



For Heaven's Sake #36: The Blessing of Stability

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As Israel passes its first state budget in 3½ years, we celebrate the stability brought about by its unusual and wondrous coalition. What can we learn from this moment about Jewish notions of normalcy, gratitude, and a collective psyche steeped in historic anxiety?

Donniel Hartman, Yossi Klein Halevi and Elana Stein Hain examine the Jewish mindset around stability, what it says about our place in the world, and how it affects the Israel-Diaspora relationship.

*This source sheet is part of Episode #36 of **For Heaven's Sake**, a bi-weekly podcast from the Shalom Hartman Institute's [iEngage Project](#) that revives the lost art of Jewish debate for the sake of illuminating a topic, not sowing division. The podcast draws its name from the concept of *Machloket l'shem shemayim*, "disagreeing for the sake of heaven."*



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1. T. Anthony Perry, *Dialogues with Kohelet: The Book of Ecclesiastes*, pp. 33-35

K[ohélet] is a man of knowledge. Yet, for K as for Socrates, knowledge consists also and perhaps especially in knowing that one does not know...The interesting thing about Kohelet is that, contrary to modern attitudes, it is the man of faith...that is more open-minded than the man of experience. He is doggedly unwilling to foreclose on God's nature or to infer the nature of things in general from particular human experiences, no matter how broad and privileged.

2. Ecclesiastes (Kohelet) 1:1-8, trans. T. Anthony Perry

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| 1 These are the words of Kohelet son of David, the King of Jerusalem. | א דבְּרֵי קֹהֵלֶת בֶּן־דָּוִד מֶלֶךְ בִּירוּשָׁלַם : |
| 2 All is vanity, says Kohelet, vanity of vanities! <i>Is everything vanity?</i> | ב הִבֵּל הַבָּלִים אָמַר קֹהֵלֶת הִבֵּל הַבָּלִים הַכֹּל הַבָּל : |
| 3 What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun? | ג מִהֲיִתְרוֹן לָאָדָם בְּכָל־עֲמָלוֹ שְׂיַעֲמַל תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ : |
| 4 A generation goes forth, only to die! <i>But the earth endures forever.</i> | ד דּוֹר הַלֵּךְ וְדוֹר בָּא וְהָאָרֶץ לְעוֹלָם לְעַמְּדָת : |
| 5 The sun rises, only to set! <i>Yet it pants to return to its starting point, where it rises again.</i> | ה וְזָרַח הַשָּׁמֶשׁ וּבָא הַשָּׁמֶשׁ וְאֶל־מְקוֹמוֹ שׁוֹאֵף זֹרַח הוּא שֵׁם : |
| 6 Moreover, it goes southward but return northward. The wind goes forth around and around! <i>Yet it can reverse its direction.</i> | ו הוֹלֵךְ אֶל־דָּרוֹם וְסוּבֵב אֶל־צָפוֹן סוּבֵב סָבֵב הוֹלֵךְ הָרוּחַ וְעַל־סִבְיַתָּיו שָׁב הָרוּחַ : |
| 7 All rivers flow to the sea! <i>But the sea is not filled. And the river must return to their source, since they continue to flow to their destination.</i> | ז כָּל־הַנְּחָלִים הַלְכִים אֶל־הַיָּם וְהַיָּם אֵינְנוּ מְלֵא אֶל־מְקוֹם שֶׁהַנְּחָלִים הַלְכִים שָׁם הֵם שָׁבִים לְלִקְתָּם : |
| 8 All things are full of weariness; one cannot say enough, one's eye cannot be satiated of looking, and the ear cannot be satiated of hearing. | ח כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים יִגְעִים לֹא־יִכָּל אִישׁ לְדַבֵּר לֹא־תִשְׂבַּע עֵין לְרֵאוֹת וְלֹא־תִמְלֵא אָזֶן מִשְׁמַע : |

3. Ecclesiastes (Kohelet) 3:2-8, trans. T. Anthony Perry

- 2 There is an appointed time to be born inevitably followed by death! Whatever is planted is eventually uprooted!** **ב** עַת לָלֶדֶת וְעַת לָמוּת עַת לְטַעַת וְעַת לְעִקּוֹר נְטוּעַ:
- 3 There is an appropriate time to kill but also a time to heal, A time to destroy but also a time to build up,** **ג** עַת לְהַרוֹג וְעַת לְרַפּוֹא עַת לְפָרוֹץ וְעַת לְבָנוֹת:
- 4 A time to weep but also a time to be happy, A time to mourn but also a time to dance.** **ד** עַת לְבִכּוֹת וְעַת לְשִׂחֹק עַת סִפּוֹד וְעַת רִקּוֹד:
- 5 A time to disseminate your stones but a longer time to hold them in! A time to embrace but always followed by separation!** **ה** עַת לְהַשְׁלִיךְ אֲבָנִים וְעַת כְּנוֹס אֲבָנִים עַת לְחַבּוֹק וְעַת לְרַחֵק מִחֶבֶק:
- 6 What is pursued is inevitably lost! What is retained is inevitably scattered!** **ו** עַת לְבַקֵּשׁ וְעַת לְאבֹד עַת לְשָׁמוֹר וְעַת לְהַשְׁלִיךְ:
- 7 But what we tear we can also sew up. He who is silent will have his time to talk.** **ז** עַת לְקַרֹּעַ וְעַת לְתַפּוֹר עַת לְחָשׂוֹת וְעַת לְדַבֵּר:
- 8 What we love we end up hating! There is indeed a time for war, but also a time for peace.** **ח** עַת לְאַהֲבָה וְעַת לְשִׂנְאָה עַת מִלְחָמָה וְעַת שְׁלוֹם:

4. Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 7b

ואמר רבי יוחנן משום רבי שמעון בן יוחי מיום שברא הקדוש ברוך הוא את עולמו לא היה אדם שהודה להקדוש ברוך הוא עד שבאתה לאה והודתו שנאמר הפעם אודה את ה' :

And Rabbi Yoḥanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai: From the day the Holy One, Blessed be He, created the world, no one thanked the Holy One, Blessed be He, until Leah came and thanked Him, as it is stated: “And she became pregnant and gave birth to a son, and she said, ‘This time I will give thanks to God,’ and thus he was called Judah” (Genesis 29:35).

5. Midrash Tanhuma, Vayetzei 9:4

לָמָּה לֹא אָמְרָה בְּרֵאוּבֵן וְשִׁמְעוֹן וְלֵוִי וּבְכֻלָּם הוֹדִיָּה אֲלֵא בִיהוּדָה. מִשָּׁל לָכֶּהֱן שְׂיִצָּא לַגֶּרֶן לְטַל תְּרוּמָה וּמַעֲשֵׂר, וּבֹא בְּעַל הַגֶּרֶן נָתַן לוֹ תְרוּמָה וְלֹא הִחֲזִיק לוֹ טוֹבָה, נָתַן לוֹ מַעֲשֵׂר וְלֹא הִחֲזִיק לוֹ טוֹבָה. לְאַחַר שֶׁנָּתַן לוֹ כָּל מָה שֶׁהָיָה רְאוּי לָכֶהֱן לְטַל, עָמַד בְּעַל הַגֶּרֶן וְהוֹסִיף לוֹ מִדָּה אַחַת שֶׁל חֲלִין. הִחֲזִיק לוֹ טוֹבָה וְנִתְפַּלֵּל עֲלָיו. אָמְרוּ לוֹ: לָמָּה כָּשַׁנְתָּן לָךְ בְּעַל הַגֶּרֶן הַתְּרוּמָה וְהַמַּעֲשֵׂר לֹא הִחֲזַקְתָּ לוֹ טוֹבָה, וְעַכְשָׁו עַל מַעַט מִדָּה אַחַת שֶׁל חֲלִין הִחֲזַקְתָּ לוֹ טוֹבָה. אָמַר לָהֶן, הִרְאִישׁוֹנוֹת הַתְּרוּמָה וְהַמַּעֲשֵׂר, שְׁלִי הֵן וְשְׁלִי לְקַחְתִּי. אָבַל אוֹתָהּ הַמִּדָּה שֶׁהוֹסִיף לִי, מִשָּׁלוֹ, לְפִיכָךְ אֲנִי מִחֲזִיק לוֹ טוֹבָה. וְכֵן אָמְרָה לֵאָה, שְׁנַיִם עֶשְׂרֵי שְׁבָטִים עָתִידִין לְעַמֵּד מִיַּעֲקֹב, וְהָרִי אֲנִי אַרְבַּע נָשִׁים, אֲנִי רְאוּיָוֹת לִילֵד שְׁלֹשָׁה לְכָל אַחַת וְאַחַת. שְׁלֹשָׁה שְׂיִלְדֵתִי כָּבֵר, חֲלָקִי הֵן. עַכְשָׁו כְּשֶׁהוֹסִיף לִי בֶן רְבִיעִי עַל חֲלָקִי, בְּוֹדָאֵי הַפַּעַם אוֹדָה אֶת יְקוֹק.

Why did she not say *I will praise the Lord* after the births of Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and all the others, but only after the birth of Judah? This may be compared to a priest who goes to a farmer's barn to collect the tithe and the priestly portion. When the owner of the barn hands the priest the priestly portion, the priest does not thank him, and when he gives him the tithe, the priest still does not thank him. But if, after he gives the priest what is due him, he adds a measure of extra food, the priest does thank him and recites a prayer in his behalf. Bystanders asked the priest: "Why is it that when he gave you the tithe and the priestly portion, you did not thank him, but when he added only a single measure of unconsecrated food, you thanked him?" The priest replied: "The tithe and the priestly offering belong to me, and I merely accepted that which belonged to me, but the extra food he added belonged to him, and so I thanked him for it." Similarly Leah said: "Twelve tribes are to descend from Jacob, and since he has four wives, each of us is entitled to bear three sons. I have already given birth to three sons, my rightful share, but now a fourth son has been granted to me; surely it is fitting that *I praise the Lord* this time."