death. In Scriptures we also find that the dog is used as a term of contempt (Samuel 1:17:14) while the lion is the mightiest among beasts (Proverbs 30:30).

In 9:5 *Kohelet* gives the reason why he holds life, despite all its contradictions, preferable to death. While alive, man possesses consciousness, if only the consciousness that he must sooner or later die, whereas in death all perception ceases. The phrase: "Neither have they anymore a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten" reminds us of 1:11 which says: "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." Nothing remains after death. All the good that they have done is forgotten.

In this verse the *Neheneh* is arguing not only with the *Yare'* but also with the *Hakham*. The *Hakham* had said in 7:1: "A good name is better than precious oil; and the day of death than the day of one's birth." Here the *Neheneh* is saying exactly the opposite, "For a living dog is than a dead lion". In contrast to the saying of the *Hakham* that a "good name is better than precious oil" the *Neheneh* asks what good is their name if ultimately it will be forgotten?

Man has various ways of making an impression in the world after he has died. One of them is through his actions in the world and the name that he has made for himself. The *Neheneh* claims that once a person has died he no longer has a name which will inspire others.

The *Neheneh's* conclusion is described in 9:7-10. In 9:8 he says "Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no oil". The *Targum*, *Midrash Kohelet Rabah* and Rashi interpret this verse metaphorically to tone down the hedonistic view expounded in the preceding verse: the whiteness of the garments being a symbol of a sinless life and the "oil" a symbol of a good name. Ibn Ezra rejects this explanation and understands the advice to refer to physical comfort. White garments were worn on festive occasions and the exhortation advises men to embrace every opportunity to have a happy time. In the heat of the Orient oil, was poured on the head to cool it and the effect was refreshing.

A striking parallel to this passage has been found in the Babylonian Gilgamesh epic dated about 2000 BCE part of which reads: "O Gilgamesh fill thy belly; day and night be joyful...let thy garments be bright anoint thy head and purify thyself; with the children at thy side enjoy the wife of thy bosom." The resemblance does not necessarily indicate direct borrowing, and the two writers may independently have summarized the essential joys of life in identical terms.

Continuing our theme, that it is the *Neheneh* who is speaking, we can understand the references to oil which are made in this verse. The words of the *Hakham* in 7:1: "A good name is better than precious oil" immediately comes to mind. The *Neheneh* disagrees with the statement of the *Hakham*. A good name is not better than good oil. The pleasures that man can enjoy are more worthwhile and therefore rather go to the house of feast than to the house of mourning.

The *Neheneh* continues this theme in 9:9 where he mentions another pleasure which man should enjoy: "Enjoy life with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life." He continues in 9:10 by asserting that man should do whatever he desires because: "There is no work, nor device nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest".

The Hebrew word "*Seol*" is used to describe the abode of the dead but is also used for the grave. We would agree with the comment quoted in Cohen's commentary to *Kohelet* (p. 171) that: "This verse is perhaps the

strongest of *Kohelet's* statements about the absence of physical or mental toil or progress after death." Here the *Neheneh* is putting the final stamp on his argument. He denied the whole concept of life after death and his conclusion is that the only worthwhile occupation in this world is to enjoy all its pleasures now.

We can now appreciate the development in the *Neheneh's* argument. In his first speech he began on a high note. G-d is organizing His world and it is man's duty to enjoy that world. This idea is reflected in the verse in the beginning of Ch. 3 that everything is ordained and has its own season. However the question of retribution for the wicked concerned the *Neheneh*. He continued with the theory that G-d is still responsible for everything in this world but that G-d will also judge "*šam*". This idea in 3:17 expresses the belief that there is a world to come "*šam*", where judgment is also meted out. In the meantime man should realize that it is not in his power to improve the world and the most that he can do is to enjoy life. However in Ch. 9 he moves to his third position. Here he denies the fact that there is any judgment at all. There is no purpose in improving the world for there is nothing that comes after it. Justice is not significant in a world which is transient. Death will overcome everyone. The only value left for man to benefit from in this world is to enjoy life and to "Eat, drink and be merry."

In summary, the *Neheneh* moves from a position where he sees man as enjoying G-d's creation to an understanding that man cannot improve the problems of the world and therefore can only enjoy it whilst he can. His final position is that enjoyment is the only value left in life which is worth enjoying.

In 9: 11 the *Neheneh* is continuing his argument but speaking to the *A'mel* and the *Ḥakham*. To the *A'mel* he says: "I return and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong." To the *Ḥakham* he says: "Neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill." To both he concludes: "But time and chance happeneth to them all." Death will happen to everyone and it is useless for man to think that he can escape it. He continues with

this theme in 9: 12: "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." Man can leave this world at any time, therefore enjoy life.

In 9:13-16 he completes his idea. This story of a small city with few men within it being besieged by a great king has been interpreted in various ways by the commentaries. The circumstances correspond with the narrative of Samuel 2:20:15 which tells how the city of Abel of Beth-Maachah when besieged by Joab, was saved by the wit of one of its inhabitants. An important disparity is that it was a woman who was concerned in this episode.

Most commentators believe that *Kohelet* invented a situation to point to his moral. In this story *Kohelet* describes how a poor man who was wise lived in the small city and successfully saved the city through his wisdom. However because the man was poor no one appreciated his wisdom. This brings the *Neheneh* to the conclusion that, "Wisdom is better than strength, nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised and his words are not heard."

According to the *Neheneh* there are two individuals who no one remembers. The first is the dead man of whom we read in 9: 5 that "For the memory of them is forgotten." The second is the poor man of whom it is said in 9: 15 "Yet no man remembered that same poor man." In other words the *Neheneh* understands that the only character who represents life is the one who knows how to enjoy life. If a man is poor even in his life no-one remembers him. Certainly this is true of one after his death. Therefore one must join oneself to life (verse 4) and go and enjoy it (verse 7).

This is the last speech of the *Neheneh*. He has led us to the same place as the *A'mel*. The *A'mel* reached the conclusion that death is man's best alternative and if a man had a choice not to be born this would be better still. The *Neheneh* sees life as everything and one must enjoy it to the maximum. However both are defeated by death. The *A'mel* tried to fight death but found that it was too strong for him to defeat. The *Neheneh* tried

to ignore death but it is so apparent and hovering above him that he cannot possibly escape from it. At this stage the *Neheneh* too leaves the argument. He, too, has failed to find an acceptable explanation for the purpose of life, the question which lies at the heart of the discussion in *Kohelet*.

