

V'HA-RUAH TASHUV: SO THE SPIRIT RE/TURNS

Commentaries on the Book of Qohelet from *MEREST BREATH*

Day 8: Skill and Wisdom

פרק י - י. אם-קָהָה הַבְּרִזָּל וְהוּא לֹא-פָנִים קִלְקֵל וְזִזְיָלִים יִגְבֵּר וְיִתְרוֹן הַכְּשִׁיר זָכָמָה:

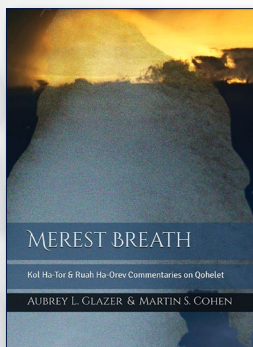
Chapter 10 – 10. Speaking of woodsmen, this too is how things are: if the blade of a dull ax is left unwhetted, then the woodsman must use more strength to wield it usefully. From this we learn a truth: skill is the context in which wisdom becomes detectable.

Kol ha-Tor Commentary by Martin S. Cohen:

Most trenchant of all is the king's intimation that wisdom is not acquired through even the most intense educative experience, but through the kind of ruminative, principled, and deeply perceptive analysis of the world that is available to all who live in the world with their eyes open and their perceptive capabilities fully functional—and specifically not paralyzed or disabled by prejudicial, self-serving presuppositions about the nature of things.

Ruah ha-Orev Commentary by Aubrey L. Glazer:

“...skill is the context in which wisdom becomes detectable.”—namely that the advantage of skillful means depends upon the prudent exercise of one's wisdom. Exercising forethought in one's actions, even with mundane chores, enables one to do a little that achieves a lot. This application of *hokhmah* reminds us of its broad range of meanings beyond what English conveys through “wisdom.” *Hokhmah* incorporates “knowledge, reasoning powers, crafts and expertise of all sorts” that “is both the knowledge gained by learning and the intellectual powers that can analyze and evaluate that learning.” It is worthwhile to also compare this Hebrew way of thinking with the Buddhist way of thinking through the Sanskrit equivalent, *upāya* which refers to expedient means, or to an aspect of guidance along the paths to liberation where a conscious, voluntary action “is driven by an incomplete reasoning” about its direction. *Upaya-kaushalya* then comes to mean “skill in means” or “skillful means.” The reason this nuance in translation matters is that as unique as both wisdom traditions may be in their cultural contexts, both appear to be struggling with the challenge of how to teach skills effectively, especially when others are necessarily listening. Qohelet and Buddha each realize that even if the student becomes a sage and eventually possesses a modicum of wisdom, still when you desire sharing that hard-earned wisdom with eager students, it is no simple task.



MEREST BREATH

**Kol ha-Tor & Ruah ha-Orev Commentaries on Qohelet
by Aubrey L. Glazer & Martin S. Cohen**

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