

## FOREWORD

**Rav Daniel Belsky, Rosh Yeshivas Oholei Yaakov, Jerusalem**

It is with great pleasure, and a deep sense of awe, that I greet the completion of this work. With this translation of the Dubner Maggid's commentary on *Koheles*, along with the previous volumes on *Eichah*, *Esther*, *Ruth*, and *Shir HaShirim*, a unique perspective on the entire set of Five Megillos has been presented to the English-reading public – through the mind of the Maggid, זצ"ל, the quintessential master of expression. It is indeed a wonder to behold this day. The occasion is one of great happiness, of rejoicing over the completion of a special course of Torah study. Through the merit of the Maggid – one of the greatest Torah educators of all time – our precious translator, Reb Dovid, has come to the magnificent completion of a magnificent undertaking.

In the course of this endeavor, Reb Dovid has led us time and again to sit at the feet of the Maggid, and has opened for us the fountains of the Maggid's wisdom. For this effort, as noted in the previous volumes, Reb Dovid has earned a place of distinction in the transmission of Torah. Our wholehearted appreciation knows no bounds.

It is fitting at this juncture to reflect upon the Five Megillos as a unit. Obviously each megillah is itself a separate *sefer*. The megillos are five distinct members of the category of written Torah we call *Kesuvim*. Yet they traditionally are referred to as a group. This grouping clearly calls for explanation. What do these five *sefarim* have in common? And why are they called "megillos"? Having seen the near-final version of the present work in the month of Adar, I am led to suggest a pattern that relates specifically to the themes of this month.

The opening Mishnah of *meseches Megillah* begins as follows: "The megillah is read on the 11th, 12th, 13th, 14th, and 15th [of Adar], not less and not more." This is a very interesting way of beginning a *mesechta*. Which megillah, and why five days? We all know that the Book of Esther is the *sefer* referred to as "the megillah." On the surface, this phrasing seems merely a topical shorthand. Perhaps it is meant to reflect the fact that *Esther* is the only megillah which every individual must read or hear read. Be this as it may, the designation of *Esther* as "the megillah" also has a deeper meaning.

The Gemara makes clear that *Esther* is the megillah that tells of the ultimate conquest of Amalek, and with it the ultimate disclosure of the Heavenly purpose behind the creation of the world. Only with the eradication of Amalek, and all that he represents, will Hashem's throne, Name, and holy city be restored. The name "Megillas Esther" alludes to the disclosure of the hidden. Our experience in *galus* began with this theme; when Yosef became viceroy of Egypt, Pharaoh renamed him *tzafnas paneiach* – "discloser of the hidden." And this theme is the central motif of the Book of Esther, the last of the Five Megillos, the book that describes what our Sages call "the end of miracles" (*Yoma* 29a). In fact, the theme constitutes a common thread that runs through all five megillos. This central theme is reflected in the very word "megillah," which is related to the verb *l'galos* – to reveal.

The author of *Maaseh Rokeiach* raises the question of the five days. He proposes an explanation based on a Midrash that lists five beings who acted as antagonists to the purpose of creation, and describes their demise. All of these antagonists, he maintains, are referred to on Purim – in particular, in the blessing after the reading of the megillah. However, I would like to suggest a different line of thought.

The redemption associated with Purim brought with it a number of tremendous changes, in the state of the world at large and in the fabric of the Jewish People. Chazal underscored five of these changes. First, there was a reacceptance of Torah (*hadar kibbluha*). Second, there was an undoing of the drive to worship false “forces” in nature (*yitzra d'avodah zarah*). Third, there was a rebuilding of the Beis HaMikdash. Fourth, there was a tremendous salvation, which mirrored (and, indeed, surpassed) the Exodus from Egypt—the redemption associated with Purim was a deliverance from death to life. Finally, there was a major victory in the battle to eradicate the name of Amalek.