(xiii) **THE SPEECH OF THE *HAKHAM* # 2**

Ch. 9: Verse 17: The words of the wise spoken in quiet are more acceptable than the cry of a ruler among fools.

9:18: Wisdom is better than weapons of war; But one sinner destroyeth much good.

Ch. 10. Verse 1: Dead flies make the ointment of the perfumer fetid and putrid; So doth a little folly outweigh wisdom and honour.

10:2: A wise man's understanding is at his right hand; But a fool's understanding at his left.

10:3: Yea also, when a fool walketh by the way, his understanding faileth him, and he saith to every one that he is a fool.

10:4: If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place; for gentleness allayeth great offenses.

10:5: There is an evil which I have seen, under the sun, Like an error which proceedeth from a ruler;

10:6: Folly is set on great heights and the rich sit in low place.

10:7: I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth.

10:8: He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and who so breaketh through a fence a serpent shall bite him.

10:9: Who so quarrieth stones shall be hurt therewith; And he that cleaveth wood is endangered thereby.

10:10: If the iron be blunt, and one do not whet the edge, then must he put on more strength; but wisdom is profitable to direct.

10:11: If the serpent bite before it is charmed, then the charmer hath no advantage.

10:12: The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious; but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself.

10:13: The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness; and the end of his talk is grievous madness.

10:14: A fool also multiplieth words; yet man knoweth not what shall be; and that which shall be after him, who can tell him?

10:15: The labour of fools wearieth of every one of them, for he knoweth not how to go to the city.

10:16: Woe to thee, O land when thy king is a boy, and thy princes feast in the morning!

10:17: Happy art thou, O land when thy king is a free man, and thy princes eat in due season, In strength and not in drunkenness!

10:18: By slothfulness the rafters sink in; and through idleness of the hands the house leaketh.

10:19: A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh glad the life; and money answereth all things.

10:20: Curse not the king, no, not in thy thought, and curse not the rich in thy bed chamber; for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter.

Many commentaries understand this section as consisting of short apparently independent pieces. Whybray (p. 150) in his commentary makes a connection between these verses and the sayings found in the Book of Proverbs. He writes:

Although some of them appear to have been arranged roughly according to theme, it is not possible, despite various attempts which have been made, to find any overall structure in the section as a whole. Some of the sayings are probably quotations, though *Kohelet's* ability to compose his own aphorisms in traditional style should be borne in mind. He appears here as a wisdom teacher. Some of the sayings would occasion no surprise if they occurred in the Book of Proverbs. In others, *Kohelet's* characteristically critical attitude towards conventional wisdom shows itself clearly.

Crenshaw in his commentary (p. 169) agrees in principle with Whybray's analysis. He titles this section "A Collection Of Proverbs On Wisdom And Folly". He writes:

This section, not fully integrated into the book, lacks obvious connections between the individual sayings although word associations do occur in some instances. The fool proclaims his own stupidity, or he considers everyone else devoid of intelligence. *Kohelet* complains about reversals in society such as servants riding horses like princes who are relegated to walking. He also warns about hidden dangers lurking in domestic chores, expresses dismay over rulers who drink too much, mentions the function of bribes, and alludes to a proverbial saying about birds carrying slander to the ears of its object.

Gordis in his commentary (p. 315) sees these verses as being appropriate to the work of a teacher of wisdom. He understands the variety of subject matter and the lack of logical organization in this section as being normal in Oriental Wisdom literature.

Although the commentaries are in agreement that these verses are difficult to connect they disagree about where to begin and end this section. Whybray sees 10:1-11:6 as one complete section and titles it "Miscellaneous Sayings". Crenshaw is more limited in his approach and sees 10:1-20 as one whole. Gordis's approach is similar to that of Whybray yet he differs with him in placing 10:1 in the previous section.

We suggest that it is possible and even plausible to connect the verses in this section. We will continue with our basic premise that *Kohelet* is a dialogue rather than a monologue and as such the verses can be understood from a new perspective. The *Neheneh* has just finished his speech and is now met by the response of the *Hakham*.

This conclusion can be understood from 9: 17. It is clear that the *Hakham* is the one who would say: "The words of the wise spoken in quiet are more acceptable than the cry of a ruler among fools." The *Neheneh* had claimed in 9:16 that the wise man who was poor was ignored and his words are not heard. The *Hakham* responds to this by saying that this is not true. The wise man speaks words of quality and he is heard by those around him. As Cohen writes in his commentary (p 174): "The quiet and dignified utterances of wise men are listened to rather than the noisy declamation of an arch fool." The reference to the fool could well be a point made to the *Neheneh* whose words are ignored. The only person who is remembered is the one who has contributed wisdom to the world.

In 9:18 the *Hakham* continues by claiming that wisdom is better than weapons of war. Both the *Neheneh* and the *Hakham* agree that wisdom is greater than strength. The *Neheneh* said so in 9:16 when he explained that: "Wisdom is better than strength". Here too the *Hakham* is making the same point that wisdom is better than weapons of war. However they

argue on the value of wisdom. The second part of 9:18 will be explained when we understand the complete picture of this section.

Chapter 10:1 has been understood in different ways by the commentaries. Cohen (p. 175) brings the following explanation:

In the winter time when flies have no strength and are near death, should one come into the ointment of the perfumer and be mingled with the scented ingredients it makes it putrid. It is something insignificant, yet spoils a precious article. So a little folly may be more costly than wisdom and honour, for it outweighs them all.

Rashi takes this parable and applies it to the situation of man. "Take the case of a man equally balanced in his faults and virtues; should he commit one transgression it inclines the scales to guilt."

It is interesting to compare this verse with 7:1: "A good name is better than precious oil and the day of death than the day of one's birth". The structure of the sentences in both places is the same with the parable being followed by its moral. Here, the parable is that even the best oil when a dead fly falls within it the fly destroys everything. In a similar way death can destroy all the enjoyments of life. The moral is that the smallest foolishness can be more destructive than the greatest wisdom because it can destroy the achievements that have been made.

There are many examples in life of this phenomena. A tank for example can be produced in the factory but if the slightest sand enters its engine it may destroy. Similarly men can achieve superb achievements in wisdom but if one individual speaks badly about him then everything can be destroyed. The greatest wisdom can fall with the smallest fault. Wisdom is indeed a wonderful trait but it suffers from the fact that it is difficult to transform a brilliant idea into practice.

