

# Self-Contradiction: How Shlomo became Kohelet

Sukkot 5783/2022 – DC

## 1) Shabbat 30b

Rav Yehuda, son of Rav Shmuel bar Sheilat, said in the name of Rav: The Sages sought to suppress the book of Ecclesiastes and declare it apocryphal <u>because its statements contradict each other</u> , and it is liable to confuse its readers. And why did they not suppress it? Because its beginning consists of matters of Torah and its end consists of matters of Torah.	אמר רב יהודה בריה דרב שמואל בר שילת משמיה דרב: בקשו חכמים לגנוז ספר קהלת מפני שדבריו סותרין זה את זה. ומפני מה לא גנזוהו? — מפני שתחילתו דברי תורה וסופו דברי תורה.
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Q: What do you normally think when you see a contradiction in Torah?

Q: Think of a contradiction in the torah (e.g. shamor vezachor). Is it resolved by a commentary? If so, how?

### Contradiction Resolution, Method 1: Reinterpretation (Chiluk)

Note: a **chiluk** is a Talmudic literary device which takes a seeming contradiction and resolves it by reinterpreting the two sentences in question and showing that they are talking about different things.

## 2) Kohelet 7:3

"Vexation is better than laughter"	"טוב כעס משחוק"
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## 3) Kohelet 2:2

"I said of laughter: It is praiseworthy"	"לשחוק אמרתי מהולל"
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## 4) Shabbat 30b

This is not difficult, as the contradiction can be resolved. "Vexation is better than laughter" means: The vexation of the Holy One, Blessed be He, toward the righteous in this world is preferable to the laughter which the Holy One, Blessed be He, laughs with the wicked in this world by showering them with goodness. "I said of laughter: It is praiseworthy", that is the laughter which the Holy One, Blessed be He, laughs with the righteous in the World-to-Come.	לא קשיא: "טוב כעס משחוק": טוב כעס שפועל הקדוש ברוך הוא על הצדיקים בעולם הזה, משחוק שמשחק הקדוש ברוך הוא על הרשעים בעולם הזה. ו"לשחוק אמרתי מהולל" — זה שחוק שמשחק הקדוש ברוך הוא עם הצדיקים בעולם הבא.
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Q: What is the contradiction between these two sentences? Do these sentences need resolution to begin with?

## 5) Kohelet 8:15

"So I commended joy"	"ושבחתני אני את השמחה"
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## 6) Kohelet 2:2

"And of joy: What does it accomplish?"	"ולשמחה מה זה עושה"
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## 7) Shabbat 30b

Similarly, "So I commended joy," that is the joy of a mitzva. "And of joy: What does it accomplish?" that is joy that is not the joy of a mitzva. The praise of joy mentioned here is to teach you that the Divine Presence rests upon an individual neither from an atmosphere of <u>sadness</u> , nor from an atmosphere of <u>laziness</u> , nor from an atmosphere of <u>laughter</u> , nor from an atmosphere of <u>frivolity</u> , nor from an atmosphere of <u>idle conversation</u> , nor from an atmosphere of <u>idle chatter</u> , but rather from an atmosphere imbued with the <u>joy of a mitzva</u> .	ושבחתני אני את השמחה — שמחה של מצוה. "ולשמחה מה זה עושה" — זו שמחה שאינה של מצוה. ללמדך שאין שכינה שורה לא מתוך עצבות ולא מתוך עצלות ולא מתוך שחוק ולא מתוך קלות ראש ולא מתוך שיחה ולא מתוך דברים בטלים, אלא מתוך דבר שמחה של מצוה
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Q: Go through each of the listed atmospheres. Theorize of how joy can manifest in each of these environments.

### Contradiction Resolution, Method 2: Cognitive Dissonance

## 8) Kohelet 1:12

I am Koheleth, I <u>was</u> king over Israel in Jerusalem.	אני קהלת הייתי מלך על-ישראל בירושלים:
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9) Gittin 68a-68b

