

Shlomo Hamelech's great wisdom in putting contradictory statements about the world in Koheles

The great Posek Rabbi Moshe Iserlin, in short Ramo, brings the minhag that we read Megillas Koheles (Ecclesiastes) on Shabbos Chol Hamoed Sukkos. The Magen Avraham explains that this is because these are days of happiness and as it says in Koheles (2,2): "ולשמחה מה זו עושה" - "Joy, what does it accomplish?"

The Avudraham explains, that every Sukkos Klal Yisruel gathered by Shlomo Hamelech, as it says (Melachim I 8,2): ויקהלו אל המלך שלמה בירח האתנים: "בחנוג" - "They gathered before King Solomon - every man of Israel - for the festival of Sukkos". At this gathering Shlomo Hamelech read Koheles to them, this is the reason we continue to do so.

The Chachomim wanted to hide Koheles

In honor of the upcoming Yom Tov of Sukkos, let us look at another reason to read Koheles on Sukkos, based on the Gemore (Shabbos 30:):

"אמר רב יהודה בריה דרב שמואל בר שילת משמיה דרב, ביקשו חכמים לגנוז ספר קהלת, מפני שדבריו סותרין זה את זה, ומפני מה לא גזוהו, מפני שתחילתו דברי תורה וסופו דברי תורה, תחילתו דברי תורה, דכתיב (קהלת א ג) מה יתרון לאדם בכל עמלו שיעמול תחת השמש, ואמרי דבי רבי ינאי, תחת השמש הוא דאין לו, קודם שמש יש לו. סופו דברי תורה, דכתיב (שם יב יג) סוף דבר הכל נשמע את האלקים ירא ואת מצוותיו שמור כי זה כל האדם..."

"Rav Yehuda the son of Rav Shmuel bar Shilas says in the name of Rav: The sages sought to conceal the Book of Ecclesiastes because they saw contradictory statements in it. And why didn't they conceal it? Because it both begins and ends with words of Torah, in the beginning it says, "What profit does man have for

all his labor which he toils under the sun?" Rav Yanai explained that under the sun, man does not profit from his efforts, but when he labors in that which preceded the sun he does profit. Koheles ends with Torah saying, "The sum of the matter, when all has been considered: Fear G-d and keep His commandments, for that is man's whole duty".

What are examples of contradictions in Koheles? It says: "Anger is better than laughter", but earlier it had said: "Of laughter, I have said, it is praiseworthy". Another example of a contradiction, in one place it says: "So have I praised joy", but in another place it says: "And of joy, I have said, What does it accomplish?"

The Gemore explains, that these are not contradictions; "Anger is better than laughter", it is better to experience Hashem's anger towards the righteous in this world, than the laughter that Hashem lets the wicked enjoy in this world. The seemingly contradictory verse: "Of laughter, I have said, it is praiseworthy", refers to the laughter that Hashem shares with the righteous in the World to Come, since that laughter represents their eternal reward.

When the verse says: "I have praised joy", it refers to the joy associated with a mitzvah and when it says, "And of joy, I have said, What does it accomplish?" this refers to joy not associated with a mitzvah. This teaches that the Divine Presence does not rest upon a person when he is gloomy, lazy, in levity, through ridicule, through idle conversation, but only through the joy associated with doing mitzvos.

As we think about Rav's words we need to be able to explain the challenge that Shlomo Hamelech presented us with. True, that ultimately all the seeming contradictions in Koheles can be resolved, but why did

Shlomo, the wisest of all men write in a way that we have to resolve the contradictions, why not just write it clearly so that it should not even appear that there are contradictions?

The ways of the world appear to contradict Torah

The Chachomim in their wisdom were able to reconcile, what at first glance may appear to be, contradictions between the way the world operates and what should be our Emunah, our belief in the way Hashem runs the world.

Our Chachomim, through the generations have discussed the fact that nature, in its never changing ways, give the non believers the mistaken ability to convince themselves that the world runs by itself. As it says (Devorim 4,19): "Lest you raise your eyes to the heavens and you see the sun, and the moon, and the stars - the entire legions of the heavens - and you be drawn astray and bow to them and worship them, which Hashem, your G-d, has apportioned to all the peoples under the heavens". Rashi explains that it means: "To look at the thing - and to set your heart - to err by following them". We see that nature can appear to contradict Hashem's continuing to run the world.

