

Kohelet Summary Sheets

The following pages aim to encapsulate the main points of each individual section of the book of Kohelet, organizing the important flow of ideas from one section to the next.

Underlying Assumption: Kohelet is usually understood as a book full of contradictions. We find very opposing views throughout the book. These difficulties can be resolved, however, by looking at the book not as a monologue but as a dialogue or discussion between varying views on life, opposing opinions, each presented as a unique personality, and as part of the life of King Solomon. (Meiri)

1) 1:1-11 - First Introduction

4 cycles involving (a) generations, (b) rivers, (c) wind, and (d) the sun. These represent 4 states of nature: Earth, Water, Air, Fire respectively. Metaphorically, these represent 4 aspects of the human being, and further represent the four main personalities in the dialogue of the book.

Earth	River	Sun	Wind
Body	Physical Life	Wisdom	Soul
עמל - Builder	נהנתן - Hedonist	חכם - Philosopher	ירא אלקים - God Fearer

“The Futile Cycle” - if life always returns to the starting point, what is the point of the journey?

2) 1:12-2:23 - Second Introduction

The 3 “contrasting” personalities are introduced:

- | | | |
|-----|-----------------------------|---|
| (a) | עמל Creator, Builder | one who wishes to leave his mark on the world. |
| (b) | חכם Philosopher, planner | one who wishes to understand the world. |
| (c) | נהנתן Man of Joy / pleasure | one who wishes to enjoy the world. |
- (The 4th, the ירא, is introduced later, and he **utilizes** the world for a higher purpose)

Each parallels a specific aspect of Solomon:

- | | |
|----------|-----------------------------------|
| Builder | see I Kings 9:15-20 |
| Pleasure | see I Kings 11:1-3 |
| Wisdom | see I Kings 5:9-14, 10:1-13,23-25 |

In Solomon's vision in Givon (I Kings 3), God offered Solomon to fulfil any wish. Solomon asked to understand good and evil, reminiscent of Adam's request to partake of the Tree of Knowledge. He is granted three aspects of life which define **worldliness** - *Wisdom, Honour, and Wealth*. But he is also told that all is meaningless without the Tree of Life, and that is conditional upon total adherence to the Will of God. Without the Tree of Life, “death” will destroy all other achievements in the world.

ב:טו-יח

...קְמוּקְמָהּ הַפְסִיל גַּם־אֲנִי יְקַרְנִי ... וְשָׁנְאֵתִי אֶת־הַחַיִּים ... וְשָׁנְאֵתִי אֶת־כָּל־עֲמָלִי שֶׁאֲנִי עֹמֵל תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם
שֶׁאֲנִיחֲנוּ לְאָדָם שְׂיִהְיֶה אַחֲרָי:

This recurring frustration is also a reflection of the primary theme of the book, an effort to understand good and evil and life and death, the two anchor themes of the Garden of Eden's Tree of Life and Tree of Knowledge – עץ החיים ועץ הדעת. Solomon's mission to build the Temple was supposed to create a path for him (and mankind) back to the Tree of Life, the Torah. But, like Adam, Solomon chose the path of the Tree of Knowledge instead.

3) 2:24-3:22 הנהנתן - The Hedonist

Starting Point: The world of nature is perfect created and guided by God for man's benefit, like chapter 1 of Genesis where mankind is created last, as the beneficiaries of Creation. Man's function is to enjoy the pleasures which God has created for him. All of life is ruled by God. Man dares not try to change the world, as he is but a guest in it.

לְכָל זָמַן וְנָתַן לְכָל-חַפֵּץ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם (ג: א)...
 מֵהִיתְרוֹן הָעוֹשֶׂה בְּאֲשֶׁר הוּא עֹמֵל... אֶת־הַכֹּל עֹשֶׂה יָפֶה בְּעֵתוֹ... (ג: ט-י)

Problem: The world God created may be beautiful, but the world in which man lives – in which evil and injustice flourish - is deeply flawed. But since man cannot influence or change it, he must rely on God to punish the evil in the next world!

אֶת־הַצַּדִּיק וְאֶת־הַרְשָׁע יִשְׁפֹּט הָאֱלֹהִים כִּי־עַתָּה לְכָל־חַפֵּץ וְעַל כָּל־הַמַּעֲשֵׂה שָׂם...
 וּמוֹתֵר הָאָדָם מִרְהַבְהֶמָה אֵין... (ג: טז-יט)

Man becomes likened to the animals who cannot effect change in the world but live only on instinct and physicality. (ג: טז-יט)

4) 4:1-16 העמל - The Builder

Response: In a world filled with the “tear of the oppressed” one cannot sit back and simply “enjoy life.” (ד: א). One cannot ‘enjoy’ the world and leave injustice for God to handle, for then life itself loses all meaning. In such a world it would be better not to be born at all!

