

12th Grade Megillah Summer Assignment 2017-2018:

If you have any questions and/or would like to contact me, I can be reached at hrafie@vths.org

To the class of 2018 – welcome to senior year!

The following summer assignment is designed to give you a background to the Chamesh Megillot so that we could begin the year with a foundation and understanding of the basic concepts we will cover.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FILL IN: Please fill out the questions below to the best of your ability based on what we learned in class.

HEBREW WORDS AND PHRASES MUST BE IN HEBREW.

BREAKDOWN OF TANACH

In the space provided below, please draw a diagram of Tanach. (What does the abbreviation Tanach stand for, list all the sefarim that are in it)

Please complete the chart below on the חמש מגילות

List the name, author, when it is read, content and characters of each of the חמש מגילות. Use Chabad.com or Aish.com or your Tanach to fill in the chart.

NAME OF MEGILLAH	AUTHOR	WHEN IT IS READ	BASIC IDEA OF THE SEFER	CHARACTERS
KOHELET			List at least 5 topics discussed in this sefer:	N/A

ESTHER			- - - - -	- - - -
RUT				- - - -
SHIR HASHIRIM				N/A
EICHA				N/A

Introduction to Kohelet: Please read the following article and answer the questions below

The Sukkot/Ecclesiastes Connection

King Solomon's exhilarating answer to: "What on earth are we doing here?"

by [Yaakov Astor](#)

Aish.com

Each of the Jewish holidays is characterized by a special biblical book (*megillah*). On Passover, we read Song Of Songs. On Shavuot, we read Ruth. On Sukkot, we read Ecclesiastes, known in Hebrew as "*Kohelet*," the name by which Solomon calls himself in the book.

Ecclesiastes begins, "Vanity of vanity, says Kohelet, vanity of vanities; all is vanity." It then catalogs the many life philosophies and lifestyles its author, the King of Jerusalem, experimented with and ultimately concluded were vain and empty. For this reason, people often view *Kohelet* as pessimistic and downbeat. Nothing is further from the truth. And that is illustrated by the fact that the sages instructed us to read it on Sukkot, the festival of our greatest *simcha*, joy. Far from being a depressing book, *Kohelet* is there to add to the *simcha*. It's infused with a spirit of joy and optimism, and gives Sukkot a special flavor.

In order to penetrate and breakthrough to the beautiful, exhilarating message beneath the surface of *Kohelet's* often complex imagery and language, we must analyze three key words -- the Hebrew equivalents of "human," "vanity" and "sun" - which are repeated throughout the entire work.

Understanding these words in depth will provide us with the skeleton key to reveal the true message of this often misunderstood book.¹

Adam

The first word is *adam*, "man," i.e. human being. In the Torah we are told that Adam was given his name because he was made from the *adama*, the "earth." However, that doesn't seem to explain the human being very well, because animals and myriads of other things were created from the *adama*. For instance, the verse says: "Let the earth give forth living things." If God wanted to give human beings a name that points to their uniqueness, one could argue that *adam* isn't a very good name.

Adam is nothing as he is; he is everything in what he can become.

However, the Maharal explains that *adama*, "earth," has two very seemingly different characteristics that in reality harmonize with one another. One on hand, there is little value in a simple clod of earth. On the other hand, all life ultimately comes from the earth. We stand on the earth; it gives us our food and minerals. It carries within it the entire and total potential of human life.

Adama, then, is that material which in and of itself is valueless but which nevertheless carries within itself a vast potential. Adam is called his name because he has the potential of *adama*. He is nothing as he is; he is everything in what he can become.

"*Adam l'omal yulad* -- The human was created for labor." If a person is going to make anything of himself, he is going to have to work very hard. If he is going to become something he has to take all those wonderful gifts that God gave him and to forge from them a personality, a being, who is Godly and good. "Adam," then, conveys the meaning of a being whose potential is limitless, but who needs a great deal of work in order to attain it.

Hevel

The most common word in *Kohelet* is *hevel*, which is often translated "vanity."

"Vanity of vanities, says *Kohelet*, vanity of vanities; all is vanity."

However, "vanity" isn't a particularly good translation. *Hevel* literally means "breath." When you let out a breath of air in the cold of winter you see its mist briefly, and then, just as quickly, see it dissipate. That's *hevel*: it's there one minute, seemingly possessing substance, and then gone the next.

