

Pranġa Anthology

Qoheleth
(c.250BCE/2008)

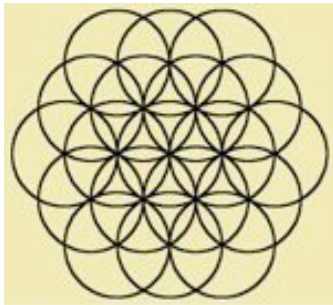
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Ecclesiastes, the Greek name for the Hebrew book of קהלת that is transliterated as *Qoheleth*, forms part of the wisdom literature of the Talmud and the Old Testament. Meaning something like 'to gather', it also evokes 'anthology', like a gathering of flowers, although it actually meant a religious gathering as in the Greek Εκκλησία. Across the ages its similarity to Buddhist notions has been noted, which leads to this rendering of Ecclesiastes in rhyming couplets based on a Buddhist understanding of life. Hence it is a gathering of the inflorescence of wisdom – *pranġa* in Sanskrit
–a *pranġa anthology*.

1

Thoughts noble and wise I give you this day,
'absurd and empty are all things', I say,
even our child, and what we're creating
is never sure, for all's ever changing;
you consider surely the earth abides,
yet sun has its clouds and seas have their tides.
Seeking sensations is oh so tiresome,
yet, though nothing's new we seek distraction,
craving diversions we never can see
how things are, were always, will always be.
These things I know from applying my mind
to the nature of being where I find
a weary world that's empty of essence,
where worry and woe comes from these lessons.
All things are products of past conditions;
ignore this insight and risk perdition;
controlling change is a life that conspires
to fill its dearth with a list of desires.
This I know from my deepest being,

*just as I know there's few others seeing.
So, I ask, 'is wisdom the pinnacle?'
No! it's but void, it makes one cynical.
As vaporous as the madness of fools
and elite comforts of knowledge's tools,
from them like all things no meaning ensues;
only pain for he who pleasure pursues.*

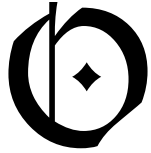


Holding this thought with mindful awareness,
I prepared myself to probe pleasantness.
Vetting it as a basis of virtue,
but neither there was any residue,
nor in life of jovial levity,
just droll delusion marked by brevity.
Even cheering wine vouched no veritas,
no consolation – only emptiness.
Then I sought solace in houses and lands,
with shade trees and fruits and water from dams;
and with results from my skillful labour,
I found the time its success to savour.
My cattle and sheep increased in numbers,
my fertile farms exceeded my neighbours',
and I was rich, could do what I fancied,
for what's done with calm mind really succeeds.
It felt good, but that's the only reward,
for wisdom taught me no thing could be stored.
And all my toiling turned, to my chagrin,

to become futile like taming wind.
Again what's wise or foolish, I wonder,
when on great men of the past I ponder;
for there is nothing new that can be done
no, not even one thing under the sun.
Of course folly remains less than wisdom,
as ignorance is to mental freedom,
but if both follow universal rules;
why seek to pursue those three precious jewels?
For worthlessness defines all attainment,
fool or wise in the end the same payment.
Ah, this thought is depressing, demeaning,
rendering life devoid of all meaning.
It made me detest what I once revered,
I saw that all would from me disappear.
Who then owns my prized creations, who knows?
My seeds, my labours caught up by time's flows.
Perhaps who comes next is uncivilized!
I felt so empty as I realized,
so I lost heart in all activities;

*even those of wise creativity
are left to others as unearned windfall,
which seems unfair, of no value at all.
All work and worry was insanity,
restless nights were for vaporous vanity.
The only response for life everyday
is 'eat, drink, work within conditions at play'.
For who to things clings is never content,
unless from control he learns to relent.
Until you see conditional knowledge
gives not peace as a simple privilege,
then constant striving whatever you do,
is chasing wind when they're taken from you.*

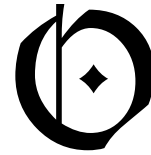




Observe and know all things have their reasons
as they cycle round respective seasons.
Know this, enjoy bliss and know you're alive,
accept birth and death as they each arrive,
plant and reap in the cycle of nature,
knowing when to kill and when to nurture.
And when to construct and when to destroy,
and when to be sad and when to enjoy.
Just live the times of grieving and dancing,
when going apart and when romancing;
embrace at some times and not at others,
sometimes gather and sometimes not bother.
At times we acquire, at others let go,
today we keep then tomorrow we throw,
one day we repair, then the next we rent,
sometimes we are silent, sometimes eloquent.
We wallow in love and then harbour hate,
is it war or peace, is it up to fate?
What a dilemma is this delusion!

For while we see each thing in seclusion,
we cannot observe that timing divine,
when all is ever sufficient and fine,
when peace is joy and contentment is bliss,
from skillful actions where nothing's amiss,
where man's laws and rules are not absolute,
only natural law is resolute.
This unchanging truth attracts our essence,
that past and future are but the present.
But that which is wicked is ever here;
we hope for justice but we live in fear.
We breathe, we die, for that's the firmament,
nothing persists, all is impermanent;
just cycling back to dust and small fractions,
thoughts of souls being empty distractions.
To enjoy the moment must be truth's core,
its all that there is, no one can know more.

