Kohelet: Sanctifying the Human Perspective

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1. Shabbat 30b
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...

2. Kohelet 11:9
O youth, enjoy yourself while you are young! Let your heart lead you to enjoyment in the days of your youth. Follow the desires of your heart and the glances of your eyes—but know well that God will call you to account for all such things.

3. Midrash Leviticus Rabbah 28:1
R. Benjamin b. Levi stated: The Sages wanted to store away the Book of Kohelet, for they found in it ideas that leaned towards heresy. They argued: Was it right that Shelomo should have said the following: Rejoice, O young man, in your youth; and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth (Kohelet 11:9)? Moshe said, Go not about after your own heart and your own eyes (Num. 15:39), but Shelomo said, Walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes (Kohelet 11:9)! What then? Is all restraint to be removed? Is there neither justice nor judge? When, however, he said, But know thou, that for all these things God will bring you into judgment (Kohelet 11:9) they admitted that Shelomo had spoken well.

4. Kohelet 1:18
For as wisdom grows, vexation grows; to increase learning is to increase heartache.
5. **Kohelet 9:7-9**

7 Go, eat your bread in gladness, and drink your wine in joy; for your action was long ago approved by God. 8 Let your clothes always be freshly washed, and your head never lack ointment. 9 Enjoy happiness with a woman you love all the fleeting days of life that have been granted to you under the sun—all your fleeting days. For that alone is what you can get out of life and out of the means you acquire under the sun.

6. **Ibn Ezra on Kohelet 9:7**

This is the folly that people say in their hearts...

7. **Ibn Ezra on Kohelet 7:3**

[One sees] in Solomon’s words in this book difficult matters. In many places he says one thing and then its opposite. For this reason our Sages said that the Sages wanted to hide Kohelet because its words contradict themselves...It is known that the greatest lightweight among the wise would not compose a book and contradict himself in that book...

8. **Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Days of Deliverance, p. 29**

Judaism has never accepted the two-value Aristotelian logic which, in its principle of contradiction and the excluded middle, states that, if A contradicts B, then only one of them is right and the other is wrong; the thing is either B or A, to the exclusion of either being both together or being neither A nor B. Judaism has ignored this principle and has quite often acted as if both A and B are right, in spite of their mutual exclusiveness. Even in the halakhic realm, Judaism believes that there is a possibility for a contradiction in the objects without negating either of them. Jewish philosophy and the metaphysic of man can only be understood if the dialectical principle is adopted as the point of departure.
9. Tosefta Yadayim 2:14
R. Shimon ben Manasia says: The Song of Songs defiles the hands because it was composed with divine inspiration. Kohelet does not defile the hands because it is only Solomon’s wisdom.

10. Kohelet 5:1
Keep your mouth from being rash, and let not your throat be quick to bring forth speech before God. For God is in heaven and you are on earth; that is why your words should be few.

11. Kohelet 4:1-3
I further observed all the oppression that goes on under the sun: the tears of the oppressed, with none to comfort them; and the power of their oppressors—with none to comfort them. Then I accounted those who died long since more fortunate than those who are still living; and happier than either are those who have not yet come into being and have never witnessed the miseries that go on under the sun.

12. Kohelet 8:14-15
Here is a frustration that occurs in the world: sometimes an upright man is requited according to the conduct of the scoundrel; and sometimes the scoundrel is requited according to the conduct of the upright. I say all that is frustration. Therefore I praised enjoyment. For the only good a man can have under the sun is to eat and drink and enjoy himself. That much can accompany him, in exchange for his wealth, through the days of life that God has granted him under the sun.

13. Kohelet 12:9
A further word: Because Koheleth was a sage, he continued to instruct the people. He listened to and tested the soundness of many maxims.
14. Song of Songs Rabbah 1:8
He pondered the words of the Torah and investigated [the meaning of] the words of the Torah (izzen ve-hikker). He made handles (oznayim) to the Torah…Said R. Nahman: Imagine a large palace with many doors, so that whoever entered could not find his way back to the door, till one clever person came and took a coil of string and hung it up on the way to the door, so that all went in and out by means of the coil. So till Solomon arose no one was able to understand properly the words of the Torah, but as soon as Solomon arose all began to comprehend the Torah…R. Jose said: Imagine a big basket full of produce without any handle, so that it could not be lifted, till one clever man came and made handles to it, and then it began to be carried by the handles. So till Solomon arose no one could properly understand the words of the Torah, but when Solomon arose, all began to comprehend the Torah.