



**Michael Bogdanow,**  
***For Everything there is a Season, 2001***  
**based on Ecclesiastes 3:1.**

Note the seasonal progression of the year from winter through fall passing across the lake and beneath the heavens above.

לְכָל זָמַן  
 וְעַתָּה לְכָל חֶפֶץ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם.  
 עַתָּה לֵלֶדֶת וְעַתָּה לָמוּת  
 עַתָּה לִטְעוֹת וְעַתָּה לַעֲקוֹר נִטְוֶה.

*For everyone, a season,  
 and a time of [doing] each thing under the heavens.  
 a time of giving birth and a time of dying;  
 a time of planting and a time of uprooting what is  
 planted.*

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 known in Hebrew as **שִׁיר הַעֲתִידִים**-the ***Song of the Seasons***, is arguably the most accessible text of biblical wisdom.<sup>1</sup> Pithy, quotable, simple yet sublime, these verses are found everywhere from Hallmark cards to protest placards. It is the wisdom we reach for in troubled times, noting its truism: there is a time for everything, and that in our lives we do go through seasons, as it were, sometimes abruptly and sometimes without even noticing. We are in precisely such a moment right now, as we await the release of the hostages during these 72 hours from the commencing of the ceasefire. While we are not exactly located in an abrupt transition from **a time for war to a time for peace** we share with Israelis the jubilation of having the end of the two-year war in sight, and the trepidation that things may yet go terribly wrong in this precarious and fragile moment,

and that peace, a true and lasting peace, is still very far off. First some midrash. Ecclesiastes Rabbah has several long midrashim on the ***Song of the Seasons***. In those homilies are a few short meditations on the Song's last and most important line, **עַתָּה מִלְחָמָה וְעַתָּה שְׁלוֹמִים**-***there is a time for war and a time for peace***. When we piece them together, they form a separate poem:

עַתָּה לִטְעוֹת, בְּשָׁעַת שְׁלוֹמִים.  
 וְעַתָּה לַעֲקוֹר נִטְוֶה, בְּשָׁעַת מִלְחָמָה.

*There is a time for planting, in peacetime.  
 And a time for uprooting that which is  
 planted, in wartime.*

עַתָּה לְהַרְגוֹ, בְּשָׁעַת מִלְחָמָה.  
 וְעַתָּה לְרַפּוֹא, בְּשָׁעַת שְׁלוֹמִים.  
 עַתָּה לְפָרוֹץ, בְּשָׁעַת מִלְחָמָה.  
 וְעַתָּה לִבְנוֹת, בְּשָׁעַת שְׁלוֹמִים.

*There is a time of killing, in wartime.  
 And a time of healing, in peacetime.  
 There is of breaking down, in wartime.  
 And a time to building up, in peacetime.<sup>2</sup>*

עַתָּה לְבַקֵּשׁ, בְּשָׁעַת שְׁלוֹמִים.  
 וְעַתָּה לְאַבֵּד, בְּשָׁעַת מִלְחָמָה.

*There is a time for looking for, in peacetime.  
 And a time for losing, in wartime.*

עַתָּה לְקַרְוֶה, בְּשָׁעַת מִלְחָמָה.  
 וְעַתָּה לְתַפּוֹר, בְּשָׁעַת שְׁלוֹמִים.

*There is a time for tearing, in wartime.  
 And a time for basting, in peacetime.*

עַתָּה לְאַהֲבָה, בְּשָׁעַת שְׁלוֹמִים.  
 וְעַתָּה לְשִׂנְאָה, בְּשָׁעַת מִלְחָמָה.  
 עַתָּה מִלְחָמָה, בְּשָׁעַת מִלְחָמָה.  
 וְעַתָּה שְׁלוֹמִים, בְּשָׁלוֹמִים.

*There is a time for loving, in peacetime.  
 And a time for hating, in wartime.  
 There is a time for war, in wartime.  
 And a time for peace. In peace.*

(Eccl. Rabbah 3:2:3, 3:3:1, 3:6:1, 3:7:1, 3:8:1)

<sup>1</sup> This is due in part to the Pete Seeger song, ***Turn, Turn, Turn***, which became a major hit in 1965, sung by the Byrds. Curiously, Seeger claimed 50% of the royalties for the melody, and 5% because he added six words, "I swear it's not too late." He gave the remaining 45% to the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, claiming that since the People of Israel produced the Bible, its descendants were rightfully owed their share from his song. What would Ecclesiastes have said about this? Do terrorists deserve sympathy or their victims? There is a time to argue this, and a time to set this argument aside.