Hevel is *Kohelet's* way of describing material existence. Material existence is "Like a shadow that passes... a mist that dissipates... a dream that vanishes..." A *hevel* existence is a vain, empty experience -- no matter how well off one is in a material sense.

Shemesh

The third term that's key to understanding *Kohelet* is the Hebrew word *shemesh*, "sun." *Shemesh* throughout the Written and Oral Torah is used as a metaphor for physical life. The sun controls our life. It gives light and heat. It makes things grow. It makes life possible. "Sun" therefore is a metaphor for physical existence.

To summarize the three key terms: Adam, from soil, represents something that is worthless as it is but limitless in what it can become. *Hevel*, like hot air, represents material existence, something that in the final analysis is insubstantial. *Shemesh*, "sun," represents bounded, physical life.

Let's now plug these understandings into the key verses.

Hevel Havalim

The second verse of Ecclesiastes reads: "*Hevel havalim*, says *Kohelet*, *hevel havalim*, everything is *hevel*."² The verse can be understood as a rhetorical question: Is that all there is -- *hevel*? The purpose of *Kohelet* is to ponder this question: What on earth are we doing here? What is our purpose here? Is there nothing more than a *hevel* existence? This is *Kohelet's* question.

The next verse answers the question. "What benefit does a human being (*adam*) have from all his labor he labors under the sun?" At first glance, all this teaches is that if a person labors and invests energies he gains nothing, he has no benefit. However, by adding the qualifying term, "under the sun," the verse opens itself to an implication and supplies the answer to the opening question.

What benefit does a person have, what benefit can he expect, if he invests that labor for which he was created in an activity "beneath the sun," in an existence controlled and defined by the sun, by physical existence?

None.

Labor *beneath* the sun has no ultimate benefit; labor above the sun has infinite potential for growth.

However, while labor *beneath* the sun has no ultimate benefit, labor above the sun does. Labor *above* the sun has infinite potential and opportunity for growth. The human being can become Godly.

A *hevel* existence, an existence entirely "beneath the sun," is an empty, vain existence. If, on the other hand, one can discover the spiritual dimension and inject some sanctity into his otherwise *hevel* life -- if he can grow spiritually and become Godly -- then his existence is anything but *hevel*.

The Sukkot Connection

Kohelet is the perfect biblical book for Sukkot.

During the year we sit in a house with a roof over our heads. Symbolically, the roof separates us from heaven. On Sukkot, we sit in a temporary structure that has no true ceiling to divide us from the Divine. In the sukkah we eat, drink and sleep, and basically live an ordinary physical life. However, in the sukkah the *Shechinah*, the Divine presence, is shining through the *schach* (the thin, thatch-like roof), enveloping our entire being in holiness -- adding meaning and a dynamic to ordinary life. Our entire physical existence becomes a *mitzvah*, a holy act.

God has given us a wonderful world to live in. It's full of beauty and song. Yet there's a catch. We are challenged. We have to allow the Divine to shine into our lives. If so, it is a life of substance, not *hevel*. It's a life of genuine optimism and holiness.

If, on the other hand, we live separated from the spiritual dimension -- under a closed roof with a barrier above, living entirely "under the sun" -- even if that roof is the ceiling of the most ornate mansion -- our life will be a life of futility, vanity, *hevel*.

We are creatures rooted in the earth but capable of forging ourselves into something reaching into the heavens. To the extent one nurtures the inner spark and makes it the main focus of his labor here is the extent one's life will have substance, meaning, hope and happiness.

A little clod of earth can create and embody Godliness. That is an exhilarating challenge. And that is the message of *Kohelet*.

1. This is the approach of Rabbi Moshe Eisenmann, heard from a recorded lecture. 2. The sages point out that there are seven instances of *hevel* in this verse, because the word *havalim*, the plural form of *hevel*, implies two. Hence we have three instances of *hevel* in the singular, plus two instances of the word in the plural, which altogether add up to seven. In other words, there are instances of *hevel* in the second verse. The sages teach this refers to the seven days of the week, implying that every day of the week -- even *Shabbat!* -- can be part of a *hevel* existence, of a limited, non-growing existence.

Please answer the following questions using the article above as well as your own personal thoughts and opinions. You are welcome to let me know what you think, just make sure to back up what you are saying with examples and/or proof.

1. In the end of the day, when you look back at your life after 120, what will matter to you most?

2. What are we here for?

3. Why don't people live with purpose?

4. What does it mean to you to live with purpose?

5. What could you do today to make the most out of your life?

Have a wonderful summer!