



Eternity Within the Moment¹

Transience is at the heart of the *sukkah* experience. The need to feel it's not a permanent home influenced a multitude of *halachic* discussions: its maximum and minimum height, the materials it can be made from, the obligation of a *mezuzah*, and many others. When you live in an impromptu hut, you remember the trials of the wilderness and the wondrous Divine Providence that protected us along the way.

A major principle of Sukkot is תִּשְׁבוּ – dwell in the *sukkah* as you would in your own home. This is why we drag our beloved sofa out into the yard, eat our meals outside and sleep in the *sukkah* as well.

We make a huge effort to feel permanent within the temporary. To dwell in the truth, within the passing moment.

הַבֵּל הַבָּלִים אָמַר קוֹהֵלֵת... הַבֵּל הַבָּל – “Futility of futilities said Kohelet... everything is futile (Kohelet 1:2). The word הַבֵּל (variously translated as futility, emptiness, vapor) appears no fewer than 38 times in *Megillat Kohelet*. However, none of those translations are accurate for the meaning of the word here.

Transience. Everything is transient. Everything will pass. Everything ends and moves on. It's neither good nor bad. Neither judgmental nor negative. It's a fundamental truth Shlomo HaMelech lays down at the outset of his book: our lives on earth are finite. Short-lived. Nothing lasts forever, and certainly not us.

Our parents said, “Before you blink, you already have grandchildren,” and before we know it, we'll find ourselves saying similar things to our children. When we raised our first son, every stage seemed like an eternity. We couldn't imagine his teeth would ever come through. We bought baby clothes very carefully without understanding that at those sizes they'd last a day and a half. From child to child we internalize that babyhood just whooshes by. That we need to take in the smell because in another moment it won't be the same...

When Rabbi Yochanan finds Rabbi Elazar crying on his deathbed (Berachot 5b), he asks him why he is so distraught. For the Torah, you didn't learn? For your livelihood? For losing children? And Rabbi Elazar answers, “I'll manage without everything you asked about. But your incredible beauty, Rabbi Yochanan, that like us all will decompose and turn to dust, for that I cry!” And Rabbi Yochanan shocks us with his reply: “For that indeed you should cry!” And they both wept, over the fleeting nature of beauty and the death that overcomes us all.

When we stand before a stunning sunrise or sunset, we are awestruck. Something about that beauty strokes eternity, stems from eternity. Such an abundance of beauty is beyond us. So we do our best to bathe in the pleasure because it's going to disappear any second. We snap a photo but sense how pathetic that is. We can't just fold this splendor and

stuff it into our pocket. Because just as it is sublime, it is also fleeting, temporary, ungraspable. Every brief blossom, every autumn leaf, every sunset... arouses yearning, longing, almost distress. For it lives forever in the passing moment (if we plant it within us), and then... it's gone!

Are “fleeting days” empty days, with no hope or expectation? No! Don't interpret הַבֵּל as futile! We were not given days of futility to waste away on this earth, for what was the reason to invest in love if our days are nonsensical? Kohelet tells us: treasure the days we have together, because life is temporary, and hence so valuable. Fill your days with love and good... “enjoy life”!

We are permanent tenants in our temporary *sukkah*. Through that, we understand nothing is really permanent.

Yet even when we return into our homes we can still observe תִּשְׁבוּ – We can experience the total beauty of the moment... of every moment, while it lasts. We can appreciate and value all the good in our personal, family and communal lives. And we can remember the *sukkot* in the desert and realize the abundance and goodness we are enjoying here and now in *Eretz Yisrael*.

¹ Adapted from Rabbanit Fraenkel's “The Preciousness of Transience” (HaMizrachi 5779).

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