This series of five milestone events may be one of the factors underlying our Sages' decree to allow five possible days for the reading of the megillah. Chidah interprets the word פורים as an acronym for the five major festivals that the Torah ordains:

פ — פסח  
ו — וסוכות  
ר — ראש השנה  
י — יום הכיפורים  
מ — מתן תורה [שבועות]

We can explain this idea very well in terms of the five events listed above. The reacceptance of Torah was a new rendition of Shavuot; the redemption, of Pesach; the quashing of the drive for false worship, of Sukkot; the rebuilding of the Beis HaMikdash, of Yom Kippur. Finally, the dispatch of Amalek was a new rendition of Rosh Hashanah—the day that ushered in the world of man, and thus brought forth the first expression of the purpose of creation.

The Five Megillos clearly relate to these days and events. *Shir HaShirim* relates to the giving of Torah and a return to the regime of the first *luchos*. *Ruth* relates to redemption, as it records Ruth's entry into the realm of *avodas Hashem* (paralleling that of the entire Jewish People at the time of the Exodus) and her key role in the lineage of King David. *Eichah* relates to the Beis HaMikdash. *Koheles* relates to subduing our desires, in service to our Creator. And, finally, *Esther* relates to the eradication of Amalek.

It is traditional to read *Koheles* on the festival of Sukkot—the “time of our rejoicing.” *Koheles*, the book of restraint, is an eminently timely reading for Sukkot: Great rejoicing must be accompanied by great restraint, lest the rejoicing veer from the path of *simchah shel mitzvah* and degenerate into wildness. I cannot refrain from suggesting that it is no coincidence that this work reached its near-final form in the month of Adar. Like no other time in the Jewish year, Adar is saturated with rejoicing; Adar embraces every cause for joy and every form of rejoicing. And so we may well say that, as our rejoicing brings us to the point of intoxication, it is an opportune time for the sobering teachings of *Koheles*.

Perhaps Chazal were referring to all five megillos when they said that “the megillah is read on the 11th, 12th, 13th, 14th, and 15th. It remains to be explained what the days themselves have to do with each of the foregoing concepts. Perhaps we will merit to have this secret disclosed to us as well. In any event, we are thankful to the Creator for all He has showered upon us, and we anticipate for Reb Dovid and his colleagues continued blessing and success. Amen.

## TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

"The voice is the voice of Jacob ..." (Genesis 27:22).

"The voice of nobles would be hidden ..." (Job 29:10).

With heartfelt praise and thanks to the One Who teaches man knowledge, I present this English translation of the Dubner Maggid's *Kol Neggidim (Voice of Nobles)*, a commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes (*Koheles*). This commentary is part of the collection *Kol Yaakov (Voice of Jacob)* of Dubner Maggid commentaries on the Five Megillos. With this volume, I complete the translation of the entire collection. I am truly grateful to the Ribbono Shel Olam for granting me the opportunity and wherewithal to carry out this project.

### *The Commentary*

The general theme of Ecclesiastes is the fleeting nature of worldly gains and the need to focus instead on spiritual matters. This theme is a major motif in all the Maggid's commentaries. Extensive discussion of this theme appears, for example, in the Maggid's commentaries on Song of Songs 1:5, Ruth 2:11-12, Lamentations 1:7, and Esther 1:10-12. And, indeed, we truly need to have the message repeatedly drilled into us. Our desire for physical pleasure and worldly success is extremely strong; as the Maggid says in his commentary on Ecclesiastes 1:12-18, the struggle against it is like a boat ride upstream. Only through a persistent and vigorous battle can we prevail. The Maggid provides us with ammunition for this battle, in the form of powerful Torah teachings. He devotes to the cause his great erudition and talent: his wide-ranging Torah scholarship, his well-known gift for clever parables, his keen insight into life and human nature, and his sharp wit.

It must be noted that the attack against worldly pleasures is not driven by grim asceticism. The Torah does not teach us to make ourselves miserable. Rather, the message is that we have better things to spend our lives on than steak dinners, luxury cars, and prestige. As the Maggid explains brilliantly in his commentary on Ecclesiastes 2:3, worldly pleasures are not only fleeting but also of no real substance. Only by cleaving to God, and devoting ourselves to His Torah and mitzvos, can we attain true joy and satisfaction.

