



Torah for Turbulent Times

" To Everything, Turn, Turn, Turn "

"There is a season, turn, turn, turn, and a time to every purpose under heaven." The Byrds made these lyrics familiar to us, but they originate in the book of Ecclesiastes/*Kohelet* (Hebrew), which is *the* text chosen to be read during the upcoming harvest holiday of Sukkot. Following the internal spiritual work of *t'shuvah*, repentance and return, we turn now to be outside in nature, to enjoy the full moon, and to celebrate. On Sukkot it's a mitzvah to be happy, an actual commandment to rejoice! Beginning this weekend, we grab our lulav and etrog and shake it all about. We enjoy the autumn harvest and colorful scenery, while "dwelling" in our humble booths. As a temporary structure, the sukkah as well as the readings from Ecclesiastes, constantly remind us, like the lingering effects of Yom Kippur, of the fragility and vulnerability of life.

While the entire book of Ecclesiastes is well worth a read, especially these days, here are a few verses I've culled in order to share a taste of its wisdom. Versatile, existential, practical and philosophical, imagine reading it with a glass in hand, while sitting in the sukkah and looking at the stars above.

"There is nothing new under the sun." (1:9) This verse is understood by the traditional commentator Rashi to mean that whatever we have learned in our lives, we can see only that which we already know. But, with the insight of Torah, we constantly find new and nourishing understandings. "*Ha'kol hevel*, all is futile," the book repeats over and over. Thus, the only thing to do is to eat, drink and be merry, as these are gifts from G-d. (2:24, 3:13) Life is like a two-sided coin, with a time for every purpose. "A time for weeping and a time for laughing. A time for wailing and a time for dancing. (3:4) Few are the days of our fleeting life, who can tell what the future holds. (6:12) In a time of good fortune, enjoy, and in a time of misfortune, reflect. (7:14) Whatever is in your power to do, do it with all your might. (9:10) Enjoy yourself and take time in life to do acts of goodness." (3:12)

During this time of “*z’man simchateinu*,” the time of our joy, there’s a lot to ponder in the sukkah. We are keenly aware that there is still much more to do in order to mend the world from illness and injustice. As Rabbi Tarfon reminds us, “It’s not our responsibility to finish the work of perfecting the world, but neither are we free to desist from it.” (Ethics of the Fathers, 2:21) And at the same time, we are reminded to seek out opportunities for joy, as Sukkot is the original, biblical staycation.

-Rabbi Mark