4



pinning deeper about oppression

I saw who lacks clout lacks consolation;

sometimes it is so incredibly bad

that it would be much better to be dead,

or better again to never be born

and not to have known this life so forlorn.

For all our effort's directly derived

from envy of what another's contrived,

which just renders our pursuit as purile

as bottling the breeze, and just as futile.

To sit still and starve leads to resentment,

while to work just enough gives contentment;

but toil for excess its full foolishness,

producing a mess of meaninglessness,

like he who used his time like usury

and found riches return but misery.

Its all so simple yet hard to be known,

that two have more warmth and strength than alone,

that work's finished fast when done with neighbours;

*robust ropes are formed from fragile fibres.
Its so much better to be poor and wise
than rich and unable to take advice,
for the wise man always has his reward
When change comes, fools are no longer adored,
their ignorance breeds but disappointment,
for from permanence they seek enjoyment.*

5



Remain aware and with wise intentions,
spurn the ignorant masses' conventions;
reflect on your words in your awareness,
know that most are uttered in foolishness
Just as a busy mind produces dreams
so ignorance ignites more words it seems.
Maintain your resolve to act ethically
but be kind, don't follow over-strictly.
Speak only truth and harmoniously,
but if you slip, don't fret onerously,
just learn to leave what distracts your resolve,
for excess of words makes wisdom dissolve.
And with unfairness and inequity,
do not worry about it overly,
for all such things depend on conditions
never known, as there's always additions.
Wealth and power still rely on the farm,
but fools will forget and cause themselves harm.
for what can acquirers do with excess,

their wealth is their worry, what emptiness!
Kept awake by fear while the poor man snores,
so hoarding brings harm to its owner's doors.
You were born with nothing, you'll die the same,
the score with be naught come end of the game,
your huge hoarded heap is but wafting smoke,
all this is what I have seen and thus spoke.
Ignorance breeds frustration and sorrow,
for he who make demands on tomorrow,
for nature gave us joy in drink and food,
in carrying water, in chopping wood.



6

*S*o you're rich, enjoy! but don't be attached,
fret-free contentment is being detached,
but it usually works the other way,
with wealth and honor producing dismay,
about the irony of seeking more;
what's surplus to your needs makes you less sure.
Gold, status, long life and family head,
all void! Ah, its worse than being born dead;
yes, not having been born would be the best,
for from clinging things there's never a rest.
No matter how long you live before death,
in that end we will all share the same breath.
We work to survive yet always want more;
what benefit wisdom, ethical mores?
With what you have be content, with calm mind,
don't chase more, for its emptiness you'll find,
for our minds name things then no longer see
them as changing parts of all that's to be.
We're lulled to giving men each their label;

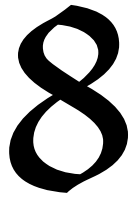
*more words, less meaning; no value at all.
Who knows what's good for a man here or there;
here fleetingly then gone, to who knows where!*



7

*A*lso I learned a good name has merit,
as does accepting death in good spirit;
to know our end heightens life's quality,
not like laughter void of vitality,
for pensive insight informs ourselves
and fashions our focus and self-resolve.
Wise men's rebukes or praise full of conceit,
which like crackling dry wood burns without heat?
I've seen corruption make wise men foolish,
condition avatars to avarice.
Just as a finish surpasses a start,
patience is better than pride for the heart;
so guard against anger, and 'good old days',
for wisdom enlightens all times, always.
It's a security better than wealth,
for it gives you life and heartens your health;
so reflect and you'll see the way things are,
conditioned contentment when all's at par.
Good die young yet there's old who are evil,

and yet slaves to ethics can be devils,
so don't be stupid or shorten your life,
the middle way banishes all such strife.
Wisdom a ruler's power will sustain,
but nevertheless, from gossip refrain,
if not you might hear of yourself with pain,
just as you criticize others when vain.
With my intellect I inquired to gain,
but wisdom requires more than just a brain;
such insight for me was all too profound,
so again I knelt on nature's firm ground
and found wisdom explains our trite trances
- mental dependence, common romances,
which as love we mistake in delusion
and so from truth cement our seclusion.
Look, I say! Just thinking is not enough,
that's acting wisdom as if it's a bluff;
it's how we behave until our worldview
sees what is real, like being born anew.



