**“A Parable: To What May the Matter be Compared” – The Popularization of the Torah**

**(Abstract)**

“And as Koheleth grew in wisdom, he continued to teach the people knowledge and listened to and tested and improved many parables” (Ecclesiastes 12:9). And he heard words of Torah and he tested words of Torah and he made ears for Torah; and you find that until Solomon arose, none could compare.

 (Shir HaShirim Rabbah 1:8)

Six parables were said of this verse and its homiletical interpretations, all sharing the same moral: Solomon engendered a revolution in Torah study. He created an aid – parables – which translated the Torah from its difficult abstract language into concrete and familiar terms. In this way, Solomon made the Torah accessible to the masses. Before, they trembled before it. It appeared to them like: a *maze*; a *thicket*; a *heavy and immovable* box; an urn full of *boiling water*; the *deep waters* of a well, and a *lost* jewel.

The parable helped the student *find* his way through the maze, *enter into* the thicket, *carry* the full box, *hold* the urn of boiling water, *draw and drink* from the well, and *find* the lost jewel. Each one of these six parables elucidates the parable’s function – to concretize and simplify the ideas hidden in the Torah for its students, presenting them from a different angle.

This was Solomon’s endeavor, the *popularization of the Torah*. Solomon gave the students of the Torah an aid – the parable; a tool which makes the Torah accessible to all via concretization, simplification and a more popular presentation. Thus Solomon opened the gates of Torah to the masses and mentored many students.

And “let not this parable be light in your eyes” – one should not demean its value due to it being simple and popular. Nor should one be concerned about the depreciation of the Torah’s status when it is made available to all. Solomon’s reward for this was receiving divine inspiration allowing him to write of three books of wisdom. And this reward – *divine inspiration* – is the reward of “all who speak words of Torah *among the masses*”; of all who make the Jewish library accessible to the public at large.