

# **The Preacher**

*Commentaries on Solomon's book of Ecclesiastes*

**by Swami Anand Nisarg**



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## **Chapter 1**

### **"1. The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem."**

The book of Ecclesiastes is a unique text in the Hebrew Bible. It is unique because it presents a teaching that is totally unlike any of the other books. It is so different, in fact, that it contradicts the beliefs of the Jewish, and Christian, traditions as found in other books of the Bible. So Ecclesiastes was special, and must have been written by someone very special. In the first verse, instead of a name, he is introduced by a title. He is called 'The Preacher'. But we are also told that he was the son of David, and king. Thus we know it was Solomon who is said to have written Ecclesiastes. Is it possible that he did? Or is that just a myth? Indeed, was Solomon himself a myth? I tell you that it must have been Solomon who wrote this book. For the simple reason that this is a very spiritually dangerous book. It contains real teachings that are not found anywhere else in the old testament. If a normal man or prophet had written this kind of book, it would never have been included in the scriptures. In fact, the people and the priests would have had the author killed. Clearly, the one who wrote this book had such power that he could not be eliminated, and had so much prestige that he could not be censored. Solomon was such a man, a great teacher.

### **"2. Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity."**

Vanity of vanities, what does Solomon mean by this? The real word is very difficult. On the one hand, vain means hopeless, fruitless. Something that will not succeed is vanity. But vanity also means pride. It means thinking oneself more than one is. So when Solomon says "all is vanity" he is saying both that all things are beyond hope, that all things come to naught, and also that everything we do is the product of our own false ideas about ourselves or our importance in the world. A misunderstanding of our role.

### **"3. What profit hath a man of all his labor which he taketh under the sun?"**

What does a man gain from all his efforts? Why is life filled with struggle, and is anything gained of it in the end? Solomon is presenting the question that has troubled those who are led to the mystic path since the beginning of time.

### **"4. One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever.**

**5. The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose.**

**6. The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits."**

Solomon draws your attention to the greater scope of the world. Many people have come to me with problems. Often, these problems stem from the fact that people do not recognize themselves as part of a vaster process. It is easy to think your work is great, your goals are important, and your failures tragic, if you think you are the center of the universe. Gaining a proper perspective of your relative insignificance means that you can shift your focus to the more significant things. People run around chasing all these silly things, in time they all come to nothing. Meanwhile the sun also rises and sets, the moon follows on

her path, the wind flies in its circuits. As it did before your life and goals and problems, and as it will afterward.

**"7. All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full: unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.**

**8. All things are full of labor; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing."**

Notice that, much like the ocean is never filled by the river, and the river never is emptied in its flowing, the senses of a man are never satisfied. There is never an end to your desires. Solomon is pointing out that this is the cause of struggle, of labour, that you are never emptied of desires. So long as you want more than what is before you, you will have to continue to labour in your life.

**"9. The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.**

**10. Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us.**

**11. There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after."**

'There is nothing new under the sun'. We seek out novelty, we want more, but really we are only reliving the old. It has all been done before, and we repeat it. We do not remember the misery we had before, and will forget this misery afterwards. Likewise, we forget all those 'important' people who had the same lives and problems in the past, and we will be forgotten in time. It all continues, in a pattern.

**"12. I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem.**

**13. And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith."**

It is said of Solomon that he practiced all the techniques that had been known by the ancient masters. In doing this, he became close to God, and God told him that he could have any one thing he wished. Solomon wished for a discerning heart, for wisdom. God was pleased that he asked for this, rather than long life, wealth, or the death of his enemies. And as a reward God made Solomon the wisest of all men who ever were or would be. Here, in Ecclesiastes, Solomon says that he has used this wisdom to seek out an answer to man's suffering.

**"14. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.**

**15. That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered."**

It was in this wisdom that Solomon became aware that all is suffering. And this suffering comes from man's desire. What is desire? Fundamentally, it is an attempt to put your conditions on life. To try to make the world work the way you think it should, rather than the way that is natural for it and for you. When Solomon says that there is nothing crooked that can be made straight, People always want to make

things become the way they think is perfect; straighten what is meant to be crooked, or bend what is meant to be straight. And Solomon is saying that in the end, nothing can be altered from its natural course. Things are to be the way they are meant to be. Of course, one can change things, but only when that change falls in the realms of the natural, not when the change is unnatural. Anything you can do, comes not from your will but from the divine.

