

Parsha Ponders

Sukkos / Koheles | September 30, 2020 | 12 Tishrei 5781

Declined desires¹

בקש קהלת למצא דברי-חפץ וכתוב ישר דברי אמת

Koheles sought to find desired sayings, and genuine recorded words of truth²

The custom on *Sukkos* is to read from the book of *Koheles*, otherwise known as *Ecclesiastes*³. Various reasons are provided for this. One is that the festival of *Sukkos* is one of joy, and *Ecclesiastes* cautions us about the dangers of unbridled joy⁴. The work is attributed to King Shlomo⁵. Indeed, the classical understanding is the protagonist *Koheles* is none other than King Shlomo himself⁶. Regarding one verse, *Chazal* share⁷ a cryptic interpretation. *Koheles*, namely King Shlomo, desired to be like Moshe⁸. However, a Heavenly voice proclaimed “וכתוב ישר דברי אמת”, literally: it is written straight, words of truth⁹. What does this teaching mean?

We are taught¹⁰ that if Moshe had entered the land of Israel, the Holy Temple would have never been destroyed. It's obvious then that King Shlomo, who actually built the Temple, would want to be like Moshe. He of course would never want to see his handiwork destroyed. However, it would seem that the destruction of the Temple, and the resulting exile, were preordained.

When Moshe was initially tasked with being the savior of the Jewish people, he asked Hashem what His name was. Moshe said that the people will want to know who sent him. Hashem responded אקיה אקיה, literally: I will be what I will be¹¹. The accepted interpretation is that Hashem was saying: “Just like

¹ Based on *Chasam Sofer's Derashos* I p. 52 col. 1 s.v. בקש קהלת

² *Ecclesiastes* 12:10

³ This custom seems to postdate *Chazal*, as *Ecclesiastes* is excluded from *Soferim* 14:3. Some sources for this custom include *Darkei Moshe* to *Tur Orach Chaim* 663 § 2, citing *Maharil Seder Tefillas Chag HaSukkos* § 2. It's also brought by the *Machzor Vitri Seder Sukkos UShemini Atzeres* § 10

⁴ *Magen Avraham* to *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 490:9 § 8

⁵ *Megillah* 7a; *Shir HaShirim* 1:1

⁶ *Bamidbar Rabbah* 10:4; *Shir HaShirim* loc. cit.; *Koheles Rabbah* 1:1. This is also the understanding of the upcoming teaching

⁷ *Rosh Hashana* 21b

⁸ I'm at a loss to understand how the *gemarra* got this from the above verse. See *Torah Temimah ad. loc.* who attempts to find the justification. See also *Rabbeinu Chananel ad. loc.*, who quotes *Isaiah* 42:21 (perhaps his version of the *gemarra* had this), which could make the derivation a little easier to understand

⁹ The *gemarra* concludes with the verse ולא קם נביא עוד בישראל כמשה (Deuteronomy 34:10). Taking this into account, the *gemarra* is simply saying the verse in *Ecclesiastes* is referring to the Torah in a poetic way. It is saying that it is written in the Torah that there will be no prophet like Moshe, declining King Shlomo's wish to be like him (*Rabbeinu Chananel ad. loc.*). However, the *Chasam Sofer* will try to explain the *gemarra* without this final part. See *Derashos* I p. 46 col. 3 s.v. בקש קהלת, where the *Chasam Sofer* quotes the *gemarra* in full and gives a different explanation

¹⁰ The *Chasam Sofer* quotes this from *Chazal*. This is an oft-quoted idea whose source is hard to pinpoint. There's a *Midrash* which apparently says this and is cited by the *Ohr HaChaim* to *Deuteronomy* 1:37. It's also cited by the *Parshas Derachim* § 8. The earliest source I found which brings this unknown *Midrash* is the *Toras HaMincha parshas Vaeschanan* § 67. Perhaps the *Midrash* they're quoting is *Devarim Rabbah* (Lieberman ed.) to *Deuteronomy* 3:6, although it's worded differently than they how bring it. Additionally, without citing a source, the *Seforno* to *Deuteronomy* 1:37, 3:26, and 34:4 and *Maharal* in *Netzach Yisroel* Chapter 33 (see fn. 70 in the Machon Yerushalayim edition) say that if Moshe brought the Jews into the land, they never would have been exiled. See also *Megaleh Amukos* § 20, 84 and *Nachal Kadumim Masei* § 3. As well, see *Zohar* III *parshas Pinchas* p. 221a

¹¹ *Exodus* 3:14

I am with them in this exile, so too I will be with them in another exile”¹². If so, King Shlomo had no hope of preventing his Temple from being destroyed. It was already etched in Hashem’s name itself that there would be an exile.

However, the *Mekubalim*, those steeped in Judaism’s mystical texts, teach¹³ that the name אקיה multiplied by itself has the same numerical value as the word אמת, truth¹⁴. Perhaps then this is all Hashem meant to Moshe. Who sent Moshe on this quest? אקיה אשר אקיה, which really means אמת, truth. Hashem’s seal is truth¹⁵, and that is Who sent Moshe to save the nation.

This is what King Shlomo was thinking. It’s not perforce that there will be another exile. Perhaps Hashem merely meant to tell the people that His name was אמת. That could mean then that King Shlomo could be like Moshe. Just like if Moshe entered the land, the Temple would have never been destroyed, so too because King Shlomo built it, it will never be destroyed.

Alas, the Heavenly voice told him that it was not to be. וכתוב ישר דברי אמת. The Torah is written straight. If it were true that Hashem was telling the Jews that His name was אמת, it would have said so explicitly. What was the need for this math puzzle of אקיה אשר אקיה? It can’t be the intent was to tell them that His name is אמת. The only other explanation is then that Hashem will be with the Jews not only in the Egyptian exile, but also in another exile. That means the Temple would be eventually be destroyed. King Shlomo sought to be like Moshe, but in the end, it was not meant to be.

Chag Sameach!

¹² Rashi ad. loc., quoting Berachos 9b

¹³ The Chasam Sofer doesn’t say who he is quoting. I couldn’t find any explicit source for this idea. However, see Orchos Tzadikim Sha’ar HaEmes, who writes that he “found” that אקיה אשר אקיה is connected to Hashem’s seal of אמת. The Imrei Emes, in his comment to Pardes Yosef to Exodus 3:14 § 78, cites this as well, and says this is the intent of the *piyut* we say in *Mussaf* of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur which begins with האוחז ביד. It says: וכל אקיה אשר אקיה באקיה אשר אקיה, מהגוי באקיה אשר אקיה. See also Ramban’s HaEmunah VeHaBitachon, which also seems to connect אקיה אשר אקיה to אמת

¹⁴ אמת [441] = אקיה [21] * אקיה [21]

¹⁵ Yoma 69b