The *Hakham* is thus stating the weakness of his own argument. In 9:17-18 he says that the words of the wise are good and important but he notes in

10:1 that one fly can disturb much good and one sinner can destroy all the good things that have been done. This does not lessen the importance of wisdom. On the contrary: "Wisdom is better than weapons of war". However it does teach us the limitations of wisdom that a few words by a fool can change the whole perspective one gives to life.

Despite the reservation of 10:1 he continues in 10:2 to extol the value of wisdom. "A wise man's understanding is at his right hand; but a fool's understanding at his left." Obviously *Kohelet* is not giving us a biological understanding of how the body works. Ginsburg explains this as meaning that a person's right hand is ready to guard and defend him from a thousand dangers. However more likely is the translation: "inclined to his right hand". As Crenshaw writes: (p. 169)

In ancient Israel the right hand connoted power and deliverance; the right side, moral goodness and favor. Hence the place of honor was on the right side. The left hand usually symbolized ineptness and perversity. Like attitudes are reflected in the language of ancient Greece (*Skaios*, awkward; *Aristeros*, clumsy) and Rome (*Sinister*, sinister) and in Modern French (*Gauche*, awkward). The moral sense of right and left is also found in the *Talmud Shabbat* 63a, where the two verbs mean to study the *Torah* properly and improperly.

The phrase accordingly indicates that a wise heart brings its possessor advantages; it warns him against a step which may prove disastrous and helps him to success. This line of thought is continued in 10: 3 where he suggests that the understanding of a fool fails him. He displays a lack of intelligence in the way he behaves.

Most commentators understand that 10:4 moves to a new topic and discusses the conduct of autocrats. When a king is angry then the best response to such anger is to pacify the fury of the ruler. However this verse can be well understood as a continuation to what came before. Just as a little foolishness can destroy wonderful achievements so too a little

wisdom can provide calm in a sea of dissension. There are times that one wise word has within it the power to appease the anger of a great ruler who visits a city with great offenses. In this sense the word "*marpeh*" is used to mean wisdom.

A contrast here is made between the "*sakhal*" - the fool - who walks by the way (10:3) and the *Hakham* who does not leave his place (10:4). The idea expressed here is that the fool is rash in his ways whilst the *Hakham* has the ability to calm others and make decisions based on logic and a clear mind.

10:5-7 deal with a separate problem. There seems to be disorder in the way things happen in the world. He calls the problem "a *šegagah*". This word signifies an unintentional wrong. The fool sits in high places whilst the rich sit in low places. The comparison between the fool and the rich man is not clearly understood. A remarkable parallel to this text in *Kohelet* occurs in the Egyptian admonitions of Ipuwer.

He who could not make a coffin owns a tomb.
 See, those who owned tombs are cast on high ground,
 He who could not make a grave owns a treasury...
 See, the poor of the land have become rich,
 The man of property is a pauper.

(Lichtheim 1, 156-157)

We can better understand the reference to the fool and the rich man if we understand that the *Hakham* is continuing with his argument and is in dialogue with the *Neheneh*. The rich man here is referring to one who is rich in wisdom and as such he is the opposite of the fool who has none. In the same way in 10:7 the servant is used as a parable for the foolish whilst the princes are the wise.

The *Hakham* is attempting to deal with the point made by the *Neheneh* in 9:16. How is it that the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard? The *Hakham* in these verses makes the point that this is indeed true but it need not happen. The *Hakham* is the one who deserves to rule.

When this does not happen it is a "*šegagah*" - a mistake which needs to be rectified. The situation that a fool can rule the world in the place of a *Ḥakham* is a mistake which is not the natural course of events. However the *Ḥakham* agrees with the *Neheneh* that in reality this often is the situation. He disagrees with him only in the fact about what to do about it.

The commentators disagree about the place of 10:8-10 in the text. In the opinion of some commentators these verses are connected with the forgoing and are intended as warnings addressed to men in attendance upon a king. Whybray (p. 152), for example, understands that these sayings have in common the fact that they are all concerned with pitfalls which may beset various activities of everyday life. Some commentators see the examples brought in these verses as made up of figures taken from other parts of the Bible. For example in 10:8, the person who breaks a fence shall be bitten by a serpent reminds us of Proverbs 26:27.

Continuing our understanding that the *Ḥakham* is continuing his dialogue with the other characters of the book these verses can well be understood as his discussion with the *A'mel*. After complaining about the situation that the fool often rules in place of the *Ḥakham* here he begins to explain the advantages of the rule by the wise.

The *A'mel* who works to improve the world always makes mistakes. The *A'mel* digs a pit and falls into it. He quarries stones which damage him. He chops wood which may injure him. It is impossible to succeed with your work without someone who is able to plan and engineer that the work is planned properly. The greatest building could never have been put up without the architect who planned the building and drew the plans. In this way the *Ḥakham* makes the point that the world cannot succeed without him.

10:11-14 continue with the words of the *Ḥakham*. The meaning of verse 11 is well expressed in the comment of the Rashbam. If the serpent stings a man because the charmer failed to charm it, there is no advantage in knowing how to exercise a charm and not making use of it.

However many commentaries note the expressions that refer to speech in these verses for example in verse 11 we have the phrase "*ba'al halašon*". In verse 12 we note the phrase: "the words of a wise man's mouth" whilst we also see the phrase "the lips of a fool". Verses 13 and 14 continue with the theme that man should rather be silent than speak too much. The reference to the snake in this context is especially interesting. It is of course the snake which enticed the woman in the Garden of Eden to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. The danger of evil speech is thus highlighted by this episode in the beginning of Genesis.

The reference to the snake in verse 11 conjures up other connotations as well. The snake bites quietly and draws close to its victim without noise (*lahaš*). He is unlike other animals of prey that make a noise prior to striking. However the message here is that one does not need a large mouth or roar in order to damage others, great danger can be lurking in silence. The *Neheneh* had previously said that the words of the *Hakham* are not listened to. Here the *Hakham* responds by saying that one does not need to make a lot of noise in order to make an impact on the world. The *Hakham* does not shout out his achievements but his quiet influence on the world can be recognized by all. His words are filled with meaning unlike the fool whose words are empty of all content. Thus he writes in verse 14 that the fool says many words whilst the *Hakham*, as we have seen, uses his words sparingly.