**"16. I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.**

**17. And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit.**

**18. For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow."**

In the final verses of this chapter, Solomon reveals that even the search for wisdom is vanity. We seek out wisdom as just another effort to 'fix' the world to what we would wish it to be. People will first be motivated to seek wisdom not for its own sake, but for a cause. They will seek to understand folly, to know what doesn't work and what does. To try to find a way to solve the madness of the world. But Solomon warns that even the pursuit of wisdom leads to vexation, frustration. That much wisdom only leads to much grief, and much knowledge only leads to much sorrow. This is because like any other goal, when you seek wisdom or knowledge from your desires, you will never have enough. And the more you know in effort to solve your problems, the more questions will arise. You will never have a satisfied mind. You will only become more aware, rather than ignorant, of the hopelessness of your situation.

## **Chapter 2**

**"1. I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also is vanity.**

**2. I said of laughter, It is mad: and of mirth, What doeth it?"**

After seeking out wisdom, and finding it unsatisfying, it is often a natural tendency of a seeker to go out after pleasure. Pure pleasure, mirth, as a way to fill your heart. Solomon did this after finding wisdom unsatisfying, but this too is vanity.

The pursuit of pleasure in life is always vanity, because you will never have enough of it. You will be unable even to enjoy what pleasures you are having at this time. Even in the midst of some great joy, you will be busy thinking about and desiring some future joy. You may be in the arms of someone you love, emotionally or sexually, and meanwhile you are thinking about some future date when you might get married to this person. Or maybe you're already thinking of someone else. You can't stay where you are and enjoy what is right before you.

But the pursuit of pleasures becomes especially futile after one has begun to pursue wisdom. It is very natural, most seekers do it at some time, to 'give up' , and decide that the only purpose in life is to enjoy yourself and seek out pleasure. Really there is no true giving up involved here, you are not dropping anything, you're just shifting your desire from the pursuit of knowledge or wisdom or truth to the pursuit of sensual pleasures. But the fundamental longing is still there. Solomon describes seeing people laughing in merrymaking, and knowing what he knows, finding it mad. Often we start to laugh when we are trying to deeply repress or deny some reality, we will start to make jokes or wisecracks when someone confronts us with a truth we don't want to hear. For someone who has had a taste of wisdom, the pursuit of pleasure will seem fruitless. What doeth it, asks Solomon, where does it get you? Nowhere. So for one who seeks to get somewhere, to gain something, this is no answer. Study these words carefully, and understand.

**"3. I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life.**

**4. I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards:**

**5. I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits:**

**6. I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees:**

**7. I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me:**

**8. I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts.**

**9. So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me.**

**10. And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labor: and this was my portion of all my labor.**

**11. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labor that I had labored to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun."**

Solomon sought to lose himself in wine. This has a double meaning. On the one hand, Solomon consciously had tried all he knew, and being in deep depression, desired to try to deaden his consciousness through alcohol. Remember that while there are a few substances that, used properly, can help to expand one's awareness, for the most part the use of drugs is something people apply to deaden their awareness, to deny it. But in this case the wine has a different meaning. Wine has been a symbol for the divine in the middle east since time immemorial. The Sufis are the most famous for applying this symbol, but here Solomon is doing the same thing. He is saying that even in the midst of his disillusionment, his deeper awareness sought to fill himself with the divine. That is the ultimate longing, the reason we pursue our other desires, to try to fill ourselves. But it is something that only the divine can satisfy.

But Solomon could, at this time, neither deaden himself nor raise himself. Instead, he did what most people do, he tried to fill himself through works. He built great things, and he filled his life with all the possessions he could, and with all the pleasures he could. Most people lack the ability or courage to jump into the divine, or the lowness of awareness needed to plummet into self-annihilation. Instead, they take a 'safe' course, trying to live as part of the world, trying to do their job, and get some things, and make themselves as comfortable as possible.

But finally, Solomon looks at all the work he's done, and finds that there is nothing there that can satisfy. It is pointless, folly. It vexes the spirit, it leaves your spirit unfilled. It is a waste of your life. There is no profit to be had from it, because all you think you gain you will lose, and you will have gained nothing of what can truly be had.

**"12. And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly: for what can the man do that cometh after the king? even that which hath been already done."**

Solomon was a King. He had the resources to do not normal work, but great work! To pursue not normal pleasures, but great pleasures! If he could not fill himself with his power and might, then no average man living an average life could do so. Often it is easier for someone living in a high level of materialism to realize the mystical than it is for someone who is poor. This is because the poor can always think, in the back of their head, that if they just had wealth, or more things, they would be happy. A rich man knows that's not true. Solomon, Buddha, and Krishna, three of the great masters, were all kings, and there were others as well. It takes a more exceptional person of lesser means, to understand the same thing. For a king it is easier to see how wealth brings you nothing.