וְטוֹב מִשְׁנִיחֶם אֶת אֲשֶׁר־עָדוֹן לֹא הָיָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא־רָאָה אֶת־הַמַּעֲשֵׂה הָרָע אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם : (ד: ג)

Challenge: 2 problems identified with human effort:

1. “For **whom** do I toil?” (ד: ח) וְלִמִּי אֲנִי עֹמֵל וּמִחֲסֵר אֶת־נַפְשִׁי מִטוֹבָה (ד: ח)

In ch. 2, the עמל felt he was toiling for himself alone. Here he wants to toil for someone else. “But after I die - what is left?” Perhaps there won't be a continuation?

2. “**Why** do I toil?” - (ד: ד) כִּי הִיא קִנְיַת־אִישׁ מִרְעֵהוּ (ד: ד)

Jealousy! What good can come from something inherently negative?

Two problems – one solution: Society - (ד: יד) וְהַחֹוֹט הַמְשֻׁלָּשׁ לֹא בְמַהֲרָה יִנָּתֵק (ד: יד)

=> Toil for community, for society lives forever.

=> Common goals for everyone in that society.

Two are better than one; three are better than two... A society is better than an individual, and the King / leader of the society can take responsibility for the solution of the problems of injustice and evil in the world.

Failure: Experience proved the failure of this approach. Solomon himself tried and failed.

טוֹב יָלַד מִסָּבִין וְחָכָם מִמְלֵךְ זָקֵן וְכֹסֵיל אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדַע לְהִזְהָר עוֹד (ד: יג)

The poor child who emerged from jail to take over and lead the path to justice (Jeroboam), for all his noise and promises of a better future, fared no better than the “old” king who could no longer take care of himself (Solomon or Rehoboam).

5) 4:17-5:11 - ירא האלקים - The God Fearer

Response:

- a) To נהנתן - Don't **complain** so much against God - (א: ה) ולבך אלימותר להוציא דבר לפני האלהים
 b) To עמל - Don't **promise** so much - (ד: ה) טוב אשר לא תתדור משתדור ולא תשלים (ה: ד)

To the עמל's claimed that the King was solely responsible for justice in the world, e.g. Solomon, Jeroboam: He says: "Don't promise to achieve - who says you are capable? Who gave you the power to control the world?"

Meaning of Work:

Man is not exempt from working, from trying to develop and advance this world, but not as עמל = toil that only has value if it is successful, but rather as עבודה = work and service which has intrinsic value!

מלך לשדה נעבד (ח) ... מתוקה שגת העבד ... (יא)

Response to the נהנתן: Man must work, he must strive to achieve; he cannot throw responsibility on to the "shoulders" of God and walk away to enjoy this world.

Response to the עמל: Whether one sees results from his actions or not is irrelevant. Ultimately one must work with faith that he will succeed, with God's help. The very process of trying is mankind's responsibility. Yet he is not solely responsible for the world; God is.

Role of Temple Sacrifices:

Ultimately, the world is controlled through a **hierarchy**, or **partnership** between God and man:

אם עשק רש וגזל משפט וצדק תראה במדינה אלתתמה עלהחפץ כי גבה מעל גבה שומר (ה: ז)

The central focus of the Temple is not man's actions (sacrifices) but rather God's Voice (obedience). One comes to the Temple bringing sacrifices, but these remain "outside". They are not the central element: וקרוב לשמע מתת הכסילים גבח - *It is better to listen than to bring the sacrifices of fools.*

Summary: The basic tenant of the God Fearer can be summed up in the key phrase **גבה מעל גבה שומר**, "Higher than high", a pictorial description of the relationship between the two "palaces", the palace of the King of Israel, over which towered the palace of the King of Kings. Man is required to work ("עבודה") in this world, and try to perfect society, to bring justice, and in that context to bring sacrifices to the Temple. But God is above him, guiding his efforts, whether he sees the success or not. The primary agenda, then, is to heed the word of God:

שומר רגלך באשר תלך אלבית האלהים
 וקרוב לשמע מתת הכסילים גבח (ז: י)

6) 5:12-6:12 - העמל - The Builder

The third and final time we find the עמל:

- (a) 5:12-19 Final attempt to find meaning.
- (b) 6:1-12 Failure, and despair.