One of the basic tenets of our belief is the concept of reward and punishment. As it says (Devorim 30,15-19): "ראה נתתי לפניך היום את החיים ואת הטוב ואת המות ואת הרע, ובחרת בחיים למען תחיה אתה וזרעך" - "See - I have placed before you today, life and good, and death and evil,.....and you shall choose life, so that you will live...". As is stated in one of the Thirteen Principles of Faith: "אני מאמין באמונה שלמה, שהבורא, שתברך שמו גומל טוב לשומרי מצוותיו ומעניש לעוברי מצוותיו" - "I believe with complete faith that the Creator, Blessed is his Name, rewards with good those who observe His commandments, and punishes those who violate His commandments".

Yet we see that Reshaim, evil people, seem to prosper. Moshe himself, asked Hashem (Shmos 33,13): "הודיעני נא את דרכך" - "make your way known to me". The Gemore in Beroches explains that Moshe was asking Hashem to answer the eternal question of why

we see that the righteous sometimes suffer and the evil sometimes prosper.

So it is vital for us to deal with the question: Why did Hashem create a world which seems full of contradictions, with more things hidden than are clear, a world in which Hashem's children are downtrodden and our enemies appear to rule the world. The whole world seems contradictory to Torah.

Man was created to resolve the contradictions in the world

The answer is that, Hashem deliberately created a world, where nature appears to hide His light, so that humans should have the free will choice to decide if they want to see Hashem who is hidden in our world. If we recognize Him and serve Him, we are rewarded; but those who deny His existence and live only in the world as it appears to them will be punished. Our world is called "נוהם", which comes from the word "הנחם", or hidden, because if Hashem's presence were clearly revealed there would be no choice but to believe in him, thus removing the possibility or rewarding those who chose to believe in Him.

Hashem's final creation was human beings who are imbued with the intelligence to understand the operation of the world and with the ability to resolve the apparent contradictions of the world and to believe in Hashem, reaching the ultimate truth that Hashem runs the world according to His will, as Dovid Hamelech declared (Tehilim 104,24): "מה רבו מעשיך" - "How abundant are your works, Hashem, with wisdom You made them all."

We are taught that our essential purpose on this world is to firmly believe that even what appears to contradict Hashem's dominance and control over this world is only because it is deliberately hidden from us. But as we develop our belief in Hashem, we are able to resolve these seeming contradictions in the world, further strengthening our belief.

The Chasam Sofer in Toras Moshe, explains that our job is to try to understand Hashem's truth and even if we have thousands question to remain steadfast in our belief, and to realize that we need to work even harder

to understand the ultimate truth of Hashem's control of the world.

The light of torah dispels the darkness of contradictions

Mere mortals are not capable of resolving the apparent contradictions of the world by themselves, so Hashem graciously gave us the Torah, and through delving in the study of the holy Torah, we can be enlightened to understand and resolve what appear to be contradictions in the natural world.

The very first words of the Torah, "בראשית ברא" - "in the beginning of G-d's creating.". Rashi explains that the world was created because of the Torah and HKB"H who are called "Reishis". This teaches us from the very beginning of the Torah, that with the Torah we can explain the contradictions of the world.

The next possuk says: "והארץ היתה תוהו ובוהו" - "And the earth was bewilderment and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep", the "bewilderment and void" of the world are all the contradictions and questions that surround us - such as how could bad people succeed and good people suffer? , the possuk continues: "ורוח אלקים מרחפת" - "And the breath of G-d was hovering upon the surface". All the questions and contradictions are only to human eyes, because in reality Hashem's spirit covers the world and He runs the word down to its minutest details.

When Hashem created light, the Torah uses the word light 5 times. The Medrash says that these 5 words correspond to the 5 books of the Torah, and only by studying Torah can we dispel the darkness of questions that pervade the world. That is why the Torah says at the end of the creation on the first day, "G-d called to the light 'day' and to the darkness He called 'night'." Teaching us that there only appear to be contradictions in the world, but the reality is as it says in the end of the possuk: "And there was evening and there was morning, one day", it is really all one day, incorporating what appear to be questions of day and night, darkness and light.

We can explain the possuk in Mishle (6,23): "כי נר" - "For a commandment is a lamp and the Torah is light", as we think about the purpose of physical light which enables us to dispel darkness, we can make the analogy to Torah whose study enables us to dispel the darkness from the questions that pervade to world.