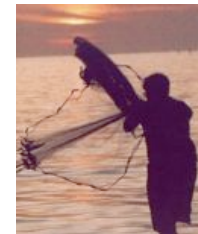
*To become brighter, softer, more refined,
that is our duty in life all the time.
So do your duty, do as should be done,
that is all that there is under the sun.
Better that rushing to blindly force change,
trying to control and all things arrange;
for hierarchies always have their day,
the wise man lives with their power and sway,
acting never too soon, never too late,
even when its so wearisome to wait.
You never know what the future endows,
and you only have limited power,
for conditions must your free-will belie,
you don't even control the day you'll die!
And there's no escape from any acts past;
when the war starts, all are trapped in the blast.
Such have I seen in moments of insight,
sometimes you think strength gives you respite,
then you discover it causes you pain*

*and you catch a glimpse of truth once again.
Base men eulogized, makes me astonished!
Of simple mind I want crimes admonished!
Oh what vanities, all is vanity!
Why not follow suit? What insanity!
Though an evil man may live a long life,
he's less content with his cares and his strife,
aging with angst not like a smooth shadow,
wary of all and fearing tomorrow.
And yet I see the ethical suffer,
and I wonder why evil men prosper.
But there's no answer, its just meaningless;
seeking purpose must always be pointless.
Just enjoy life's basic necessities,
contentment is time's honoured recipe.
When on our work reflex I reflected,
I saw that its role's to be respected,
so basic that its hard to comprehend,
so much deeper still than ever sage penned.*



*For wise ethics can't see all conditions,
 and so cannot inform all decisions;
 we are by such circumstance affected,
 even if we've religion rejected.
 Its the same for all, both evil or good;
 all die in the end to be fat worms' food.
 But while there's life there's hope, an epilogue,
 for sure a dead lion's worse than a live dog;
 at least the living know death, that's something,
 the dead are forgotten, and know nothing,
 and with them leaves their loves and their envies.
 So be content, for all's as it must be.
 Dress and groom, enjoy your lover's caress,
 in the deluded world's meaninglessness,
 being content is doing your duty,
 in all you do, do it well, with beauty.
 And more have I seen, that as no one sees all,
 we're subject to chance as well as death's thrall;
 we can't know the day so why do we fret?*

*fish don't know when they'll be caught in the net,
 and birds can't know when they'll be snared by men,
 so men can't know when bad times will claim them.
 I also saw wisdom's felicity,
 when a strong czar besieged a small city,
 where a poor wise man saved all to acclaim,
 and within the week all forgot his name.
 So I concluded that wisdom beats force,
 but if followed is quickly unendorsed,
 even though wise words are heard and some heed,
 its kings' and fools' shouts that the masses need.
 So while I know that wisdom whips weapons,
 good's long gone, when unskillful acts happen.
 Such a small foolish act sours all wise views,
 like a fly in ointment spoils its value.*



10



like a fly in ointment spoils its value.

*Thus are ignorance and folly made clear,
so when betters berate before your peers,
don't resign in a huff, stay calm 'midst fears,
for all err, even those in high places,
they miss merit and praise who disgraces.*

*I have seen reversals of position,
kings forget they depend on conditions,
perhaps it comes with industriousness,
like injury induced from carelessness
of using brute force to cut with a blunt ax.*

So prepare, be aware, never be lax!

*Nor can the snake charmer mistreat his snake,
lest he risk putting his own life at stake;
thus the wise man prepares before speaking,
fools gabble gossip ending in grieving,
so full of words that they cannot listen,
fatigued by foof and damning derision.*

*for states are rotten when leaders don't heed,
which soon tempts ministers into gross greed;
better by a balanced mind ruled over,
where all ministers are sound and sober.
The leaking dwelling of a lazy man,
simply fixed but he won't do what he can!
Laugh when feasting and be merry with wine,
don't despise money, that tool of our times,
don't criticize leaders or wealth and charm,
for they might hear and harass your own calm.*



Be generous with boons, to all be a friend,
share! share, for who knows what lurks 'round the bend;
as storm clouds bring rain, trees fall where they rest,
so you can plan your planting and harvest.
But no one knows all interrelations,
that make up life and its variations;
to act when time's ripe requires vigilance,
and awareness with mindful diligence.
To see life's light is indeed a delight,
then even long lives won't die in fright;
for all things end, they change, for all is void,
whatever's built is doomed to be destroyed.
So enjoy youth but create good karma,
that will guide life with minimal drama,
don't fret that youth is so impermanent;
youth seek wisdom, its not impertinent!
Enjoy life's pleasures in the years before
the dark moods of old age your heart implores,
when owning's a burden, and strength leaves you

like past parts of life and those whom you knew,
when houses are stale and industry's still,
when birdsong enchants then fades to a chill,
when fears surround you and life seems a lie,
all interest deserts you, and then you die.



12

Best reflect before life's links are broken,
lest words like shattered pitchers be spoken,
while yet eternal fountains well function,
and life is a balm smoothed by fine unction.
For as all does, so you will become dust,
to the world empty, it views as it must;
but the wise know cycles and change as real,
such knowledge is free to all who have zeal.
For me, I sought but self-resurrection,
that could goad me in the good direction;
always avoid other vexed versions,
unless its simple its just diversion.
They're just words in books going round and round,
distracting the mind, like an empty sound.
Now all's said, it's the best gift I'm giving,
mindful ethics, the purpose of living
for each act indubitably creates
that future in which we can recreate.