In 10:15-19 the *Hakham* discusses the state of kingship in the world. The situation in which the fool (*kesil*) governs is one which is intolerable. He already has said in 10:5 that he sees this as being an error that has come to the world. This king he calls "*na'ar*" a young man. It is bad for a state when its king is young in years and inexperienced. Not only is he likely to make mistakes but also to fall under the influence of unscrupulous advisors. The phrase: "and thy princes feast in the morning" has to be understood in this context. Who are those who feast in the morning? The morning is a time for work and labour it is not the time to have a heavy meal.

10:16 can be better understood when it is read together with 10:17. Here *Kohelet* praises those who eat in due season. The implication here is that to eat is no crime but one must know when it is appropriate to eat and that work must be seen as the first priority. The *Hakham* here is complaining that the leaders are not always of the caliber that he would want. When they eat in the morning then the consequences of their actions will lead to laziness and work will be done. One then should not be surprised when "the rafters sink in; and through idleness of the hands the house leaks".

Various explanations have been given to 10:19. Some connect it with 10:18 and understand it as drawing a contrast between the effects of idleness and industry. With the money one earns a man is able to procure the means to a comfortable life.

However, in our view, 10:19 can be better understood when it is seen as a continuation of 10:16-17. How does a state look when its leader feasts in the morning and is not concerned with the affairs of the state? "A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh glad the life; and money answereth all things." Not only do the princes have their meal at the wrong time of the day, but they turn it into an occasion for feasting and spend the money they extort from the people for their own selfish gain.

We can now summarize the words of the *Hakham* in this chapter. The *Hakham* claims that he is the only individual who is qualified to rule in the world. However he is constantly complaining that he is not the one who is ruling. He calls this situation a "mistake which proceedeth from a ruler". This ruler could well refer to G-d who is the ultimate King and the *Hakham* is blaming Him for the situation that the world is not governed by the wise. The *Hakham* cannot accept the fact that fools are found in high places whilst the wise are often subservient to them.

We have understood that the *Hakham's* words are directed mainly to the *Neheneh* who is referred to as the fool (*kesil*) but we have seen that the *A'mel* is also being addressed. He too does not deserve to rule for he cannot build or develop anything in this world without the help and planning of the *Hakham*. Thus the *Hakham* comes to the conclusion that

the world is being governed by two fools. The king who is a child who puts his own enjoyment and interests before the affairs of state and the "šalit", G-d Himself who rules the world "bišgagah" by letting the fool be king and not giving kingship to the person who would perform the role the best, the *Hakham* himself.

(xiv) THE SPEECH OF THE YARE' #3

10:20 is written in the second person. As we have seen previously in the book of *Kohelet* a change of person signifies a change of character. "Curse not the king, know not in thy thought and curse not the rich in thy death chamber." This verse has been understood in various ways by the commentators. Some see it as advice to those who wish to criticize the ruling class. It is unwise to give voice or even entertain such criticism in one's thoughts, because one may inadvertently make a remark which will endanger one's life. An autocrat spreads spies throughout the land to report on his subject. In this sense the word "mada" is connected to "knowledge" and here it refers specifically to the seat of knowledge which is the mind.

However we suggest that the change of person, as we have said, signifies a change of character. The *Yare'* is responding to the words of the *Hakham*. The word "mada" is parallel to the phrase "behadrei miskavkha". Whilst the latter refers to the bed chamber the former can be connected to the word "yada" (to know). This, we have already seen, is a verb connected to sexual intercourse. For example: "And Adam knew Eve his wife". In this sense the verse is telling us that in one's bedroom and during sexual intercourse be very careful what one says. It is in such a place that one is likely to reveal secrets and therefore do not curse a king there.

The *Hakham* had said that a mistake had come forth from the ruler (G-d). The *Yare'* responds to the *Hakham* by telling him not to curse that king (G-d) for everything that the *Hakham* says is reported above and he is

likely to be judged in future on what he says today: "For a bird of the air shall carry the voice and that which hath wings shall tell the matter".

(xv) SUMMARY OF PART TWO OF KOHELET

In the second part of *Kohelet* the *Hakham* has replaced the *A'mel*. There is a clear connection between the ideologies of the *Hakham* and the *A'mel*.

The *Hakham* believes that he knows everything whilst the *A'mel* believes that he is capable of changing everything. Both the *Hakham* and the *A'mel* feel very comfortable in this world and feel that they have much to contribute to it. The *Neheneh* and *Yare'* however see themselves as guests in this world and admit to understanding little about how the world actually works.

All these characters undergo transitions during the book, except the *Yare'*. The *Yare'* remains consistent in his views throughout the whole of *Kohelet*. The other characters through the process of dialogue and discussion change their views and this is their main point of weakness. It is the *Yare'* who eventually wins the argument and says "The end of the matter, all having been heard: fear G-d, and keep his commandments for this is the whole of man" (12:13).

1.THE A MEL

We have seen that the *A'mel* has already completed his argument. He began with the wish not to leave the fruits of his labour to anyone but himself. Unfortunately he had to deal with the problem of death and tried

to find solutions to this problem. In Chapter 4 he began with the problem of those who are wronged. Without dealing with the problems of society and state there is no purpose to life. He ended with the thought that in fact there is no meaning to life and in fact better for man not to be born at all. There is a logical progression to the *Amel's* thought.

1. For whom shall I work? - There is no one to leave the fruits of my labour.
2. I will work for society. Here too he is left with a problem as he concludes that man is unable to solve society's problem.
3. I will work for myself. In Chapter 5 he deals with this at length but comes to the conclusion that it is not worth being born for man can never fill all his desires.

He has moved from a great idealist, believing in the possibility of solving society's problems, to becoming a man obsessed with filling his own desires.

2. THE NEHENEH

The *Neheneh* undergoes a similar process to that of the *A'mel*. He began with great ideals "What profit has he that worketh in that he laboureth?" He saw himself as a guest in this world and as such his duty is to enjoy the world that G-d has made. However he was met by the problem of justice in this world. At first his attitude is to let G-d judge the problems of the world and that there will be retribution for the wicked "*šam*," in the next world. However this attitude changes and he moves to a more radical position. If G-d is unable to enforce justice in this world then He is unable to do so also in the world to come. He comes to the conclusion that there is no judgment nor retribution at all.