(a) 5:12-19 “One Last Try”

The Problem (5:12-16): The loss of all wealth in one's life, the futility of toiling and having nothing to show for it, nothing to give over to the next generation:

(יג) וְאֵבֶד הָעֵשֶׂר הַהוּא בְּעֵינָיו רָע וְהוֹלִיד בּוֹ וְאִין בְּיָדוֹ מְאוּמָה : (יד) כְּאֶשֶׁר יֵצֵא מִבֶּטֶן אִמּוֹ עָרוֹם יָשׁוּב לְלֶכֶת כְּשֶׁבָא וּמְאוּמָה לֹא יֵשֵׁא בְּעַמְלֵוֹ שִׁילָד בְּיָדוֹ :

In describing man ending up exactly where he started – going from the grave (= womb) to the grave with nothing to show for the journey – we repeat the futile ‘cycle’ of nature with which the book began!

וְגַם־זֶה רָעָה חוֹלָה כְּלַעֲמַת שֶׁבָא בּוֹ יִלָּד וּמֵה־יִתְרוֹן לוֹ שִׁיעֲמַל לְרוּחַ : (טו)

Yet we also see a maturing process in the עמל. Looking at the question of an heir:

- 2:18-20 לאדם שיהי אחרי - **egocentric** – why should I work for somebody else?
- 4:8 גם בן ואח אין לו - No heir – **caring** - he wants to work for others, but for whom?
- 5:12-16 Nothing left – **desperate** – after a lifetime of toil – nothing to show...

Conclusion (17-19): If all attempts to toil for the future fail to provide meaning, then enjoy the fruits of that toil **now**, before death. Live for the moment.

טוֹב אֲשֶׁר־יִצְפֶּה לְאָכּוֹל לְשִׁתּוֹת וְלִרְאוֹת טוֹבָה בְּכָל־עֲמָלוֹ ... מִתַּת אֱלֹהִים הִיא...

(b) 6:1-12 Rejection, Despair

What happens if a person cannot even enjoy the fruits of his labour here in this world? What about the person who loses everything, who doesn't even have a “burial plot”?! The “stillborn” is better off, for at least he has a grave (the womb)!

וְלֹא־יִשְׁלִיטֵנוּ הָאֱלֹהִים לְאָכֵל מִמֶּנּוּ ... טוֹב מִמֶּנּוּ הַנֶּנְפֵל (ו: א-ג)

It is better not to be born than to live life as a meaningless cycle that achieves nothing.

Kohelet extrapolates this as the existential crisis of every person, because nobody is ever really “satisfied” from physical pleasures. The more one achieves, the greater the appetite for more.¹
כְּלַעֲמַל הָאָדָם לְפִיּהוּ וְגַם־הַנֶּנְפֵשׁ לֹא תִמְלָא (ז: א)

But since “not to be born” is not a solution to the meaning of life, the עמל has failed in his task.

¹ Chazal famously countered this philosophy with the statement in Ethics of our Fathers: “Who is wealthy? One who is satisfied with their (allotted) portion... (אבות ד: א)

The “cycle” in the Introduction:

In the עמל’s final words, he repeats the same metaphor of nature as symbols of the futility of life with which the book opens.

Earth – 5:15, 6:6, Wind - 5:15, Sun - 6:4, and Water 6:7.

כל עמַת שָׁבָא כֹּן יִלְדָּה... אֵל מְקוֹם אֶחָד הַכֹּל הוֹלֵךְ	ה: טו, ו: ו	הָאָרֶץ
וַיִּמָּה יִתְרוֹן לּוֹ שֶׁיַּעֲמַל לְרוּחַ	ה: טו	הָרוּחַ
כִּי בַהֶבֶל בָּא וּבַחֲשָׁךְ יֵלֵךְ וּבַחֲשָׁךְ שָׁמוּ וְקִסָּה...גַּם שָׁמֶשׁ לֹא רָאָה	ז: ו	הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ
כֹּל עֲמַל הָאָדָם לְפִיָּהוּ וְגַם הַנֶּפֶשׁ לֹא תִמְלֵא	ז: ו	הַמִּים

In addition, the עמל himself has come full circle, ending with the same question with which he started: What is the meaning of the needless toil in the world?