**"13. Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness.**

**14. The wise man's eyes are in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness: and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all.**

**15. Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity.**

**16. For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man? as the fool.**

**17. Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit."**

Solomon says that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness. Many have taken this to mean that wisdom is far better than folly. But if you read the verses that follow, you will see this is not what he

meant. He only meant that wisdom lets you see what is happening, it does not change anything else. Light and darkness are only different, one is not truly greater than the other. Both come to an end. Likewise, to be wise does not allow you to escape death. The wise man and the fool, the same thing happens to both. Both will die.

So Solomon came to hate life, and what he perceived as unfair about it. No matter how hard he looked, he could not find a way that did not end in vexation and vanity. There was no way to escape this reality.

**"18. Yea, I hated all my labor which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me.**

**19. And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labor wherein I have labored, and wherein I have showed myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity."**

Solomon was indeed followed by lesser men, who ended up destroying all he built up. No matter what you accomplish, not only can you not take it with you, you also cannot control where it will go. Even the works of masters, even mystery schools, are guaranteed to become false and corrupt at some point after the master is gone. Sometimes very slowly, other times fast, but it is certain to happen.

**"20. Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labor which I took under the sun.**

**21. For there is a man whose labor is in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity; yet to a man that hath not labored therein shall he leave it for his portion. This also is vanity and a great evil.**

**22. For what hath man of all his labor, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath labored under the sun?**

**23. For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity."**

Even to fill yourself with grief is a vanity. There is nothing to gain from it. It would be easy to feel sorry for yourself, for your state, but what comes of that? It only serves to help you feel a certain kind of good; if you can't get what you want, at least you can make a point of being bitter over it, of crying out to people or to the world, or to God, in the hopes of getting attention for it. You can come to feel that nothing is your fault, that you can be free at least of responsibility. This path leads to deadening, it goes nowhere. It too is vanity.

**"24. There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labor. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God.**

**25. For who can eat, or who else can hasten hereunto, more than I?**

**26. For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight, wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit."**

Solomon explains how one can also fantasize that there must be a judgment, that sometime in the future God will make up for your suffering, and punish those who have wronged you. But of this he says it is also vanity. Anything that leads you away from the hereunto is vanity. What Solomon calls the 'hereunto' is what I call the moment. This is what we have, and this is where we can find fullness. The other things

Solomon has listed, the vanities, are vanities because they cannot fill you. And they cannot fill you because in fact they become your very obstacle. By pursuing these other things, by seeking wisdom or knowledge or pleasure, or by feeling sorry for yourself, or by seeking to deaden yourself, you cannot appreciate what you do have: this moment, the hereunto. So what can you do? You can do nothing better than to eat and drink, make your soul enjoy the good in your work. It is what you can benefit from, not others, and it does not fail. It is its own reward. If you can eat, drink, work, live, not for some further goal or desire, but for its own sake, then this will be your reward.

## **Chapter 3**

### **"1. To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:"**

The preacher's next few lines are the great classics of his Sutra. Some of the most beautiful lines in the Bible, in all religion, are found in this very chapter. 'A time to every purpose under heaven'; all things happen in their place. And everything happens not for a purpose, as some might wish, but just because that is the flow, that is the way of nature. All things are in constant change. This is not the philosophy of Judaism, this is more like the philosophy of the I Ching. It is perfectly in agreement with Lao Tzu. Nothing else in old testament is like it. The one who wrote this had a deep understanding of reality.

### **"2. a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;**

**3. a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;**

**4. a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;**

**5. a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;**

**6. a time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;**

**7. a time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;**

**8. a time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace."**

All things come in their time, in their season. If it is the time to do it, you must do it. Be natural. If it is not time, there is nothing that you could do to make it work. You might try, but it would not happen. There is a story, and it may well be just a story but it is a good one, that when Jesus was presented before Pilate, the governor did not want Jesus dead. Pilate was a philosopher, he wanted to know Jesus' teachings. It was probably a very academic interest, but even so. Pilate told Jesus that Pilate could save him. He said "I have the power to remove all your charges". But Jesus answered, "you have no power! all power you think have is an illusion, its really very far removed from you. There is nothing you can do to change what will be". And so it is in our lives, this is what Solomon is trying to say. We cannot change anything, or force anything. Only flow. When we think we are changing something, it is really because a force greater than ourselves moves things that way. It gives us the illusion of control. But in reality, if what we are trying to do is not natural, there is no way it will happen successfully. If we are doing something that is natural, then it will happen, and could have happened without us.