In short the *A'mel* began by seeing man as being central to the world. However over time the man that he saw as being so great becomes small in stature. The *Neheneh* however began by seeing G-d as being central to the

world. However over time the G-d that he saw as being so great becomes small in stature .

3. THE HAKHAM

The *Hakham* also undergoes changes in his philosophy of life. He delivers two main speeches, one in Ch. 7-8 and one in Ch. 10. In this way he is similar to the *Neheneh* and the *A'mel* who both deliver two speeches. His basic premise is the need to reconcile oneself to the fact that death occurs to everyone. The world is not without its faults and as such one has to make the most of what life has to offer. Death is a shadow which falls over man throughout his life and he must realize that he cannot escape what is inevitable. This is the beginning of his first speech in 7:1. "A good name is better than precious oil; and the day of death than the day of one's birth." The *Hakham* continues this philosophy and applies it to all aspects of life. Because man has to resign himself to the realities of life: "Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry" (7:9). Man should learn to patient for that is the only way that he will manage deal with his problems. This philosophy of life is also reflected in his attitude towards the fear of G-d. He writes in 7:16-17: "Be not righteous overmuch; neither make thyself overwise; why should thou destroy thyself? Be not overwicked, neither be thou foolish; why shouldest thou die before thy time?" The *Hakham* is teaching us here that one should resign oneself to mediocrity for there are many imperfections in the world.

However the *Hakham* too, is confronted with the problem of retribution in the world. This leads him to say: "Because sentence (*pitgam*) against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." The injustices he sees in the world him to adopt the position that "So I commended mirth that a man has 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." The *Hakham* has gone full circle and adopted the position of the *Neheneh*.

The *Yare'* now comes to answer the words of the *Hakham*. In verse 20 he says to the *Hakham* that he should not curse the king. The world is not

without a ruler and one who governs all things. This ruler is G-d. One must accept the rule of G-d even if one does not always understand the way that He governs the world. He continues by saying: "For a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which has wings shall tell the matter." G-d hears and understands everything. He hears what you are saying and therefore be careful in the views that you express. To the *Neheneh* he says that there is room for enjoyment as long as it comes with an awareness of life's purpose. This purpose is expressed in the concluding verses of *Kohelet*: "The end of the matter all having been heard; fear G-d and keep His commandments; for this is the whole man. For G-d shall bring every work into the judgment concerning every hidden thing whether it be good or whether it be evil."

Ch. 11:1: Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thy shall find it after many days.

11:2: Divide a portion into seven, yea, even into eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.

11:3: 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 falls there shall it be.

11:4: He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.

11:5: 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 G-d who doeth all things.

11:6: 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.

11:7: And the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun.

11:8: 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.

11:9: 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 G-d will bring thee into judgment.

11:10: Therefore remove vexation from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh; for childhood and youth are *hevel*.

Ch. 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".

12:2: Before the sun, and the light, and the moon, and the stars are darkened, and the clouds return after the rain.

12:3: 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.

12:4: 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.

12:5: 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;

12:6: 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;

12:7: And the dust returneth to the earth as it was, and the spirit returneth unto G-d who gave it.

12:8: *Hevel Havalim*, saith *Kohelet*; all is *Hevel*.

12:9: And besides that *Kohelet* was wise, he also taught the people knowledge; yea, he pondered and sought out, and set in order many proverbs.

12:10: *Kohelet* sought to find out words of delight, and that which was written uprightly, even words of truth.

12:11: 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.

12:12: And furthermore my son be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.

12:13: The end of the matter, all having been heard: fear G-d, and keep His commandments; for this is the whole of man.

12:14: For G-d shall bring every work into the judgment concerning every hidden thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.

The opening section we have quoted, has been interpreted in various ways amongst the commentators. Crenshaw in his commentary (p. 178) understands that:

In this unit *Kohelet* observes that an element of risk always resides in commercial and agricultural enterprises but intelligent people venture nonetheless. The image of sending bread on waters is also found in a late Egyptian Instruction, although its exact meaning eludes modern interpretation.

Other modern commentators such as Gordis (p. 330) understand the first two verses in this passage literally rather than metaphorically, as straight advice to merchants. The New English Bible thus translates: "Send your grain across the seas and in time you will get a return. Divide your merchandise among seven ventures, eight maybe, since you do not know what disasters may occur on earth."

Rabbinical tradition explains 11:1 as urging that charity be given to strangers who will never be seen again. Generosity will not go unrewarded; the favor will be repaid. The *Midrash* in *Shemot Rabbah* 27 remarks:

Are men so foolish as to throw their bread upon water? Rather this verse is to be understood allegorically to refer to one like Jethro, who told his daughters to invite the stranger, Moses to dinner. As it turned out, Moses became his son-in-law and Jethro converted to Judaism. The *Midrash* relates an incident of a man who actually used to throw a loaf of bread into the sea every day. One day he bought a fish. On cutting it open he found a beautiful object inside. People said of him: "This is the man whose loaf stood him in good stead and they applied to him the verse 'Send your bread upon the waters'.

We suggest that Chapter 11 is coming to answer the question posed at the beginning of *Kohelet*. We saw the seemingly endless cycle of life. Nothing seems to progress and everything appears to move around in one large circle. *Kohelet* used in Ch. 1 the elements of water, wind, sand and earth to illustrate this point. In this chapter we can see clearly these elements again at work but here, unlike Ch. 1, they are seen as serving some purpose.

Kohelet tells his reader to "Send your bread on the surface of the waters". You will eventually reap the benefits of that bread - nothing is meaningless in the cycle of life. In 11: 3 we are told that: "If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth." The process of purification of water is being described in this verse. At first, in Ch. 1, *Kohelet* saw rivers

losing their water and flowing into the big sea. He saw this as something which was not positive and even destructive. Now however he understands that there is something deeper to this cycle of life. The water is not lost but returns to the earth in the form of rain that makes the world grow. This process of water purification is what keeps the world in its fresh state.

In a similar vein he understands the function of the wind. In Chapter 1 he describes how the wind moves aimlessly from place to place. However here he shows that although it may seem that the wind has no direction, without it man could not sow the seeds of the land. Not everything can be seen and understood in this world. This is the major idea that *Kohelet* is expressing in this section. He writes: "He that observeth the wind shall not sow and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap." If a person waits for the time when all the conditions for growing a good produce will be there man will never do anything. Because man does not know the workings of G-d he must have faith in Him and do what he can to build G-d's world.

