

“AND YOU SHALL BRING THE OMER OFFERING, THE FIRST OF YOUR HARVEST...” (VAYIKRA 23:10)

Shlomo's words would seem to directly contradict Moshe Rabbeinu's

THE MIDRASH on this week's *parasha* (Vayikra Rabbah 28:1) quotes the wisdom of Shlomo HaMelech in Koheles, as he discusses the nature of man's labors in this world. The Midrash mentions that the book of Koheles seems, at first glance, to give a wrong message about man's conduct in his youth. Our sages felt that the following statement of Shlomo HaMelech (Koheles 11:9) could have easily been misunderstood, "Rejoice, young man, in your youth ... and walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes." It seems to say that a young man should make himself happy by indulging the strong desires of youth – hardly a righteous approach to life! The Midrash points out Shlomo's words would seem to directly contradict Moshe Rabbeinu's teaching, repeated twice daily in the last paragraph of the *Shema* (Bamidbar 15:39) that we are forbidden to go astray after our hearts and our eyes! The sages of the Midrash then explain that the next part of Shlomo HaMelech's statement clarifies his intent, "But you should know, that for all these things God will bring you to judgment." These concluding words elucidate that Shlomo HaMelech's dictum was actually: Even in your youth, choose actions that will not bring you to judgment and to punishment; choose to follow Torah and *mitzvos* (see Mahrzu, *ibid.*).

How can Shlomo HaMelech call this denial of desires, and repression of passions "rejoicing"?

Shlomo HaMelech, the wisest of men, did not change his mind in mid-sentence. The beginning and ending of the verse in Koheles are not contradictory. The Midrash is explaining the meaning of the complete verse and the true understanding of Shlomo HaMelech's statement: That we should follow the Torah even when we are young. Every youth is confronted with tough decisions and strong desires. The *yetzer hara* pulls them with great force to follow a path that seems so delightful. Yet, Shlomo HaMelech tells these youth to refrain from following in this course and rather to follow the pathway of Torah. If so, why does King Solomon say, "Rejoice ... in your youth"? How can Shlomo HaMelech call this denial of desires, and repression of passions "rejoicing"? Wouldn't "frustration" and "dissatisfaction" be better descriptions of this approach? Is abstaining from the physical pleasures of the world the way to "rejoice"?

Being a slave to our passions and addicted to our desires is not enjoyable

The wise King Solomon saw life more clearly than much of our technologically advanced and sophisticated society. On a superficial level, the *yetzer hara's* clever pitch to give in to our cravings and satisfy our lusts seems to be a recipe for happiness and joy. But in reality, the opposite is true – indulgence brings frustration and unhappiness. Who would we expect to have the happiest and most fulfilled lives? Presumably, the rich and famous, the Hollywood stars and media idols, who have all the physical pleasures to enjoy. Yet these people are the ones most afflicted with depression and anxieties, have multiple divorces and are in conflict with their own children, and sometimes end their lives dying alone and forgotten in a motel room. Being a slave to our passions and addicted to our desires is not enjoyable. Shlomo HaMelech is enlightening us to the fact that real happiness comes from exercising our free will to make the right choices, and to gain self-control and self-mastery. The only time we can really rejoice is when we choose to refuse the *yetzer hara* and to follow the path that our Creator has mapped out for us, which leads us to our ultimate happiness.