### **"9. What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboreth?**

**10. I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it.**

**11. He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end."**

Solomon is saying that the nature of this illusion is a test. That the work we have to do, our duty, should be done. People who do not understand will, at some point in their lives, come under the illusion that they have power. God makes them beautiful, or rich, or strong, and in this way they become filled with ambition, thinking that they can force life to go how they want it to go. But people who have come to realize that all things happen only according to nature, that they have no real power to affect life, can also miss. They might decide that if what Solomon teaches is true, if there is really nothing they can do, no

power of their own, then why do anything? If nature can do it without us, then why bother doing any work?

**"12. I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life.**

**13. And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labor, it is the gift of God."**

Solomon says that the thing to do in life is your duty. It is the same message that Krishna gives Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita. One should enjoy life as a gift from god, and do what you must do, your work, according to your nature. And to do it for its own sake, for your fulfillment, not for any other ambition. You should rejoice, you should do your work, you should eat and drink. You should be true to your nature and do the work of your nature. Find your place in life and follow it. This is the gift of God.

**"14. I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him."**

The message here is simple, but for one word. Solomon is saying that all flows as it does, that nothing can be that is not meant to be, and that the realization of this creates a state of awe. Here it is translated as 'fear', but fear in this context is meant to mean a state of awe, of being humbled. Of realizing the insignificance of your own ego. People will think of themselves as pretty grand. That because they are beautiful or smart or strong or rich, or even a little aware, things that they themselves are not responsible for, they believe that they are central or important. And much modern religion concerns itself with this. It tries to promote the idea that you are spiritually powerful or important. That you are somehow vital to God, to the destiny of the world, or that your petty concerns are of vital importance to God.

As if whether or not your team wins the football game is important, or you have the power to make a request of God that he give you what you think you need. But when you become aware of the Tao, of the nature of the flow of life, and how vast it is, the opposite effect will occur. You will see that your actions are meaningless, that you are in fact powerless, and this breaks the strength of your ego. This is important because the ego is the barrier between you and this very nature. The ego cannot be there when God is; it is like a raindrop falling into the ocean. As long as the drop is there, it is not part of the ocean, but to become part of the ocean, it must let go of its definition, limitation, as a raindrop.

**"15. That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past.**

**16. And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there; and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there.**

**17. I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work."**

All actions that you commit, whether people see them as 'good' or 'bad', will only really be judged based on whether they are part of nature or against it. Even when you do something that might seem 'righteous' or 'moral' or 'spiritual', to do it because you wish to impose your will on the world, it is in reality a wrongful action. In the Gita, Krishna teaches that all actions that you do for your sake will generate Karma, and bring you suffering. Solomon here too says this, that God knows what's really righteous, free

of Karma; and conversely what is wicked, born of Karma. And that those acts that have Karma will generate attachments, and these attachments will generate suffering.

**"18. I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts.**

**19. For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity.**

**20. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again."**

Man tries to imagine that he is greater than the beasts, and religion tries to teach this. Everywhere else in the bible, it teaches that man is something special, not an animal. Man is given 'dominion' over the animals in genesis. But here, Solomon points out the obvious: men are as much animals as any other beast. There is no difference. Men act in beastly ways, both in the good and bad sense. Men act ignorantly of God, like an animal. Men have the capacity to act at one with nature, like an animal. Just like all the other animals, man is born and man dies. The difference of awareness is real, yes, but most men have never tried to be aware. Most live out their lives mechanically. In this sense animals are better off than man. Animals do not need awareness, they are one with nature, unconsciously, but one. As a result, although both men and beasts can be hurt or get sick and both will die, man can suffer in ways an animal cannot even conceive of. Man can have the suffering born of Karma. The suffering of desire. And many of these desires come from an effort to avoid our naturalness, to avoid identifying with beasts. We repress the natural animal within us, and we suffer for it, and the natural animal within us turns into a monster for it.

**"21. Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?**

**22. Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?"**

Solomon is saying that there is no proof that man is better than an animal. Priests have always said that man has a soul. But Solomon says you cannot know that. Mystics have always said that souls must be earned, they must be developed. Because the soul is really awareness. So anyone who rests on the belief in a soul will miss, they will not be aware. Why be aware if you can just believe in heaven? Solomon says you must doubt, do not assume! And if you cannot assume this, you cannot assume yourself greater than animals.