ו:ו	ב:ב
כִּי מִיִּיּוֹדֵעַ מֵה־טוֹב לְאָדָם בְּחַיִּים מִסִּפְּרֵי יָמֵי חַיֵּי הַבָּלוּ וְיַעֲשֶׂם כְּצֵל אֲשֶׁר מִיִּיגִיד לְאָדָם מֵה־יְהִיָּה אַחֲרָיו תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַשׁ:	תִּרְתִּי בְלִבִּי לְמִשׁוֹךְ בִּינֵן אֶת־בְּשָׂרִי וְלִבִּי נָהָג בַּחֲכָמָה וְלֹאֲחֹז בְּסִכְלוֹת עַד אֲשֶׁר־אֶרְאֶה אִיזָה טוֹב לִבְנֵי הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשׂוּ תַחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם מִסִּפְּרֵי יָמֵי חַיֵּיהֶם:

In both form and content, the עמל has achieved nothing in his quest – and essentially has ‘written himself out of the remainder of the script.’

PART II:

Two significant changes are noticeable in the second half of Kohelet:

- The עמל disappears and is replaced by the חכם
- The focus of the discussion shifts from ‘good and evil’ to ‘life and death’, or from the עץ הדעת to the עץ החיים.

While the ירא is consistent throughout, his response to the question of ‘good and evil’ is a worldly centered response – since the problem is a societal problem the solution must lie in a partnership between God and man, namely, גבה עמל גבה, עבודה, and partnership and ultimately in the Temple-Palace relationships.

In the second half of the book, the focus is on the existence of death, and the question of Divine retribution in a finite world. To that question the ירא by necessity focuses on accountability before God in the world after this one, the world of the spirit. והרוח תשוב אל האלקים אשר נתנה.

7) 7:1-22 - החכם - The Philosopher

In this section, the חכם responds to each of the previous personalities according to each one's unique approach.

Framework: טוב שם משקן טוב ויום המות מיום - "This is better than that..." e.g. טוב (זה) ... מזה) - "A good name (eulogy) is better than good oil (birth oil) and the day of death (is better) than the day of birth." This is a direct response to the question posed at the end of the previous section of the book: מי יודע מה טוב לאדם בחיים מספר ימי חיי הבלו... (וי:יב) - "Who knows what is the good that mankind should pursue all the futile days of his life...?"

(a) 7:1-8(a) - Response to the נהנתן:

The world is not so "wonderful" when you recognize the death! You cannot just "enjoy" life. You must look death squarely in the eye. It is far more meaningful to come face to face with mortality, than to bury oneself in ephemeral pleasures of the moment.

(b) 7:8(b)-14 - Response to the עמל:

One does not have the ability to change the world, or perfect the distortions in it. *Who can fix the distortions that God has created?* - מי יוכל לתקן את אשר עתו? (v. 9-10), because the world does not run according to your wishes. Ultimately, you have no control over what happens, so learn to live with what exists. Learn to live with the world's greatest עוות = flaw, or distortion, namely the existence of death!

(c) 7:15-22 - Response to ירא:

Don't be too righteous because every person is flawed and imperfect. We all sin. Why eat yourself up? On the other hand, don't be too wicked because "crime doesn't pay", "*why should you die before your time?*" למה תמות בלא עתה? Righteousness will get you nothing except disappointment living in a world where man is cruel, and where your own slave will one day stab you in the back, and curse you. Learn, therefore, to live with all the imperfections in the world - including your own!

Contrast:

נהנתן: "The world is perfect".

חכם: "The world is not perfect as long as **death** exists"

עמל: "Man is perfect"

חכם: "Man is not perfect - for the greatest imperfection is **death**."

ירא: "Man must **strive** for perfection"

חכם: "Mankind is inherently imperfect, and sin is unavoidable."

Attitudes towards death:

נהנתן Ignores death - live for the moment.

עמל Fights death - attempt to immortalize mankind.

חכם Resigns himself to death - live with it!

8) 7:23-29 - ירא האלקים - The God Fearer's Response

The ירא responds by rejecting the axiom and underlying premise of the Philosopher outright. He questions the very validity of חכמה (wisdom) as defined by the חכם, namely wisdom based on human intellect and empiricism alone, without faith in - and fear of - God. This is discussed at greater length in the opening chapters of משלי (Proverbs).

Proverbs chapters 1,2,7,8,9.

Proverbs 1:20-24 - חכמה is described metaphorically as a woman calling out to the fool, seeking to help him.