Resolving the contradictions of the world from solving the contradictions in Torah

Let us look more deeply to understand why it is that it is only through delving into Torah that we can resolve the contradictions of the world. We know that Hashem, so to speak, looked into the Torah to create the world.

Since Hashem created the world with all its apparent contradictions using the Torah, and the Torah is the source of the entire creation, it therefore also contains the resolution to all the apparent contradictions of the world. We have to delve into Torah to find the answers that are hidden in the Torah. The more we study Torah the more we will be able to resolve what appeared to be contradictions of creation whose source is the Torah.

We can understand the Gemore (Kedushin 30A): "הקב"ה אמר להם לישראל, בניי בראתי יצר הרע ובראתי לו תורה תבלין, ואם אתם עוסקים בתורה אין Hashem said, "I have created the evil inclination, and I have created Torah as its antidote, if you involve yourself in Torah, you will not be delivered into its hand." The Yetzer Harah tries to bring us down by confronting us with questions that appear to show contradictions between the world and the Torah. By studying Torah, we can resolve these questions.

Sholomo Hamelech revealed In Koheles all of the contradictions in the world

In light of all this, let us try to understand why Shlomo Hamelech put in so many apparently contradictory ideas into Koheles. Even though our sages explained them, the question remains why did he choose to write in such a contradictory style instead of spelling out all the solutions?

It appears to me that Shlomo Hamelech did this purposefully, to teach us that the world is full of contradictions. Shlomo Hamelech refers to himself throughout Koheles, as "וראיתי אני" - "I have seen", as if to say, I, too, had questions and worked to resolve them, so too you will have to resolve for your selves what appears to be contradictions.

But as if to answer the person who thinks: "how can I resolve these great questions?" Shlomo Hamelech starts and ends Koheles with Torah so that we should understand that everything is in the Torah which Hashem used to create the world. The third possuk of Koheles says: "מה יתרון לאדם בכל עמלו שיעמול" - "What profit does man have for all his labor which he toils beneath the sun?" The Gemore explains that this suggests that: "תחת השמש" - "under the sun" there is no purpose, but "above the sun" there is a purpose, meaning in Torah which is "higher" than the sun there is a purpose to our work.

What Shlomo Hamelech is telling us is: Under the sun, in this world, there is no real purpose for our work, because the world is so full of contradictions that we can get lost in the confusion. But when we toil in Torah which exists in higher sphere, we can resolve these questions and find that even our efforts on this world are rewarding.

Shlomo Hamelech ends Koheles saying: "סוף דבר הכל נשמע את האלקים ירא ואת מצוותיו שמור כי זה כל האדם" - "The sum of the matter, when all has been considered: Fear G-d and keep His commandments, for that is man's whole duty". In the end, by delving into Torah, we see that what appear to be contradictions in the operation of the world are only illusory and our true purpose of being on this world is to serve Hashem by doing mitzvos.

Words of truth for every time and every situation

We began with the deep thought of Rav that: "The sages sought to conceal the Book of Ecclesiastes because they saw contradictory statements in it. And why didn't they conceal it? Because it both begins and ends with words of Torah". From this we can understand the great wisdom of Shlomo Hamelech

who filled Koheles with apparent contradictions so we should all realize that our purpose is to toil in Torah to resolve the conflicts in a manner that is appropriate for each of us individually.

Koheles begins with words of Torah: "מה יתרון לאדם בכל עמלו שיעמול תחת השמש" - "What profit does man have for all his labor which he toils under the sun?" Rav Yanai explained that under the sun, man does not profit from his efforts, but when he labors in that which preceded the sun he does profit. Koheles ends with Torah saying: "סוף דבר הכל נשמע את האלקים ירא ואת מצוותיו שמור כי זה כל האדם" - "The sum of the matter, when all has been considered: Fear G-d and keep His commandments, for that is man's whole duty", through the deep study of Torah, a person can have of his questions answered.