Jesus said that we should not struggle with the world, we should not seek to be unnatural. Consider the birds in the trees; they don't work, but they are not worried for their lives. Nature goes as it should, it will take care. By repressing the animal, the natural within you, and seeking your desires, you are also closing the door to the divine. Man is a bridge between the animal and the divine, but if you reject one you reject the other. To be natural is to accept both. And to do this is to follow Solomon's simple advice: rejoice in your own works; let what you are doing at this very moment be according to your nature, and that will be its own reward. Don't seek after something beyond that or you will miss the richness of the reward being offered to you.

## **Chapter 4**

**"1 So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter.**

**2 Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead, more than the living which are yet alive.**

**3 Yea, better is he than both they, which hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun."**

Solomon considers the reality that all beings experience suffering. This is the same as the first noble truth of the Buddha, that all people must suffer. Solomon points out that there are people who are powerless in the world: the poor, the sick, the helpless. They have nothing in the world that brings them comfort. But the powerful, the rich, the beautiful, the mighty, they also have nothing that comforts them. So none of the things you can acquire in this earth, even if you become powerful, will be able to bring you peace. The conclusion that Solomon drew from this reality was a nihilistic one; that it would be better to be dead, or even to never have been born, than to experience the suffering of the world.

**"4 Again, I considered all travail, and every right work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbor. This is also vanity and vexation of spirit.**

**5 The fool foldeth his hands together, and eateth his own flesh."**

Even good works, even accomplishments that others respect you for, brings you no deeper reward. It too is vanity. To strive for this sort of reward is foolishness, it is like devouring yourself for sustenance. You will gain nothing from it.

**"6 Better is a handful with quietness, than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit."**

It is better, says Solomon, to have less, to be more simple, to strive less. In doing so, you will be more capable of finding peace. Jesus said that those who are poor are blessed; this is not because they are poor, or because they have something inherently spiritual. Most of the poor are worse off than the rich. The only difference, what Jesus meant, is that if you have nothing, you have nothing to lose. You will be more willing to risk jumping into the unknown. The more you surround yourself with distractions, with pursuits, with seeking accomplishments, the more you will feel as though you have something to lose. You have nothing more to lose, if you are rich than if you are poor, both have nothing as far as peace is concerned. But the person with riches, with prestige or respect, will be more afraid. Even though their possessions bring them no peace, they will hold to them stubbornly. But Solomon says that it is better to have less and find peace, than to have more of that which does not satisfy. Then you only have more of what is worthless.

**"7 Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun.**

**8 There is one alone, and there is not a second; yea, he hath neither child nor brother: yet is there no end of all his labor; neither is his eye satisfied with riches; neither saith he, For whom do I labor, and bereave my soul of good? This is also vanity, yea, it is a sore travail.**

**9 Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labor."**

Now Solomon speaks of the spiritual path. But he speaks here of one who seeks out the spiritual on his own. He does not let himself be attached to riches or prestige, he seeks peace. But Solomon expresses that if you seek out this path alone, you will only end with nihilism. You will come to the same theoretical conclusion that Solomon did, that it is better to not even be alive. When you have a sincere desire for the spiritual, you are on the right track. But for almost everyone, it cannot be done by one's self, by one's own efforts. If all you know is the world of ego, of attachment, of the mind, then how can you escape it? You will go around in circles, there will be no one to give you a push out of your illusion and toward reality, and eventually you will fall back into old patterns. And when you fall, there will be no one to help you back up. Many have missed this way.

**"10 For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up.**

**11 Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone?**

**12 And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken."**

If you are only surrounded by false people, then no matter how difficult it is better to stand alone. Always stand alone rather than follow the herd of fools.

But if you find even one sincere seeker to join you, it is better than being alone by a hundred times.

If you find a seeker who has attained a bit of meditation, it is better than being with a hundred sincere seekers who haven't.

If you find a seeker who has become an adept, it is better than being with a thousand meditators.

If you find a master, who has attained to the ultimate, it is better than being with a million adepts.

Having a group, or even better having a true teacher, is the surest way to make sure you will not fall back into illusion. And if you do, having a group, or a teacher, is the surest way that you will be raised back up again.

**"13 Better is a poor and a wise child, than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished.**

**14 For out of prison he cometh to reign; whereas also he that is born in his kingdom becometh poor.**

**15 I considered all the living which walk under the sun, with the second child that shall stand up in his stead.**

**16 There is no end of all the people, even of all that have been before them: they also that come after shall not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and vexation of spirit."**

Solomon gives the teaching that Jesus would so often repeat afterward. To become one with the universe you must become once more like a child. If you start with much in the world, even your own kingdom, in time you will have to give it up. If you start with nothing, it would be far easier for you. If you start out thinking you are someone special, you will be less likely to hear the call to the spirit, you will be less likely to be able to give up all that you have for the sake of finding peace. But if you are innocent, like a child, you will be able to give up what little you have.