<p>Solomon said to the sages: How shall I make the Temple so that the stone will be precisely cut without using iron? They said to him: There is a creature called a shamir that can cut the stones, which Moses brought and used to cut the stones of the ephod. Solomon said to them: Where is it found? ... and they said: Maybe Ashmedai, lord of the demons, knows.</p> <p>Solomon sent for Benayahu, son of Jehoiada. Benayahu descended from the tree, came and threw the chain around Ashmedai, and enclosed him within it. When Ashmedai awoke he struggled to remove the chain.</p> <p>[When Benayahu took Ashmedai to Jerusalem] they <u>saw the joy of a wedding celebration, and Ashmedai cried</u>. Benayahu asked him: What is the reason that when you saw that joy of the wedding you cried? Ashmedai said to him: I knew that this man will die within thirty days. Ashmedai heard a certain man say to a shoemaker: <u>Make me shoes that will last for seven years, and he laughed</u>. Benayahu asked: What is the reason that when you heard that man say to a shoemaker: Make me shoes that will last for seven years, you laughed? Ashmedai said to him: That man does not have seven days to live; does he need shoes that will last for seven years?</p>	<p>אמר להו לרבנן היכי אעביד אמרו ליה איכא שמירא דאייתי משה לאבני אפוד. אמר להו היכא אישתכח... אמרי אגן לא ידעינן דילמא אשמדאי מלכא דשידי ידע... שדריה לבניהו בן יהוידע נחית אתא שדא ביה שושילתא סתמיה כי אתער הוה קא מיפרזל... חזא חדוותא דהו קמחדי לה בכה <u>שמעיה לההוא גברא דהוה קאמר לאושקפא עביד לי מסאני לשב שני אחיה... מאי טעמא כי חזיתיה לההוא חדוותא בכית אמר ליה בעי מימת גברא בגו תלתין יומין ובעיא מינטר ליבם קטן תליסרי שנין. מאי טעמא כי שמעיתיה לההוא גברא דאמר ליה לאושקפא עביד לי מסאני לשב שנין אחיקת אמר ליה הוהא שבעה יומי לית ליה מסאני לשב שנין בעי</u></p>
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Q: How is the content of Kohelet and what Ashmedai says similar? How are they different?

10) Gittin 68b

<p>Solomon kept Ashmedai near until he completed building the Temple.</p> <p>Ashmedai said to him: Take off the chain engraved with God's name and give me it to me with your ring with God's name engraved on it, and I will show you my strength. Solomon took off his chain and ring and gave them to him. Ashmedai swallowed the ring and grew until he placed one wing in the heaven and one wing on the earth. He threw Solomon a distance of four hundred parasangs. <u>With regard to that moment Solomon said: "What profit is there for a person through all of his toil under the sun?"</u> (Ecclesiastes 1:3). [Meanwhile, Ashmedai usurped power and impersonated King Solomon. No one in the kingdom could tell the difference between them.]</p> <p>With regard to the verse: "And this was my portion from all of my toil" (Ecclesiastes 2:10), the Gemara asks: What is the meaning of the expression: "And this"? Rav and Shmuel disagree. One said: This is referring to Solomon's staff that remained in his hand. And one said: This is referring to his cloak. <u>Solomon circulated from door to door collecting charity [with this staff and cloak], and wherever he arrived he would say: "I am Kohelet, I was king over Israel in Jerusalem"</u> (Ecclesiastes 1:12). When he finally arrived at the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem the sages said: <u>Now, an imbecile does not fixate on one matter all of the time? Is this man perhaps telling the truth that he is Solomon?</u> [Ashmedai was then discovered a fraud and fled.]</p> <p>And even so, although Ashmedai fled, <u>Solomon was fearful of him</u>. Rav and Shmuel disagreed with regard to this story of Solomon. One said: He was a king, then became a commoner, and never returned to his position as king. And one said: He was a king, and became a commoner, then a king.</p>	<p>תרחיה גביה עד דבנייה לבית המקדש... אמר ליה שקול שושילתא מינאי ובה לי עיזקתה ואחוי לך רבותאי שקליה ל'שושילתא מיניה וניהב ליה עיזקתיה בלעיה אותביה לחד גפיה ברקיעא ולחד גפיה בארעא פתקיה ארבע מאה פרסי על ההיא מה יתרון שעתא אמר שלמה לאדם בכל עמלו שיעמל תחת השמש... וזה היה חלקי מקל עמלי מאי וזה רב ושמואל חד אמר מקלו וחד אמר גונדו <u>היה מחזר על הפתחים כל היכא דמטא אמר אני קהלת הייתי מלך על ישראל בירושלים כי מטא גבי סנהדרין אמרו רבנן מפדי שוטה בחדא מילתא לא סריג מאי האי ואפילו הכי הוה ליה ביעותותא מיניה... רב ושמואל חד אמר מלך והדיוט וחד אמר מלך והדיוט ומלך</u></p>
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Q: Some say that Ashmedai and Solomon were the same person. How does this change the meaning of the story?

11) Rashi on Kohelet 1:1

<p>[He was called Kohelet] because he gathered (קהל) much wisdom...</p>	<p>קהלת. על-שם שקהלה חכמות הרבה...</p>
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Q: When Shlomo is a pauper, he says "I am Kohelet." According to this story, how does he become Kohelet?

Q: Shlomo becomes Kohelet by living in two contradictory worlds: king and a pauper. Does his contradiction need to be resolved, or is living with contradiction the message of Kohelet?