

D" T CHOL HAMOED SUKKOT Sid Kadish

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Today is Shabbat Chol Hamoed Sukkot. It is a custom among Ashkenazi congregations to read the book of Kohellet (Ecclesiastes) on this day. I will endeavor to briefly share some of Kohellet with you so as to answer the question, what does Kohellet have to do w/ Sukkoth?

Imagine that you are a farmer in the Land of Israel in biblical times. At this time in the year, you can feel a bit of a chill in the air, and you know that the growing season is over and its harvest time. You have gathered your crops, pressed oil from your olives, and put up the grapes juice from your vines to mature into wine. You have put away fodder for your animals for the winter, seed for the next growing season, and adequate food stores for the winter season.

You are commanded to erect a Sukkah, a flimsy hut-like structure, in which you will celebrate your harvest and the blessings HaShem has granted you. You may have traveled to Jerusalem to offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving. Sukkoth is truly ZMAN SIMCHATEINU, the time of our gladness. Looking over all this, a certain smugness and satisfaction may be in order.

But most rabbis agree that some of our ancestors may have celebrated too heartily. Just like the Sukkah itself is frail and fragile itself, indicating impermanence, some rabbis felt that they needed a "downer," a reminder that all is well but it may not last. They felt the need for a further buffer against the gaiety of the season. The answer is Kohellet.

Utter futility said Kohellet;
Utter futility, all is futile,
What real value is there for a man,
In all the gains he makes beneath the sun!

And there is no strict moral code here. You all know these lines of Chapter 3: They are so beautifully huma

A time for planting, and a time for uprooting the planting.

A time for slaying and a time for healing.

A time for tearing down, and a time for building up.

A time for weeping and a time for laughing.

A time for wailing and a time for dancing.

A time for ripping and a time for sewing.

A time for silence and a time for speaking.

A time for loving and a time for hating.

A time for war and a time for peace.

At the end of Kohellet is a brief summary:

The sum of the matter when all is said and done: Revere God and observe his commandments. For this applies to all mankind.

In my humble opinion, this statement this appended statement probably allowed this semi-heretical text to be canonized and declared Kosher for inclusion in the Tanach.

In our own time, we are no longer agricultural people. But we still celebrate our harvest of blessings, our prosperity, and the relief from the stressful period of the Yamim Noraim, the Days of Awe. We still could use a reminder that although Sukkoth is Z'MAN SIMCHATEINU, we must still exercise restraint and keep things in perspective.

There is a second reason why the custom of reading Kohellet on Col HaMoed Sukkoth was instituted by Ashkenazi rabbis. There was a desire to read all the 5 megillot from Ketuvim in public.

- * Purim: Book of Esther
- * Tisha B'Av: Aicha (Book of Lamentations)
- * Shavuot: Book of Ruth
- * Pesach: Song of Songs
- * Sukkot: Kohellet

There is a tradition that both Shir HaShirim (Song of Songs) and Kohellet were written by King Solomon. Shir HaShirim was written when he was a young man, and a vigorous lover, hence the semi-erotic text of Shir HaShirim. But he wrote Kohellet when he was an old man, when he realized that his lust and vigor were all vanity. Shir HaShirim is read in the springtime, but Kohellet is read in the fall.

Shabbat shalom and Chag Sameach!!

If there is time for discussion, I would like to pose the following question:

How did this somewhat gloomy and negative book make into the canon?

SPK

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