In Chapter 1 and 2 we saw the expressions "I knew", "I saw", "For I also know". Here in Chapter 11 however, we come across expressions of uncertainty about knowledge. This uncertainty is not pictured as a negative factor but seen as part of man's learning to have faith in his Creator. In order to sow and build one needs faith. It is impossible to know when the wind will blow or when the rain will fall nevertheless it is incumbent upon man to have faith in G-d.

In 11:5 he writes: "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 G-d who doeth all things." In this verse he continues the theme of man's lack of knowledge and understanding of the mysteries of the world. Man's ignorance about the changes of the wind is as profound as about the formation of a child in the womb.

The comparison is also made between sowing seeds which needs the help of the wind and the seed that is sown in the womb of a woman. Both the seed in the ground and the seed in the womb bring life to the world, yet

man's understanding of the process is very limited. This theme is continued in verse 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." This verse has been interpreted in various ways by the commentators. Some have understood it figuratively as meaning that from youth till the evening of life one must perform life's tasks and not hesitate because of the uncertainties that life presents. Metzudath David, on the other hand, interprets the verse literally to refer to the work of the farmer: In the morning sow thy field, and in the evening do not withhold thy hand from sowing; i.e. that at all times sow thy field and wait not upon the wind.

Following our suggestion however, that a comparison is being made between the seed in the ground and the seed in the womb then we can explain this verse differently. In the morning man does his labour in the field. He sows his land and builds his world. In the evening man sows another type of seed that which lies in the womb of the woman. In both cases man acts and does not know what will be the result of his efforts. It is only through faith that man can continue.

As we have seen the central theme of this chapter is lack of knowledge. In 11:2 he writes: "For thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth". In 11:5 he writes: "As thou knowest not what is the way of the wind... even so thou knowest not the work of G-d." In 11: 6 he states: "For thou knowest not which shall prosper whether this or that." However there is one fact that man does know: "But know thou, that for all these things G-d will bring thee into judgment" (11: 9).

We suggest that the *Yare'* in this section is speaking to the *A'mel*, the *Hakham* and the *Neheneh*. The *Yare'* is arguing with them about who has ultimate control over the world. The *A'mel* wanted to take upon himself responsibility for the world. The *Hakham* felt that only he had the qualities necessary to be a leader. The *Yare'* argues with both of these views. He does not want the power to control. After all man is limited and he is ultimately subservient to the will of G-d.

In 11:1-8 the *Yare'* is relating his message to the *A'mel*. "Cast thy bread upon the waters" is according to this a message to the *A'mel* to work and sow the land rather than eat his produce. In verse 2 he advises the *A'mel* to store his produce for a bad day for one never knows when this day may come. Because man does not know when the rain will come man must sow anyway for otherwise he will never produce anything. Do not think says the *Yare'* that the success of man is dependent upon his own efforts. There are too many factors that are beyond his control. Man's success is dependent upon G-d. Man must do all he can to succeed but ultimately he must understand that he cannot know for sure what will be the results of his actions. This concept of work for work sake reminds us of 5:11 where the *Yare'* describes the benefits of work "Sweet is the sleep of a labouring man."

We suggest that 11:7-8 are directed to the *Hakham*. We have already seen that the light has been used in *Kohelet* as a symbol for wisdom. In 2:13 we read: "Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness." In 2:14 we saw that: "The wise man, his eyes are in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness." In 7:11 we read: "Wisdom is good with an inheritance, yea a profit to them that see the sun." The *Yare'* admits that wisdom is a good thing. It helps man understand and perceive the world. However wisdom is not an end in itself. It is valuable when it is used to reach a higher goal. This the *Yare'* describes in 11: 8: "And remember the days of darkness for they shall be many." Wisdom is important when it helps us to focus on what is central in life. Man must remember that he will die and come before G-d in judgment. "But know thou, that for all these things G-d will bring thee into judgment." (11: 9).

In 11: 9-10 the *A'mel* is speaking to the *Neheneh*. "Rejoice, O young man in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth." The *Yare'* tells the *Neheneh* to enjoy his life but he must know that at the end of this life he will be judged on all his actions. Rejoicing and enjoying life is a good thing but should not be turned into life's main aim.

Thus, the message of the *Yare'* to all three of his colleagues with whom he has a dialogue, is that ultimately man cannot know what will happen to

him in this world. It is therefore upon man to prepare himself as best he can for the day of judgment after his death. This reminds us of the *Yare'*'s words in 8:3: "For He doeth whatsoever pleases him", and his message in 8:8: "There is no man that hath power over the wind to retain the wind; neither has he power over the day of death."

Chapter 12 has been understood in various ways by the commentators. We will offer various explanations given to this chapter and then show how it can be understood with reference to the assumption that the *Yare'* is concluding his final argument which leaves him victorious in his debate with his colleagues.

In this section we have a graphic account of "The days of darkness" (9:8) which succeed the period of "Youth and manhood" (9:10). This passage is one of the most famous sections in all literature. The imagery under which the oncoming of age is figured has called forth a variety of interpretations. The *Talmud Bavli* (*Shabbat* 152a) understands that *Kohelet* here is describing the waning powers of the organs of the body employing symbolic terms for them. Others see this passage as describing the blotting out of the light of life by advancing years which is likened to a gathering storm and its affects. We shall comment upon these verses using both these theories.

12: 2 has been understood in the following way by the *Talmud*. "The sun and the light" denote the forehead and the nose, "the moon", the soul, "the stars" the cheeks "the clouds after the rain" the eyesight which is enfeebled by weeping due to trouble and sickness.

The other school of thought understands this verse referring to the clouds that gather and obscure the sun during the day, and the moon and stars during the night. The rain pours down heavily; but as soon as it stops, the clouds return for another downpour. According to this interpretation the verse is indicating that there is no check to the creeping on of old age.

12:3 has likewise been interpreted in various ways. The *Talmud Bavli* continues its explanation by understanding the "the keepers of the house"

as symbolically referring to the flanks and ribs of man, "the strong men" are seen as the legs which support the body but grow bent in old age. "The grinders" refer to the teeth and "those that look out" refer to the eyes. The Ibn Ezra sees in "the keepers of the house" a reference to the arms and hands.

The alternative understanding of 12:3 sees it as presenting a picture of the terrifying effect produced upon the members of the household by the storm. "The keepers of the house" are the staff of servants and "the strong men" those appointed to guard the building against robbers. "The grinders" are the women employed to provide the daily supply of flour required for baking. "Those that look out" alludes to the ladies of the house who were not at liberty to walk outside, and so gazed through the windows to see what went on outside.