It is with this idea in mind that our Sages instituted the reading of Ecclesiastes on Sukkos. In the siddur, Sukkos is called "the time of our joy." In the Mishnah, it is called "*the festival*" – the epitome of rejoicing. Ecclesiastes seems a somber book, but in fact its message is not at odds with this spirit of celebration, but in full accord with it. The makeshift sukkah, with its flimsy roof of minimally processed vegetation, teaches us that worldly assets are temporary, and that the only way to attain true security and contentment is to draw close to God and rely on His protection. And we cap Sukkos off with Simchas Torah – leaving the material world behind to dance in ecstatic joy over the Torah, our cherished spiritual treasure.

The Maggid brings out the message of Ecclesiastes with sublime eloquence and penetrating humor. The Maggid's wit plays a prominent role in a number of places, such as in the parable of the blind men in the opening piece, the parable of the hapless stranger in the commentary on verse 2:3, and the metaphor of the drunkards in the commentary on verse 5:8. With biting irony, the Maggid shows us how utterly stupid it is to get caught up in worldly matters. Indeed, King Solomon tells us (Ecclesiastes 5:9): "A lover of money will never be sated with

money.” Our Sages remark (*Koheles Rabbah* 3:12): “No person leaves the world with [even] half his desires satisfied. If a person has one hundred, he wants to make it two hundred. And if a person has two hundred, he wants to make it four hundred.” The man who is obsessed with worldly gains is like a man on a treadmill, running endlessly but ultimately getting nowhere.

We can sum up the message with another of the Maggid's teachings. In *Sefer HaMiddos, Shaar HaBitachon*, the Maggid quotes Rambam's statement that the physical world is kept running by the efforts of crazy people.<sup>1</sup> He then remarks: “But why should *you* be one of these crazy people? You have before you the Torah, which spans the length of the world ... delight in your love of it!”

### *The Translation*

In this translation, I have followed the same general approach as previously. My goal was to provide a full translation of the original Hebrew text into idiomatic English prose. Thus, this work is neither an abbreviated digest nor a strictly literal translation. I deliberately left the basic structure of the original Hebrew text intact, firmly avoiding substantive deletions or additions. Headings and subheadings were added to aid the reader, along with citations of Biblical and Rabbinic sources. In addition, I have included explanatory notes, but, as before, I make no claim to comprehensive annotation.

The text contains many references to Biblical verses and Rabbinic statements, particularly Midrashim. The translation of these passages is my own. I was guided here by the classical commentaries and by extant English translations, especially for Biblical verses. In many cases where the original Hebrew text quotes just a fragment of a Biblical or Rabbinic passage, the English version includes the full passage for the benefit of the reader. In several cases where such a passage is quoted more than once in the same section of the commentary, the repeated quotation is omitted or shortened in the English translation. In quotations from *Midrash Rabbah*, the new Wagschal edition of *Midrash Rabbah* generally is followed. Citations of the *Eitz Yosef* commentary on the Midrash are drawn from this edition. In references to *Yalkut Shimoni*, the form of citation is either I:xxx or II:xxx, where I and II refer to Part I (Torah) and Part II (Prophets and Writings), respectively, and xxx is the paragraph number.

Citations of my translations of the Maggid's commentaries on Lamentations, Esther, Ruth, and Song of Songs refer to the following works:

*Voice of Weepers: Commentary of the Dubner Maggid on the Book of Lamentations* (2nd ed., Feldheim, 2007)

*Voice of Rejoicing and Salvation: Commentary of the Dubner Maggid on the Book of Esther* (Feldheim, 2005)

*Voice of the Dove: Commentary of the Dubner Maggid on the Book of Ruth* (Feldheim, 2006)

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<sup>1</sup> Introduction to the commentary on *Seder Zeraim*. The Maggid also quotes this statement, in a different vein, in his commentary on Ecclesiastes 2:3.

