

Shabbat Hol Hamoed Sukkot - Shorts #49
Rabbi Eliot Malomet 19 Tishri 5782 September 25, 2021

A Verse From Hallel

תהילים קי"ח:י"ז
לא־אָמוֹת בְּיִאֲחִיָּהּ וְאֶסְפֹּר מַעֲשֵׂי יְהוָה:

Psalms 118:17

I shall not die but live

and proclaim the works of the LORD.

In the course of our lives, especially when faced with illness and mortality, we pray **in order to** live. But here the psalmist inverts this common thought and claims, *we live in order to pray*. The longer we stay alive, the more opportunities we will have to praise God. For people who live a prayerful life, the more opportunities to praise, thank, petition, honor God, the better. There is a worldview encoded in this verse that we derive life-giving meaning in prayer and that is an essential aspect of our lives, so much so we would not be able to live fully without it. This should not be that difficult to understand. People who are singularly devoted to their fields say this all the time: *I live to paint. I live to play music. I live to write. I live to sing...* etc. People who desire noting more than pleasure or leisure in life say that as well: *I live to travel, I live to eat...* etc. When prayer is an essential part of your life, you orient your life around it – it does not fall into the category of leisure or entertainment. But the verse also implies that it's in God's interest to keep us alive. God's reputation, so to speak, and by extension, the magnified and sanctified presence of God in the world requires individuals and communities to praise Him. We find that idea elsewhere in the Psalms. For example, earlier in the Hallel *The dead will not praise you* (115:17), and earlier in the service, *What is to be gained from my death? Can dust praise you? Can it declare Your faithfulness?* (Psalm 30:10). Part of what makes us infinitely valuable is that we can praise the Infinite. One of the reasons the mourner recites Kaddish is to attempt to "replenish" the loss of God's grandeur incurred when someone dies. Each one of us has a unique praise, and death disables, disrupts and discontinues, our singular and unique expression to God. Our particular experience is lost, and therefore our particular expression, our own unique voice of praise is lost.

From the Torah Reading

שמות ל"ד:כ"ב

וְתָגַדְתָּ לְפָנֶיךָ מַעֲשֵׂה לֵךְ בְּכוּרֵי קֶצֶר חֹטִים וְתָגַדְתָּ אֶת־הָאֲסִיף תְּקוּפַת הַשָּׁנָה:

Exodus 34:22

You shall observe the Feast of Weeks, of the first fruits of the wheat harvest; and the Feast of Ingathering at the turn of the year.

Sukkot is referred to here as *Hag Ha'asif – The Feast of Ingathering*. Stripped here from any associations to the Exodus, it is, at its core, a thanksgiving festival for a bountiful harvest. But because it is located in the context of the Sinai Covenant, this verse suggests that the observance of this festival, specifically, showing up and coming before God at these moments of the year, is essential to the maintenance of the covenantal relationship between God and Israel. Living in secularity, we forget how pilgrimage is such an essential part of the spiritual life.

From the Haftara

יהזקאל ל"ח:כ"ג

וְהִתְגַּדַּלְתָּ לְפָנֶיךָ וְהִתְקַדַּשְׁתָּ וְנִדְעוּתִי לְעַיְנֵי גוֹיִם רַבִּים וְנִדְעוּ בְּרִי אֲנִי ה':

Ezekiel 38:23 *Thus will I manifest My greatness and My holiness, and make Myself known in the sight of many nations. And they shall know that I am the LORD.*

This is the only place in the entire Tanakh where this phrase **greatness and holiness** occurs. What has become so integral to Jewish prayer, in the form of the Kaddish, has its source in an almost impenetrable, un-interpretable apocalyptic text that speaks about a cataclysmic war and an ensuing period of recovery. But in this **great and holy** word pair, we derive an important idea. For God to be great, God must also be holy, and vice versa. Put in other words, God's vast, unlimited power is pointless without an intimate and holy relationship. God's presence spans the infinite space of the universe, and is beyond the universe, but God's intimate holiness resides in a singularly infinitesimal zone above the holy Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies. The Kaddish is the reminder that God's greatness must be mediated by God's holiness.