12: 4 has also been interpreted in both these ways. The first theory is as follows. The *Talmud* understands that "the doors shall be shut" alludes to the apertures of the body; "the sound of grinding is low" refers to the failing power of the stomach to digest food; "one shall start at the voice of a bird" refers to the bird who will awaken him from sleep; "the daughters of music" is understood to be the voices of male and female singers who sound to him like a whisper because of deafness. Some explain the Hebrew of "and shall start...a bird" as referring to a man's voice which becomes high pitched and tremulous like a bird.

The other theory understands that because of the storm the doors are closed. Nobody ventures forth in the streets and the noise of milling stops. All the birds stop their chirping and singing. Ginsburg in his translation makes the following comment: "The portentous swallows in anticipation of the storm, quit their nests with shrieks to fly about; whilst the singing birds, which mount the air with their warbling songs, for the same reason descend and retire."

The same *Talmud* explains 12:5 in the following way: "They shall be afraid of that which is high" - even a small knoll looks to each old man like the highest of mountains when he has to walk up it; "Terrors shall be in the

way" - when he walks on a road his heart is filled with fears because his legs are unsteady; "The almond tree" - is the coccyx (the lowest end of the vertebrae); "Shall blossom" - is understood as meaning it shall protrude and shall be moved from its place; "The grasshopper" - is the rump; "The caperberry shall fail" - is a fruit which excites sensual passion, but it will produce no effect. Some explain the "almond trees" as depicting the whiteness of the hair; but its blossom is pinkish in colour.

The other explanation understands the verse in a different way. "That which is high" is the black heavens with threatening clouds which portend "terrors on the way". "The almond tree shall blossom" is understood by Ginsburg as "the almond shall be despised." He understands the verse as meaning that all desire for food, however tempting, shall vanish in this awful scene. *Kohelet* says that even the caperberry, with all its provocative properties will fail to excite the appetite.

The reference in this verse to "*Bet Olam*" or eternal home is a reference to the cemetery. According to our second explanation the storm arouses fear of death which destroys the desire for food.

The *Midrash Kohelet Raba* 12:6 understands this verse in the following way. "The silver cord" is the spinal cord; "The golden bowl" is the skull; "The pitcher" is the stomach which has a similar shape. Those who explain the previous verses as part of the storm allegory agree that verse 6 is presenting, in highly figurative language, a description of the bodies dissolution. The reference at the end of the verse to "the pitcher is broken at the fountain, and the wheel falleth shattered into the pit" has been explained in the following way. With the pitcher broken and the consequent impossibility of drawing the vital supply, death ensues from thirst. The wheel is an indispensable part of the machinery; The cord tied to the pitcher runs round it and enables one to pull up the bucket without spilling the water. If the wheel broke away and collapsed into the well, the water would be unobtainable. In a similar way the machinery of the body wears out with age and its owner is incapable of drawing substance from the reservoir of life.

The purpose of this description of the bodies dissolution is understood when reading 12:7. "And the dust returneth to the earth as it was, and the spirit returneth to G-d who gave it." Life does not end at death but continues in a different form. The body is buried in the ground but the soul will continue to live in the world to come. The *Yare'* is explaining to the characters in the dialogue that death should not be seen as the end of the process. The *Yare'* has already told us in 11:9 that: "But know thou that for all these things G-d will bring thee into judgment." This theme is continued in 12:14: "For G-d shall bring every work into the judgment concerning every hidden thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil."

Modern scholars are in agreement that the Epilogue (12: 9-14) does not form part of the original book. Gordis (p. 349) for example, writes:

It has been noted since Doderlein that the last six verses of the book are not from *Kohelet's* own hand, since they speak of him in the third person, while throughout the book *Kohelet* refers to himself in the first person. So, too, the use of "*beni*", characteristic of Wisdom, as in Proverbs, does not occur in *Kohelet* proper. Hence the contradiction between the sentiments expressed in vv. 13f. and the rest of the book needs no explanation, and the various efforts to harmonize them are uncalled for.

Various traditional commentators have also explained the Epilogue as being the work of later editors. The Rashbam, for example, writes that, "Those that edited it said from here onwards." Reuben Margalioth in his work "*Hamikra' Vehamesorah*" (p. 27) writes: "They are the words of Hizkiyahu's men who copied and edited all the words of Solomon."

Other commentators see not one Epilogue but two. Crenshaw (p. 189), for example, writes:

Two epilogues bring the book to a close, each beginning with the Hebrew word "*veyoter*" (besides, in addition to). The first epilogue focuses on the professional activity of *Kohelet*

and the nature of his teaching. The second epilogue characterizes the intellectual process as endless and exhausting, offers some advice on what is really important, and warns that a judgment day is certain... The point of view in the first epilogue is that of a devoted student who reflects on *Kohelet's* activity. The second epilogue seems to be the work of a detractor who thinks of *Kohelet's* teachings as inadequate and perhaps perverse.

Some commentators such as Galling and Lauha go further in suggesting that the epiloguist himself inserted these features, often thought to be inconsistent with the rest, into the book, in order to present *Kohelet* in a more "orthodox" light.

It has been our contention in this thesis to explain *Kohelet* as a dialogue rather than a monologue. Once we understand that various personalities with different viewpoints are arguing with each other then the tensions and contradictions become resolved. In the Epilogue we are presented with the concluding argument of the book. Three of the four protagonists of the book have concede the argument. They have failed to provide a satisfactory answer to the purpose of life. Only the *Yare'* is left. It is the basic argument of the *Yare'* which leaves him victorious in the dialogue with his colleagues. It is he who has found the answer to the basic question of *Kohelet* - what is the meaning of life? We argue with commentators such as Crenshaw who writes: (p. 189) "The style is generally consistent with *Kohelet's*, although the content of the second Epilogue differs sharply from his thought." As we have analyzed the book we have shown that there are various philosophies being presented and the view being presented here is consistent with that of the *Yare'*.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

THESIS: THE DIALOGICAL NATURE OF THE BOOK OF KOHELET.

The aim of this chapter is to capsule the main points of each individual section of *Kohelet*, organizing the important flow of ideas from one section to the next. Our underlying assumption is that the contradictions in *Kohelet* can be best understood when the book is seen as a dialogue rather than a monologue. In *Kohelet* we have a discussion between different personalities with different opinions.