*A Voice Shall Sing Forth: Commentary of the Dubner Maggid on the Song of Songs*  
(Feldheim, 2008)

These works are cited using, respectively, the following abbreviations: *VoW*, *VoR&S*, *VoD*, and *VSSF*. When the Maggid presents several essays on a given passage and I want to refer to a specific one, I mention the title I gave to that essay in my translation.

### *Acknowledgments*

First of all, I express my deep thanks to my dear wife Yehudis Brachah for her encouragement throughout this project, and for providing me with the time and environment necessary to carry out the work. Her support was vital to the successful completion of the project.

Several people played an important role in preparing the work for publication. Rabbi Shmuel Globus thoughtfully edited the manuscript, and his incisive input improved both the style and accuracy of the translation. Yechiel Lewis did the formatting and layout for my first two books, thereby laying the foundation for the succeeding volumes. Rabbi David Rossoff oversaw the production and provided key guidance in the preparation of the book. I sincerely thank all these people.

I am indebted to Rav Daniel Belsky, *shlita*, Rosh Yeshivas Oholei Yaakov, Jerusalem, for his beautiful foreword and for his encouragement. I am also indebted to the many friends who encouraged me in this work. I most particularly thank my dear mentor, Rav Ben-Zion Kermaier, for his constant support and willingness to help with questions that arose during the translation. Special thanks as well to R' Ephraim Patachnik and R' Yerachmiel Goldberg for their moral support. I am most grateful to the distinguished *rabbanim* who kindly provided letters of support for my previous works; I have reprinted these letters at the beginning of this book. In addition, I am deeply grateful to the generous individuals who donated toward the production expenses (including the donors who placed the printed dedications appearing at the end of this volume, as well as all others who contributed).

The Bar-Ilan Torah Library CD-ROM was used for tracking down a number of sources and for the Hebrew text of the verses inserted in this book.

I thank my parents, Mr. and Mrs. Paul Zucker, my in-laws, Mr. and Mrs. Mathew Foner, and the rest of my family for their support over the years. I also thank the *rabbanim* and members of the Jewish communities of White Oak, Maryland, of Har Nof, Jerusalem, and of Neve Yaakov, Jerusalem, for providing a vibrant Jewish environment in which I could grow in Torah. I would like to acknowledge specifically HaRav Zvi Weber, the *mara d'asra* of the Neve Yaakov community, for an inspiring *drashah* that provided the impetus for my translation work.

*Postscript*

Completing the translation of the Dubner Maggid's commentaries on the Five Megillos is obviously a profoundly joyous event for me, and I express again my deepest thanks to the Ribbono Shel Olam for bringing me to this milestone. I feel very privileged to have made this contribution to the dissemination of the holy Maggid's teachings. Rav Shimshon Dovid Pincus, *zt"l*, remarked that when a person successfully concludes an effort, it behooves him to thank Hashem not only for granting him the merit of bringing the effort to completion but also for giving him the idea of taking on the effort in the first place. I therefore add a further note of thanks to Hashem for the inspiration to begin.

This brings us to the question of why Hashem arranged for me, a humble *baaleboss*, to be the one to translate this set of commentaries by the sainted Maggid of Dubno. Obviously I cannot presume to know the true answer to this question. But I see an inkling of an explanation in one of the commentaries in the present volume. In his commentary on Ecclesiastes 2:13, the Maggid says that in order to appreciate the good, one must have an understanding of the bad. In this vein, I feel that my involvement in the workaday world gives me a special appreciation for the Maggid's teachings. The Maggid speaks of the challenges abounding in the trenches of life, and he urges us to rise above them. I see what he is talking about because I am there.

I close with a brief Hebrew prayer expressing my thanks to the Ribbono Shel Olam for leading me to begin this project, and enabling me to complete it.

דברי חתימה של היהודי הפשוט  
המתרגם דוד מיכאל בן פסח :

אודה למקים מעפר דל ומרים אביון מאשפות  
אשר בחסדו העלני על תל תלפיות  
להשמיע למורגלים בשפת גלויות  
קול יעקב המגיד על חמשת המגילות

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