This gives us a new insight of what Shlomo Hamelech wrote in the third chapter of Koheles listing 28 "times", 14 good and 14 bad:

"לכל זמן ועת לכל חפץ תחת השמים, עת ללדת ועת למות, עת לטעת ועת לעקור נטוע, עת להרוג ועת לרפוא, עת לפרוץ ועת לבנות, עת לבכות ועת לשחוק, עת ספור ועת רקוד, עת להשליך אבנים ועת כנוס אבנים, עת לחבוק ועת לרחק מחבק, עת לבקש ועת לאבד, עת לשמור ועת להשליך, עת לקרוע ועת לתפור, עת לחשות ועת לדבר, עת לאהוב ועת לשנוא, עת מלחמה ועת שלום".

"To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; A time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; A time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace".

Shlomo Hamelech was using this to teach us the essence of the wisdom of Koheles, we have to know when to cry and when to laugh, when to speak and when to be quiet, when to love and when to hate, when to use each of 14 "times" for good and when for bad.

**Hashem says:
"a new Torah will come from me"**

We have to realize that we do not yet have the ability to answer all of the world's questions, there are things that are supposed to remain hidden from us and we are even forbidden from delving into them. As the Mishna in Chagiga says: **"כל המסתכל בארבעה דברים רתוי [כלומר ראוי] לו כאילו לא בא לעולם, מה למעלה, מה למטה, מה לפנים, ומה לאחור, וכל שלא חס על כבוד - קונו רתוי לו שלא בא לעולם"** - **"If a person tries to delve into what is above us, what is below us, what was before and will be after, and a person who is not concerned with Hashem's honor, it is better that he not have been brought onto this world."**

Also, there are questions that will only be resolved after Moshiach comes. This is the essence of our being in golus, in exile. We live in darkness and the time has not come for many questions to be answered and therefore much of the depths of Torah have yet to be revealed. As Yeshaya Hanavi said (41,3): **"כי תורה - מאתני תצא"** - **"Torah will come forth from me"** and the Medrash explains: **"אמר הקב"ה תורה חדשה מאתני תצא"** - **"Hashem says: "A new Torah will come from me, a Torah with novel explanations"**.

When we are ultimately redeemed, and the exile we are in will end, we will then understand all the difficulties that were at the root of our exile. As it says (Tehilim 126,2): **"אז ימלא שחוק פינו ולשונונו רנה"** - **"Then our mouth will be filled with laughter and our tongue with glad song"**. Because there is no joy like that which is felt when all of our doubts are resolved. To do that, we will need to understand all of the question about creation.

The Sukkah symbolizes our existence on this world which is only temporary

Let us understand why Shlomo Hamelech chose to read Koheles on Sukkos, which is the reason we continue to do so. Our Sages called the Yom Tov of Sukkos: **"זמן שמחתנו"** - **"Our joyous time"**, why is Sukkos more joyous than Pesach or Shevuos?

On Sukkos, we leave our homes for seven days to live in a temporary dwelling, The Alshich in Toras Moshe says that this reminds us that these seven days are like the seventy years of a person's life that is also really only temporary.

As we ponder this deep thought that our existence on this world is only temporary, it becomes the root of the answer to all of our questions about the world, in particular the question of why the wicked prosper. This world is only temporary and is really a preparation for the World to Come. As the Mishna says in Pirke Avos (4,16): **"העולם הזה דומה לפרוזדור בפני העולם - הבא, התקן עצמך בפרוזדור כדי שתכנס לטרקלין"** - **"This world is like a corridor before the World to Come, prepare yourself in the corridor, so that you may enter the banquet hall"**.

Hashem repays the wicked person for whatever good deeds he may have done, while he is still on this world so that he will not be able to participate at all in the World to Come. On the other hand, when it comes to righteous people, Hashem is very strict with them on this world so that they should be completely purified so that when they get to the World to Come their experience will be totally sublime.

Sukkos is called **"זמן שמחתנו"** - **"our joyous time"**, because the lesson of Sukkos is that this world is only temporary; we are given an opportunity to have some pleasure in this world so that we can relish the thought that any suffering is to purify us so that when we enter the World to Come, the permanent world, we will be worthy of pure pleasure.

Shlomo Hamelech read Koheles on Sukkos, because that is a time of joy, when we realize that our entire existence on this world is only temporary. So he focuses our attention on the questions and contradictions so that we will endeavor to find resolutions to the questions by realizing that this world is only a temporary existence to prepare us for our permanent residence.

By overcoming our questions, we can merit the eternal existence that will be ours as we will sit in the the glorious Sukkah made from the skin of the great Leviason fish. May we merit this speedily in our days.