In 1:1-11 we are introduced to the four states of nature: Earth, Fire, Water, and Air. These represent four aspects of man: Body, Wisdom, Physical Life, and the Soul. These are represented by the four personalities in the dialogue of *Kohelet*.

The problem that lies at the center of the book is that of the endless cycle of life. If life always returns to the place from where it started, what is life's purpose? The "hevel" or the futility of life is the basic problem that is to be addressed in the book.

In 1:12 - 2:23 we are introduced to three of the personalities of *Kohelet*. The *A'mel*, the *Hakham* and the *Neheneh*. The *A'mel* sees his purpose in life as creating and building the world in order to leave his mark and impression on it. The *Hakham* is the philosopher who endeavors to understand the world. The *Neheneh* is the one who enjoys the physical pleasures of the world. These three personalities are in fact the embodiment of Solomon himself. He builds great buildings (Kings 1 9:15-20), he enjoys life to the full (Kings 1 11:1-3). He is known for his great wisdom (Kings 1 10:23-25).

In 2:24 - 3:22 we encounter the first speech of the *Neheneh*. He believes that G-d created a perfect world for man to enjoy. It is man's sole task in this world to enjoy the physical pleasures which G-d has created for him.

All of life is ruled by G-d, and therefore man is powerless to change the world. His duty is to enjoy it. "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose" (3:1). He understands that there is injustice in the world but he sees imperfections in the world as flaws in man rather than G-d. G-d will punish evil in the next world (*šam*).

In 4:1-16 we read the first speech of the *A'mel*. He responds to the words of the *Neheneh*. In a world full of the "tears of the oppressed" (4:1) one cannot sit back and enjoy the physical pleasures of life, leaving the evil for G-d to handle. He is concerned with the products of his labour. If he is ultimately to die to whom will he leave his estate? If jealousy is the result of all his work then why should he work at all? He arrives at a solution by looking at society rather than the individual. "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour" (4:9). Let the King, or leader of the society take responsibility for the solution of the problems of injustice and evil in the world of man.

In 4:17 - 5:11 we meet a third figure in the dialogue. The *Yare'* responds both to the *Neheneh* and the *A'mel* in this section. To the *Neheneh* he points out that man must work the world in order to achieve perfection. Man cannot throw responsibility on G-d and just enjoy this world. To the *A'mel*, he says that the results of one's actions are not important. The very act of working is a holy task. Man is not solely responsible for the world, G-d is above him. The key phrase in the *Yare's* argument is: "for one higher than the high watches" (5:7). The world is ultimately controlled through a hierarchy - man's efforts together with G-d's help.

In 5:12 - 6:12 we encounter the second and final speech of the *A'mel*. He is concerned that he will have nothing to show for his toil (5:12-19). What happens if he loses all his material goods leaving nothing to his heirs? This leads him to utter despair and to consider the thought that maybe it is better not to have been born at all than to live a life of an endless cycle that achieves nothing. "I say, that an untimely birth is better than he" (6:3). But since "not to be born" is not a solution to the meaning of life the *A'mel* fails and leaves the discussion.

In 7:1-22 we meet a new figure in the discussion. He is the *Hakham*. In this section he responds to the *Neheneh*, the *A'mel* and the *Yare'*. To the *Neheneh*, he says that the world is not perfect and death exists. To the *A'mel* he argues that the world cannot be perfected because death is the ultimate imperfection in the world and cannot be overcome. To the *Yare'* he says that man is imperfect because evil exists in the world and it is hopeless to fight it. The *Hakham's* ultimate philosophy is one of complete resignation.

In 7:23-29 the *Yare'* responds to the *Hakham* by rejecting his ideas. The wisdom of the *Hakham* is an external one, whilst true wisdom comes from G-d. The metaphor used is that of a woman. True wisdom is compared to a woman who lives close to home, whilst false wisdom is compared to a woman who lives at the gates of the city. The *Yare'* concludes that the search for true wisdom is one which may take man many years to find.

In 8:1-13 we see an argument between the *Yare'* and the *Hakham* concerning the problem of evil in the world. Both agree on the need for justice in this world. The *Hakham* however cannot understand a system in which evil goes unpunished. He sees "dead people walking around" and asks why are they still alive when they are so wicked? The *Yare'* answers that there is no escaping from G-d's final judgment which will take place after death.

In 8:14 - 9:16 the *Neheneh* gives his second and final speech. We see a development in his philosophy. He originally solved the problem of evil by saying that G-d will judge in the next world. However in this passage he is more questioning. If this world is meaningless, on what basis is there justice in the next world? This question leads him to a complete rejection of the existence of a spiritual world. Physical enjoyment is the only reality left in life. The *Neheneh* arrives at the same point of despair as the *A'mel*, but from the opposite direction. The *A'mel* struggled with death and concluded that it is better not to be born. The *Neheneh* ignores death and concludes that it is better not to die! Neither conclusion solves the problem of death and as such the *Neheneh* leaves the argument having failed to prove his point.

In 9:17 - 10:19 the *Hakham* gives his second and final speech. He claims that of all the personalities he is the only one who knows enough and is capable of guiding the world. Yet he is the one that is constantly silenced. This leads him to cry out in frustration at "G-d's mistake". This frustration leads the *Yare'* to respond "you, who were willing to resign yourself to the curse of others, now "curse" and complain yourself? It is your turn now resign yourself to the rule of others."

In 10:20 - 12:14 we have the third and final speech of the *Yare'* which gives him a clear victory in the structure of the book. His solution to the endless cycle is each cycle has a purpose which we may not see. Water brings rain necessary to grow (11:1-3) and wind brings the seeds from place to place. To the *A'mel* he replies that man's knowledge is limited (11:5). Man's task is to work and achieve and to do the best that he can. To the *Neheneh* he says that there is indeed room for enjoyment in this world as long as it comes with an awareness of life's purpose. In the days of one's youth man should attempt to remember his creator and the judgment which will take place (11:9). The *Neheneh* claimed that death was unseen, and therefore irrelevant. The description of death in 12:1-7 comes to show the *Neheneh* that death is a reality and that man should live his life in a productive manner whilst he can. The final conclusion of *Kohelet* is given by the *Yare'*. He alone has given an answer to the question posed at the beginning of the book. Life is not meaningless but "fear G-d and keep his commandments for this is the whole of man."

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