Proverbs Ch. 7,8: Two women represent ‘wisdom’ - the “harlot”, the alien evil woman, who can be found in the streets, stalking her prey, and the woman of ‘valor’ and wisdom, who can be found connected to the house or the gates of the city.

Wisdom is compared to a woman, and the attainment of wisdom is metaphorically described in sexual terms: (ו: ד-ה) ... זָרָהּ ... לְשִׁמְרָךְ מֵאִשָּׁה זָרָהּ - “Say to wisdom you are my ‘sister’ (or betrothed!), and call knowledge your ‘intimate’, to protect you from the alien woman...”.

The uniqueness of Proverbs is its distinction between these two types of wisdom: “good” wisdom and “evil” or “dangerous” wisdom. “Good wisdom” is rooted in the Fear of Heaven, and comes from God, through the revelation of Torah.

כִּי ה' יִתֵּן חָכְמָה מִפִּי דְעַת וּתְבוּנָה: (משלי ב: ו)

God grants wisdom, from His mouth comes knowledge and understanding.”

Good wisdom is rooted, connected to the “house”, to the “beginning”, the source from which it comes – namely God, and is revealed through Torah. That is the deeper meaning of the end of Proverbs as well, the chapter of אשת חיל. But “evil wisdom” is based only on personal experience and is at once more tempting and more dangerous. God's wisdom came even before the world was created! (see Proverbs **8:22-35**). Only the wisdom of God can be used to truly understand life in all its facets!

Kohelet 7:23-29

(23-27) The wisdom as presented by the חכם is false for true wisdom is “farther” “deeper” than the superficial vision of mortal man, it predates creation itself. (see Proverbs **8:22-35**).

(25-26) “Having gone in search of חכמה, I have found the wrong Woman!!!” Kohelet has found the “Evil Wisdom/Woman” of משלי, the false wisdom, rather than the אשת חיל, the True Wisdom based on the Fear of God.

(27-28) “אמרה קהלת” - Kohelet is feminine! Because Kohelet represents the Wisdom which is based on Fear of God, the “Good Woman”, the אשת חיל.

(29) Conclusion: God created man straight! The distortions are the product of man's own doing, not God's. (This becomes the starting point for the next discussion.)

9) 8:1-13 - החכם והירא - The Philosopher and the God Fearer

In this section two voices are speaking, vying for primacy:

- (1) The חכם attempts to speak: מי כהחכם? - *Who is like the Wise man?*
- (2) The ירא - “I am!” interjects the ירא, who then continues his rejection of the חכם.

8:2-9: Position of the ירא:

(3) One cannot run away from God - אַל תִּבְהַל מִפְּנֵי תֵּלֶךְ (see Psalms 139:7 and Job 10:8-22). In what context is this said? God is the ruler (4) in the most fundamental sense - life and death. אֵין שְׁלֵטוֹן בְּיוֹם הַמָּוֶת - *“There is no mastery on the day of death”* – or there is no mastery **over** death. Man cannot escape it. The fear of death is ultimately what most focus us on our subservience to God. It is what constantly reminds us that God exists. That is precisely why God expelled Adam from Eden *“Lest he send forth his hand and take of the Tree of Life and eat, and live forever,”* lest man eliminate the last existing boundary between himself and God: mortality.

לְכֹל חֲפֹץ יֵשׁ עִת וּמִשְׁפָּט - *“The wicked cannot escape their master”*, ולא ימלט רשע את בעליו (6,8) *“For everything there is a time and a judgment.”* One cannot escape from God because ultimately God will catch up with him at death! Then the wicked will be forced to stand before God in judgment. The world does not **end** at death. On the contrary, there is **judgment and accountability** after death. Man must live his life focusing on what must be achieved to succeed in that judgment.

5:10-12¹: **Response of חכם** - For justice to be an effective **deterrent** of evil it must be **perceived**. Death as a system of justice and deterrent to evil will not work. So many “dead” people are walking around! רשעים קברים וְבָאוּ!

5:12²-13: **Counter-Response of ירא** - Contrary to what the חכם described, the world is not void of justice! Rather, the ירא, in his first speech (chapter 5), has already established the existence of such a system: אִם לֹא עֵשֶׂק רָשׁ וְגִזְל מִשְׁפָּט וְצָדִיק תִּרְאֶה בְּמִדְיָנָה אֶל תִּתְמָה עַל הַחֲפֹץ כִּי גְבוּהָ מַעַל גְּבוּהָ שְׁמֵר - *“If you see oppression of the poor... in the country - do not be dismayed, for one “Higher than High” guards...”* The king, in partnership with God, effectively administer justice in this world! But for those individuals who manage to slip through the cracks, there is a “back-up” that is foolproof, namely judgment after death! ולא ימלט רשע את בעליו!