If you think you are already wise, you will resist anything or anyone who challenges your perceptions of wisdom. When you hear a teacher speak, you will only accept the parts that you think confirm what you already believe. This will lead you nowhere. Instead, you must become childlike again, let go of all you think you already know, and hear everything with total openness. Only then will you be able to plainly receive truth, and grow from it.

Worst of all is if you reach a level of surety and comfort in what you know. Always doubt what you know, question what you have grown comfortable with. If you reach to heights of power or respect in this life, you will not be able to accept truth when it is presented to you. But if you do not make these assumptions, then you will be able to gain the real peace that can be found. The powerful men and kings who are respected in life will someday be forgotten, but if you become one with God, in peace, you will be praised forever by those who seek and find peace. But remember, this praise too is meaningless. It is vanity. Only the peace itself matters. Seek it for nothing other than its own sake.

## Chapter 5

**"1 Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil.  
2 Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.  
3 For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words."**

How is one to behave spiritually, given the realities that Solomon has established? All earthly things are vanity. What then is the point of going to a temple, and praying to god for good health, or wealth, or love, or any other thing?

Solomon says there is none. But this is what most people do. They will be terrible people for six days of the week, and one day a week they go to a church or temple. But even there they are not being spiritual. How can you be? If you are not spiritual for six days in a row, how can you suddenly become spiritual on the seventh? You cannot. You can only be pseudo.

So people will go into the church in a big hurry. Almost from the moment they enter a church, or a temple, or they start a meditation, they are thinking about what they will do when it is finished. This is why Solomon says 'keep your foot'. He means stop, don't be in a rush to go.

Second, you will follow the proscribed prayers. You will chant when you're supposed to, say 'amen' and 'hallelujah' when its time to, chant 'hare Krishna' or 'thank you Jesus'. All at its appointed time, all mechanically, following rituals you are programmed to do. They are not real prayer. This is why Solomon says that it is better to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools. Its the priests he's calling fools! Don't waste your time with religious fools. Just hear, just listen.

That is how to pray.

But very few people can do this. Instead, if you do not pray mechanically then you will pray selfishly; you will put your demands on God. You will say 'you just have to let me get that job', or 'please let me find a girlfriend' or 'please don't let my husband cheat on me'. Whether you demand or beg it is the same, you are creating your conditions. You are chattering to God, instead of listening. Let thy words be few.

**"4 When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed.**

**5 Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.**

**6 Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?**

**7 For in the multitude of dreams and many words there are also divers vanities: but fear thou God."**

Here Solomon says that if you say you are going to do something for God, do it. People will always try to bargain with God, and the funny thing is that most times they will be the ones to break their bargain. A schoolboy will pray "if you let me do well on this test I promise I'll study hard from now on". But of course he will not. A woman will say "if these blood tests turn out OK, I swear I'll eat better and stop smoking"; but even if they turn out fine, she will just forget about her promise.

It is better not to vow, says Solomon, then to vow and not keep your vow to God. I think this line may have been changed, perhaps originally it said it is better not to vow at all. Because Solomon would know that this is true. Its better not to make any promises to God, because what do you have that he wants?

What can you offer, that he will not already demand of you? What could you do? Nothing. It is better not

to offer anything to God, because whenever you are it is usually as part of a bargain. If you say you want to do something for the sake of God, fine. Do it, without expecting any reward. There are already many things that God will ask of you to do, and if you are quiet you will be able to hear and understand what these things are. So really, there is no need to vow. But if you do, make sure it is not for the sake of some desired reward.

Solomon certainly knew it was better not to vow. So perhaps this line has been changed, or perhaps he did not say it was better not to vow, only because he knew the Jews would not listen to him. The Jewish mainstream religion is very much based on the idea of vows, of covenants, of trying to make bargains with God. Perhaps Solomon thought that they would not listen anyways, so he watered the message down just a bit. What he said is still true, it is better not to vow, than to vow and break your vow. So perhaps he hoped that if this was all he said, and added something about being punished for breaking their vows, the people would at least not make false vows to God. Only human beings could be foolish enough to think they can cheat God. Or negotiate with him in the first place.

**"8 If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for he that is higher than the highest regardeth; and there be higher than they.**

**9 Moreover the profit of the earth is for all: the king himself is served by the field.**

**10 He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity.**

**11 When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes?**

**12 The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep."**

To want for material things is a never ending cycle. As soon as you believe you own a little, you will want a little more. If you think you own a lot, you will not be satisfied, instead you will only want a lot more.

