

A Paean to Ecclesiastes

Ten years ago I learnt the book of Ecclesiastes (Kohelet) by heart in honor of the holiday of Sukkot, when it is traditionally read. It is a marvellously anomalous book in the annals of Biblical literature, full of heretical sentiments, which despite being hidden by a later and more conventionally pious redactor mischievously shine through.

Ecclesiastes doubts that the destination of human spirit is heaven, or that there is any celestial justice; we are but dust and to dust we will return. He urges us to pray seldom, since God has little need for our prayers. Because life is so fleeting, he suggests that being happy is the only worthwhile pursuit. Indeed words to live by!

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One day greets another in a burst of song
But at night, at night there is only anguish
The sun whirls round and round
Fruitlessly pursuing
A tarnished bride
Shedding sparks as she flees
I gather these poor orphans into my bosom,
O these tears of loneliness,
I sing when the day comes
But at night there is only anguish

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אחרי לבנתו המחללת
ילדיה רסיסיה
היא מפלת
את יתומיו מאסף אני לתוך חיקי
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