The חכם and the ירא agree in principle on the need for a system of judgment here in this world. The חכם, who believes only in what he sees, draws his conclusions from the exceptions, those who escape justice here, while the ירא, who has faith in what God tells him, proclaims his faith in the final judgment in the World to Come, from which there is no escape.

Attitudes towards death:

- נהנתן** Ignores death - live for the moment.
- עמל** Fights death - attempt to immortalize mankind.
- חכם** Resigns himself to death - learn to live with it!
- ירא** Utilizes death for a **constructive** purpose, and lets it direct his life constructively!

10) 8:14-9:16 The נהנתן - Summation

8:14-17 - Response to the ירא אלקים - While the חכם has already raised the question of the wicked who prosper, the נהנתן takes this further, suggesting a complete lack of any system of Divine retribution or justice, anarchy and chaos in the realm of Reward & Punishment. By combining the two famous questions of the wicked who prosper with the righteous who suffer, he suggests that what exists is chaos.

יִשְׁהַבֵּל אֱשֶׁר נַעֲשֶׂה עֲלֵהָאָרֶץ אֱשֶׁר יֵשׁ צַדִּיקִים אֲשֶׁר מִגִּיעַ אֲלֵהֶם כְּמַעֲשֵׂה הַרְשָׁעִים וַיֵּשׁ רָשָׁעִים שְׂמִינִיעַ אֲלֵהֶם
כְּמַעֲשֵׂה הַצַּדִּיקִים אֲמַרְתִּי שְׂגִים זֶה הַבַּל: (ח: יד)

In Tanach, whenever the prophets “question” God's justice, they do so to better understand God, to “emulate” God, learn from God, not challenge God. They question if there is “too much mercy” in the world (Yonah), or “too much justice” (Abraham). But they never combine them, for doing so would suggest anarchy. That is the נהנתן's heresy.

9:1-3 There is no point to righteousness, because the “end” of the righteous and the “end” of the wicked is the same – death. There is nothing beyond the grave.

9:4-6 Hold unto life as the only remaining reality. Man is completely forgotten!

9:7-10 Conclusion: If there is no “afterlife”, live this life with only physical pleasure and enjoyment. Do all that is within your power. There **are no moral consequences!** (See Is. 22:14 - “*Eat and drink for tomorrow we die*, אכול ושתו כי מחר נמות

כֹּל אֲשֶׁר תִּמְצָא יָדְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּכַחַךְ עֲשֵׂה
כִּי אֵין מַעֲשֵׂה וְחֶשְׁבוֹן וְדַעַת וְחִכְמָה בְּשֵׂאוֹל אֲשֶׁר אֲתָה הַלֵּךְ שָׁמָּה: (ט: י)

9:11-16 - Response to the עמל and the חכם

(11-12) Both the עמל and the חכם will be defeated by death, the same way the ירא will be defeated by death. One lives his life in the constant shadow of death.

(13-16) The חכם may be stronger than the עמל, but he too is forgotten, because he is “poor”, and no one listens to him. His words of soon forgotten.

There are two who are “forgotten”

- One who is dead - (ה) נִשְׁכַּח זְכָרָם
- One who is poor - (ז) נִשְׁמָעִים

The Stages in the נהנתן

1. The world God created is good – כי טוב - run by God; man's task is to enjoy as God's guest!
Model: **Yitzchak**.
2. World of man is evil. but man is powerless to change it because God is in total control. God will judge man in the next world, שם. For now, eat, as an animal. Live for the moment.
3. If this world is meaningless, on what basis is there judgement in the next world? Anarchy here implies chaos there as well. Therefore he rejects any existence of a spiritual existence beyond this one. Physical enjoyment becomes the only “reality” left.

Model: **Esav!** הנה אנכי הולך למות ולמה לי זה בכרה

The נהנתן arrives at the same point of despair as the עמל, but from the opposite direction.

- עמל - Struggle with death leads to the conclusion: better **not to be born**.
- נהנתן - Ignoring death leads to conclusion: better **not to die!**

Neither conclusion is plausible, or resolves the quest of Kohelet.