If you love silver, says Solomon, you will not be satisfied with silver. Instead you will only want more of it. To start on that path of materialism is to never finish. You will never get to the point where you have enough. Even if you become a king, you will want to be an emperor; and this is how we get people like Alexander the Great, who wished to conquer the entire world.

What is more, even the idea of social prosperity is vanity. When goods (in a kingdom) increase, says Solomon, so will the number of those who eat them. The great failure of social materialism, of philosophies like capitalism and communism, or social engineering, is found here. As soon as you create social wealth to satisfy the needs of the people in your community, more will arrive, who are drawn to this wealth. There is plenty of food, so more people will have children, and your population will increase until food becomes a problem. There is plenty of money, so more people will immigrate to try to have a share of the money. To try to create a utopia is a hopeless endeavour. Neither will individuals be satisfied by materialism, nor will societies.

But an individual can be satisfied only within himself. If he lives for his own moment, lives for life's own sake. Solomon advises to work hard, not for a goal, but for its own sake. Work in the moment, in whatever role destiny has given to you, or wherever you lead yourself to. Really these are the same.

Someone who labours, and by this Solomon means someone who lives in the moment for its own sake, will sleep soundly. They will be satisfied by life, regardless of what conditions they are in. Because even hardship can be a paradise if you are living in the moment. So whether you have much to eat or little, if you accept where you are, and focus on your inner center and this very moment, you will feel satisfied. You will not necessarily be rich, but rich or poor, healthy or ill, with many friends or few, you can find

peace by being in the moment. On the other hand, he who seeks, or even gains material abundance, will sleep uneasily. This is because they will always want more, and always worry about losing what they have. They live for their future, for their hopes and fears, not for today. And no peace can be found for them.

**"13 There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt.**

**14 But those riches perish by evil travail: and he begetteth a son, and there is nothing in his hand.**

**15 As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labor, which he may carry away in his hand."**

There is a story, about Alexander the Great, that when he died he was carried into his homeland in an open coffin with his hands hanging out. He told his men to do this, because he wanted the whole world to see he had been a fool. He would be dragged back to his homeland, dead, and with nothing in his hands, because none of his wealth and power could save him from death, and he could take none of it with him. Whether this story is true or not, it is real.

**"16 And this also is a sore evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go: and what profit hath he that hath labored for the wind?"**

What profit is there to labour for the wind? For the future? For that which may never come? For that which you will be certain to lose, even if you gain it? It is better to labour for yourself, for the here and now, for that which can be eternal.

**"17 All his days also he eateth in darkness, and he hath much sorrow and wrath with his sickness.**

**18 Behold that which I have seen: it is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him: for it is his portion.**

**19 Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God.**

**20 For he shall not much remember the days of his life; because God answereth him in the joy of his heart."**

Do not much remember the days of your life. Do not linger in the past or in the future. If you are rich or poor, healthy or sick, you can find the joy of God in your heart, by labouring. By doing your work in the moment, the here and now, enjoying your food and drink. When you can find the immeasurable peace of enjoying what you have in this moment, you will see that it is infinitely richer than what any kingdom can offer to you.

## Chapter 6

- "1 There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men:  
2 a man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honor, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it: this is vanity, and it is an evil disease.  
3 If a man beget a hundred children, and live many years, so that the days of his years be many, and his soul be not filled with good, and also that he have no burial; I say, that an untimely birth is better than he.  
4 For he cometh in with vanity, and departeth in darkness, and his name shall be covered with darkness.  
5 Moreover he hath not seen the sun, nor known any thing: this hath more rest than the other.  
6 Yea, though he live a thousand years twice told, yet hath he seen no good: do not all go to one place?  
7 All the labor of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled.  
8 For what hath the wise more than the fool? what hath the poor, that knoweth to walk before the living?"**

Solomon is assessing the lives of most people, and his judgment is that in most cases it would have been better had these people been a miscarriage.

He says, you can have money, respect, fame, but if you cannot "eat thereof", then your life is not worthwhile.

What does Solomon mean by 'eating thereof'? Surely any man who lives many years, and has money and power, will use it. So the metaphor of eating is not simply about using what you have. To eat from the fruits of your labours means to be present. It means to be in the moment, and appreciate what you have in that moment. Anyone could cook a fine meal, with the right ingredients and training. And anyone could eat it. But not all those who eat it are really there to appreciate its fullness. It is the same with money, with power, with family, with love.