<sup>2</sup> This follows James Kugel who chooses the genitive "a time of X" as opposed to "a time to X." His explanation: *The difference is subtle but important. "A time to X" seems to imply that to each of us will come a time when we can do X, or are to do X, so that there is indeed a "time for everything under the sun." This is certainly a soothing message. "Don't worry, the right time will come for you to do whatever it is you may have in mind." But that is not quite what Koheleth means. Rather, he means that to each of us may come a "time of X," a time when X is done. Inevitably, like it or not, we will do X at that time. James Kugel, ***The Great Poems of the Bible***, New York: The Free Press, 1999. p. 312.*

Perhaps each line should be read with a question mark. When Ecclesiastes says there is **A time for planting** he is implying a question: **When? When is the time for planting?** Answer: Planting takes place **in peacetime**. And **a time for uprooting? When is that?** That obviously takes place in **wartime**. In this reading of the midrash, we are to understand that all human endeavor falls into the two defining categories of human experience: **the time of war and the time of peace**, the last line of the Song. For us who live in a society very far removed from war, it is very difficult to comprehend this kind of thinking. But for the majority of human civilization, and for a large part of the world in the present, war was and remains a constant feature of life. Only when you are not at war, can things like **planting, healing, building, seeking and loving** take place. Even a time to luxuriate in **peace** can only be enjoyed in a **time of peace**.

Obviously, there are many other ways to read the **Song of the Seasons**. Individual lives can be understood to be a series of eras or seasons. They have discreet starting points and ending points, birth and death being the obvious ones. But throughout the course of a human life, a person will experience a **season of planting and a season of uprooting that which was planted, a season of crying and a season of laughter** etc. It is also possible to experience these things simultaneously. People do laugh through their tears, and cry through their laughter. In divided societies, opposing factions will simultaneously experience their political reality very differently. There is a time for triumphalism - that is for those who are in power, and a time of dejection -

that is, for those out of power. And then there may be a society in which everyone is feeling everything simultaneously. Take for example, these comments by Nadav Eyal on Dan Senor's podcast, **Call Me Back** referring to the ceasefire in Gaza and impending hostage release:



*It's like a cloud has been lifted from the country on the one hand. But there is another element there that I want to mention. And these are the people that feel very differently today. And we need to acknowledge that. The people who have lost their loved ones, the families who have sacrificed their sons and their daughters in the war in Gaza, those 465 men and one woman that were killed inside the Gaza Strip fighting so that Hamas cannot control the Gaza Strip and again be a threat... Also, the hostage families that are going to receive their loved ones' bodies. And they need to start thinking about how to cope with that. And of course, the hostages that have been murdered, the stories that are going to be left from this war, the many hundreds and thousands of Israelis that are injured, some of them very severely injured. And I'm not mentioning this because I'm trying to put down the jubilation and the joy we all feel... I'm mentioning that*

*because it's very important to remember that this was Israel's longest war and it was a terrible war. But if you're not getting your loved one home, it's still a sad day. And one of the messages, I received was from a family that lost a son on October 7th. She wrote, we along with 1200 other families are preparing to say Yizkor and have a yahrzeit on Simchat Torah. And everyone keeps thinking we should be happy. So for many of the families that have loved ones who were killed on October 7th, this is the this is what this holiday represents them, not the not the return of the rest of the hostages in a new day, timed with this beautiful holiday. It's not that.*

**Indeed. There is a time for everything under heaven. And sometimes everything is all jumbled up into one time.**

**Nu Kohelet, is there really nothing new under the sun?**



**Wisława Szymborska – Nobel Lecture 1996**

I sometimes dream of situations that can't possibly come true. I audaciously imagine, for example, that I get a chance to chat with the Ecclesiastes, the author of that moving lament on the vanity of all human endeavors. I would bow very deeply before him, because

he is, after all, one of the greatest poets, for me at least. That done, I would grab his hand: *“There's nothing new under the sun': that's what you wrote, Ecclesiastes. But you yourself were born new under the sun. And the poem you created is also new under the sun, since no one wrote it down before you. And all your readers are also new under the sun, since those who lived before you couldn't read your poem. And that cypress that you're sitting under hasn't been growing since the dawn of time. It came into being by way of another cypress similar to yours, but not exactly the same. And Ecclesiastes, I'd also like to ask you what new thing under the sun you're planning to work on now? A further supplement to the thoughts you've already expressed? Or maybe you're tempted to contradict some of them now? In your earlier work you mentioned joy – so what if it's fleeting? So maybe your new-under-the-sun poem will be about joy? Have you taken notes yet, do you have drafts? I doubt you'll say, 'I've written everything down, I've got nothing left to add.' There's no poet in the world who can say this, least of all a great poet like yourself.”* **Shabbat Shalom and Hag Sameah!**

**On this day 736 of their captivity, we pray that the hostages will soon be home in the loving embrace of their families. In peace and health. Amen!**

**שיחזרו במהרה לאור ביתם בשלום ובבריאות - אמן!**

**שבת שלום ותג שמחה!  
ומועדים לשמחה!**