11) 9:17-10:19 - The חכם - Summation

9:17-10:4 - Response to נהנתן

The נהנתן made the accusation that the חכם is not heard (or perceived) in the world as much as the נהנתן is. While admittedly true, the חכם responds with a rational:

- **9:17-18¹** - *Wisdom* is still more powerful, and better, despite its silence in the world.
- **18²-10:1** - It is the very nature of perfection, and therefore the nature of *Wisdom*, to be more vulnerable to flaw or imperfection.
- **2-4** - Nevertheless, the approach of *Wisdom* is preferred because of its **potential** perfection.

Who should “rule” or control the affairs of this world?

5-7 A world in which the נהנתן “rules” is an intolerable “error”, for which God is to blame. The “ruler” should be the חכם.

8-10 The עמל is incapable of running the world without the guidance of *Wisdom*.

11-14 Nor should the ירא אלקים run the world, for he is nothing more than a “fool”, who claims to know nothing of what will be in the future.

15-19 Conclusion: Woe is the nation whose rulers are “fools”, who “eat” before proving their worth. Only the חכם is capable of ruling the world.

As much as the חכם is the one who should be running the world, he is also the one who is constantly silenced, always forgotten, and never headed! This is God's mistake!

Ironically, the חכם began with the philosophy of total acceptance and resignation. Resign yourself to death (נהנתן), resign yourself to the flaws of the world (עמל), and resign yourself to the flaws of mankind (ירא).

This was broken by the question of Divine retribution, גמול. The נהנתן had applied the theory of “resignation” to the question of reward & punishment, and totally rejected any notion of Divine retribution. This forced the חכם to come full circle, as he could no longer resign himself to a world that makes no sense, and has no structure. The world becomes a frustrating mistake, because he is not guiding it!

10:20 - Response of ירא אלקים.

It is precisely this inconsistency in the philosophy of the חכם to which the ירא responds, using the very same analogy of 'cursing' with which the חכם had earlier tried to dismiss the ירא אלקים (see 7:22). Now the tables have turned. “You, חכם, who was so willing to resign yourself to be cursed by others, now “curse” and complain yourself?” It is your turn, now, to resign yourself to the fact that you are not the most powerful force in this world. You must accept the existence of others who are more powerful, including the Almighty himself.

(כ) גַם בְּמַדְעָךָ מְלֵךְ אֱלֹהִים לֵל וּבְחַדְרֵי מִשְׁכַּבְךָ אֱלֹהִים לֵל עֹשֶׂה
כִּי עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם יוֹלִיד אֶת־הַקּוֹל וּבַעַל פְּנִינִים יַגִּיד דְּבָר

12) 10:20-12:7 - The ירא אלקים - Summation

The third and final speech of the ירא gives him a clear victory in this debate. This is perceived in both content and structure!

11:1-8 – Answer to עמל and חכם

A) 1-6 - Resolution of “Endless Cycle” - each cycle in the world has a purpose, and while we may not see that purpose, we must have faith it exists. Water brings rain necessary for growth. Wind brings the seeds from place to place. *The dust returns to the earth as it was, but the spirit returns to God who gave it.*

B) 1-6, 9 - To עמל - You are not completely responsible for the world, because your knowledge is limited ... (ה) כַּאֲשֶׁר אֵינְךָ יוֹדֵעַ... You don't know what will be, so invest in man, and in the world – (ו) כִּי אֵינְךָ יוֹדֵעַ אֵי זֶה יִכְשַׁר הַזֶּה אוֹיְזָה. Your task is to work and achieve what you can, so you can stand firm and emerge victorious in ultimate judgement (9).

C) 1-9 - To חכם - You, who claimed to know everything, and insisted on ruling the world: You know nothing. The only thing you know for certain is that there is judgement (see 9) in the next world. Therefore live this life with *Wisdom* indeed, but for the purpose of constantly reminding yourself of that judgement so that your life has more meaning. (ז-ט).

(ז) וּמִתּוֹךְ הָאֵוֶר וְטוֹב לְעֵינַיִם לְרֹאאוֹת אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם : ... (ט) וְדַע כִּי עַל־כָּל־אֲלֵהָ יִבְיָאֵךְ הָאֱלֹהִים בַּמִּשְׁפָּט :

11:9-12:7 - Answer to נהנתן

A) 11:9-10 - There is room for enjoyment and pleasure in this world, as long as it comes with an awareness of purpose, and of ultimate judgement. Particularly in the days of one's youth one should attempt to remember their Creator, and for all is judged. (ט) שְׂמַח בְּחַיֵּי בְּיַלְדוּתְךָ וְיָטִיבֶךָ לְבָבְךָ. בימי בחורונךך ... וְדַע כִּי עַל־כָּל־אֲלֵהָ יִבְיָאֵךְ הָאֱלֹהִים בַּמִּשְׁפָּט.