In fact, the more of these things you acquire, the less likely you will be to be able to 'eat of them'. You may have millions of dollars, but then you will be thinking about how to make your next million. You will not be present to enjoy what you have. You may have many possessions, but you will never be able to be fully present in using them. Instead, even as you make use of them, you will be thinking of your next purchase, of what you would like to do next.

Solomon says another thing too, perhaps even more enigmatic. He says that even if a man lives for many years and have many children, if he has not filled his soul with good, and has not been buried, then a miscarriage would have been better than his own life.

What does this mean? If your life is filled with love and happiness, why would it matter how you are buried? The answer is that Solomon doesn't speak of normal burial here. He says, even if your life is happy, you have many children and a happy family, it does not mean that good has filled your soul. The good he refers to is the spiritual good, the energy of God. Many people will live out average lives; not too sad, perhaps mostly happy, but utterly without a deeper peace. Then what has their life mattered? If you have a hundred children, what difference does that make? The goodness of the soul is the longing for a deeper awareness, for transformation.

And to have a burial is Solomon's code for initiation, for becoming a mystic.

The ancient Egyptian rituals, which deeply influenced ancient Judaism and Solomon's own teachings, were famous for their burial rituals for the dead. However, these rituals today are only understood at one of their levels. It is true that when a normal person died, the Egyptians would conduct certain burial rituals for them, for the afterlife. However, these rituals in their true form were meant to be conducted on

a living initiate. In the initiation of 'Passing through the Tuat', a candidate would go through the process of death and burial, and then be reawakened, reborn. This was the start of their new life, as a mystic. Solomon's school must have taught a similar ritual to his initiates.

And he says, if you are not reborn, if you do not die before you die, your life is so meaningless that you may as well not have lived.

Without the mystic path, you may have lived a thousand years twice over, but you will see no good of it.

**"9 Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire: this is also vanity and vexation of spirit.**

**10 That which hath been is named already, and it is known that it is man: neither may he contend with him that is mightier than he."**

In these two verses, Solomon reveals a deep truth. First, he says that it is better to experience what is before, rather than let yourself pursue your fantasies. This is the same message that can be found in the Bhagavad Gita, in the Buddha's teachings, and all other mystic scriptures. The wandering of desire is vanity. Take what is before you, work with what is real.

Second, Solomon reveals a deeper mystery. "That which hath been is named already and it is known that it is man."

Solomon here is saying that you as a man can only be one of two things. How do you define yourself? You can either be that which already has been; you are nothing more than the sum of your past. The conditioning that you received as a child, as a young person, or even a week ago, these conditionings are all that make you who you are.

The alternative is to understand that your perception of yourself is based on these conditionings, on what you have been. But this is a frightening proposition. "Neither may he contend with what is mightier than he". Man cannot deal with, oppose, cannot handle what falls beyond this spectrum of the known.

In truth, the normal person defines themselves (without realizing it) as the product of what they already know. Most people are thus very cowardly, and in no way curious. Even though some might appear courageous, or curious, it is a farce. They have the courage to brave territory they have already been to, or for which they have some reference point. This is not truly the unknown; if you can compare and reference an experience to some other past context, then it is nothing new. If you learn something 'new' that is really a repetition or elaboration of existing knowledge, this is no great sign of intelligence.

Most people know what they know.

They also know what they don't know.

But they don't know about the things they don't know they don't know.

If you can say about a subject 'I don't know about this', in fact you must already know enough to be able to claim ignorance. But what about the multitude of experiences you can't possibly imagine? That which is totally beyond you, so totally that you can't even claim not to know about it? And beyond that, what about the unknowable?

This is Him that is Mightier.

If you can generate the courage, to jump into this unknown, then you shatter the old definition of yourself. And this old definition is in fact very small, it is a very small person. You may think your life is great and complex, but in fact this thing you call yourself is a tiny box, in which you are suffocating and cramped. Destroy it, and you break free into vastness. Then, instead of man being defined as the sum of what already has been, man is redefined as the infinite possibility of what is happening at this very moment.

**"11 Seeing there be many things that increase vanity, what is man the better?**

**12 For who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow? for who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?"**

These last verses ask the question, for further elaboration, of what then is good if there is so much vanity? This leads to the material in the next chapter, which is a series of aphorisms in which Solomon speaks of what is good. Many of these may have been contrived, and indeed these two lines are most likely contrived to allow for the transition to the next chapter.

It is important to note that as of this chapter, Solomon has already said all that is essential in his work. What follows is only elaboration, it only contributes but really it repeats what has already been imparted. The essence of Solomon is found in these first six chapters.