From the Hoshanot for Shabbat

קהושעית העם נהגת בצאן להנחות, וחוק שמות במרה על מי מנוחות.

As You delivered the people You led like a flock of sheep to their rest and set a statute for them beside the tranquil waters at Mara, so too, deliver us! Admittedly, we need an advanced degree to decipher all the references in the Hoshanot prayers. Frankly, this poet is just showing off, and why the Hoshanot is a series of meditations with such ostentation is a consternation! Nevertheless, the Shabbat Hoshanot encode all sorts of clever, cheeky references to Shabbat in the Torah and midrash. This line refers to Exodus 15:25 just after the Song of the Sea. The people found themselves at a body of undrinkable water. They complained to Moses. Moses turned to God. God pointed out a tree. Moses threw it into the water and the water became sweet enough to drink and then, *that is* where he (Moses) established a statute. And what was the statute? Shabbat, according to the rabbis. Shabbat precedes Sinai. And all that is what is being recalled in just one line of Hoshanot!

From the Book of Kohelet – Ecclesiastes

קהלת א'ד'

דור הלה ודור פא והארץ לעולם עמדת:

Ecclesiastes 1:4 *One generation goes, another comes, But the earth remains the same forever.*

Every time you see the phrase, *le-dor va-dor*-from generation to generation, you will also see the word *le-olam*-eternity. In the Hebrew mind, time has two contexts: the generational context, ie. me and my ancestors and descendants, and the eternal context, ie. God. Here Kohelet is challenging our conception of time. We, the faithful, derive our sense of meaning from our place in generational time and our sense of wonder from our location in the timeline of eternity. Kohelet is saying: *Nah, I don't think so! You're not that important. Your place in time doesn't matter.* ♪ *Nothing really matters.* ♪ *Anyone can see.* ♪ *Nothing really matters to me.* ♪ *Everything will go on with or without you; if you come back a hundred years from now, nothing will have changed.*

קהלת ג'א'

(א) לפל זמן ועת לכל-תפוז תסת השמים:

Ecclesiastes 3:1 *A season is set for everything, a*

time for every experience under heaven: The. Wisest. Thing. Ever. Stated. By. Any. Person. Period. Life has its own set of “seasons”, and to know what “season” you are in is key to understanding life. What is true in an individual life, is true in a relationship, a community, a nation, the world, the universe. There is a “season” for everything, and a rhythm that moves us, and all reality, between those “seasons.”

קהלת ז'א'

טוב שם מלשמן טוב ויום המות מיום הנולדו:

Ecclesiastes 7:1 *A good name is better than fragrant oil, and the day of death than the day of birth.*

Well, Kohelet couldn't resist plays on words either. Many have noted that if you were beamed back to the any era before our own, you would experience an olfactory overload! Perhaps people were simply used to an overabundance of foul smells. Undoubtedly, fragrant oil was desirable to make life bearable. But it was expensive and therefore also rare. So the analogy to a good name is very powerful. A good name is rare; a good name is more valuable than the most valuable commodity. And the reputation of a good name travels further than a good fragrance. In the end, our name, our reputation, is the most enduring aspect of our lives.

קהלת ז'ב'

טוב ללכת אל-בית-אבל מלכת אל-בית משתה באשר הוא סוף כל-האדם והתי יתן אל-לבו:

Ecclesiastes 7:2

It is better to go to a house of mourning than to a house of feasting; for that is the end of every man, and a living one should take it to heart. There is more to learn at a shiva house than there is at a party. An obituary is more instructive than a birth or wedding announcement.

קהלת ט'ז'

לה אכל בשמחה לחמה ושתה בלב-טוב ייגה כי כפר רצה האלקים את-מעשיך:

Ecclesiastes 9:7

Go, eat your bread in gladness, and drink your wine in joy; for your action was long ago approved by God. Here is a source for validating the good life. As an end in itself, it is frivolous, but as a way of experiencing gratitude and joy, why not? God approves. But there's more to life than this too. Our tradition provides us with so many avenues to find meaning. *Hag Sameah!*