B) 12:1-7 - The נהנתן claimed that death was “unseen”, and therefore irrelevant. The ירא counters: Death begins with the breakdown of the body in old age and continues in the grave. From there we learn that death is a reality. You can see it, at least its beginning. That is a constant reminder of what is to come. So learn to live your youth more productively.

(יב:א) וַיִּזְכֹּר אֶת־בְּוֹרְאֵיךָ בְּיָמֶיךָ בְּחַיֵּיךָ עַד אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָבֵאֵךְ יָמֵי הַרְעָה וְהִגִּיעוּ שָׁנִים אֲשֶׁר תֹּאמַר אֵינֹלִי בְּהֵם חֲפָץ

C) 12:7, 13-14 – Conclusion: **the purpose of death is for the body to decay so that the soul can return to God for Judgement.** Therefore - *Fear God, and keep His commandments, for there is ultimately judgement for all good and evil!*

Note: King David wrote a similar book to Kohelet, Psalms, in which he struggled with very similar issues, but with very different conclusions.

<p>תהלים פרק כז (ד) אַחַת שְׁאַלְתִּי מֵאֵת־יְקֹוֹךְ אוֹתָהּ אֲבֹקֶשׁ שְׁבִתִּי בְּבֵית־יְקֹוֹךְ כִּלְיָמֵי חַיֵּי לַחַיִּוֹת בְּנַעַם־יְקֹוֹךְ וּלְבַקֵּר בְּהִיכָלוֹ : אהבת ה'</p>	<p>קהלת יב (יג) סוּף דָּבָר הַכֹּל נִשְׁמָע : אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים יִרָא וְאֶת־מִצְוֹתָיו שְׂמֹר כִּי־זֶה כָּל־הָאָדָם : (יד) כִּי אֶת־כָּל־מַעֲשֵׂה - הָאֱלֹהִים יָבֵא בַּמִּשְׁפָּט... יראת ה'</p>
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Kohelet's Search for the Meaning of Life & Death Sequence of Voices

1:1-11 **First Introduction** - The Question: The endless/futile cycle of nature/life
1:12-2:23 **Second Introduction** - The Problem: good vs evil, life vs death

1:12-2:2 **The Integrated Kohelet:** Builder - עמל, Hedonist - נהנתן, Philosopher - חכם
2:3-23 **Integrated Solution:** King Solomon - Trees of Life & Knowledge.

Part I: Good vs Evil – עץ הדעת

2:24-3:22 **The נהנתן (1)** Fatalism, a world with evil.

4:1-16 **The עמל (1)** The communal solution - Society & Monarch

4:17-5:11 **The ירא (1)** Response to עמל: Partnership / *hierarchical responsibility*

5:12-6:12 **The עמל (2)** the heir, death, and ultimately failure (better not to be born)

Part II: Life vs Death – עץ החיים

7:1-22 **The חכם (1)** Philosophy of Resignation
1-8(a) To נהנתן - World with death is not “perfect”
8(b)-14 To עמל - Man who dies is not “perfect”
15-22 To ירא - Man who does evil can never be “perfect”

7:23-29 **The ירא (2)** Rejection of Wisdom not based on God (evil woman)

8:1-13 **ירא and חכם** - Debate over Reward & Punishment (גמול)
1 The חכם calls out to be heard
2-9 The ירא - Ultimate Judgement comes after death.
10-12(a) The חכם - Death is not a deterrent to evil in this world.
12(b)-13 The ירא - Retribution does exist even in THIS world.

8:14-9:16 **The נהנתן (2)** Anarchy in system of Divine Retribution - no Judgement.

9:17-10:19 **The חכם (2)** Frustration that *Wisdom* does not rule the world.

10:20-12:7 **The ירא (3)** **Victory**
Resolution of the Futile Cycle – faith!
Resolution of Death: Gives life meaning to prepare for Judgement.

12:8-14 - Conclusion:

סוף דבר הכל נשמע את האלהים ירא ואת מצותיו שמור כי זה כל האדם
כי את-כל-מעשה - האלהים יבא במשפט