Rav Yehudah son of Rav Samuel bar Shilat said in Rav’s name: The Sages wished to hide the Book of Ecclesiastes, because its words are self-contradictory; yet why did they not hide it? Because its beginning is religious teaching and its end is religious teaching. Its beginning is religious teaching, as it is written, *What profit has a person of all the labor wherein we labor under the sun* (Ec 1:3)? And the School of Rabbi Yannai commented: *Under the sun we have none, but we have it [sc. profit] for what precedes the sun. The end thereof is religious teaching, as it is written, *Let us hear the conclusion of the matter, fear God, and keep God’s commandments: for this is the whole of a person* (Ec 12:13). What is meant by, *for this is the whole of a person?* Said Rabbi Eleazar, The entire world was created only for the sake of this [type of] person. Rabbi Abba bar Kahana says, This person is equal to the entire world. Shimon ben Azzai-others state, Shimon ben Zoma - said: The entire world was created only to be a companion to this person.

How are its words self-contradictory? It is written, *Anger is better than play* (Ec 7:3); but it is written, *I said of laughter, It is to be praised* (Ec 2:2). It is written, *Then I commended joy* (8:15); but it is written, *Of joy [I said] What does it accomplish* (Ec 2:2)?” There is no difficulty: *anger is better than laughter;* the anger which the Holy Blessing One displays to the righteous in this world is better than the laughter which the Holy Blessing laughs with the wicked in this world. *I said of laughter, it is to be praised:* that refers to the laughter which the Holy Blessing One laughs with the righteous in the coming world. *Then I commended joy:* this refers to the joy of a mitzvah. *Of joy [I said], what does it accomplish?:* this refers to joy [which is] not in connection with a mitzvah. This teaches you that the Divine Presence rests [upon] a person neither through gloom,
nor through sloth, nor through frivolity, nor through levity, nor through talk, nor through idle chatter, save through a matter of joy in connection with a mitzvah, as it is said, But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon Elisha (II K 3:15).

Rav Yehudah said: It is likewise thus for a matter of halakha. Rava said: It is likewise thus for a good dream. But that is not so, for Rav Giddal said in Rav's name: If any scholar sits before his teacher and his lips do not drip bitter dread, they shall be burnt, for it is said, his lips are as lilies [shoshanim], dropping liquid myrrh (SS 5:13) [mor‘ober]: read not mor‘ober, but mar‘ober [dropping bitterness]; read not shoshanim but sheshonin [that study]? There is no difficulty: the former applies to the teacher; the latter to the disciple. Alternatively, both refer to the teacher, yet there is no difficulty: the one means before he commences; the other, after he commences. Even as Rabbah before he commenced [his discourse] before the scholars used to say something humorous, and the scholars were cheered; after that he sat in awe and began the discourse.

The Book of Proverbs too they desired to hide, because its statements are self-contradictory. Yet why did they not hide it? They said, Did we not examine the Book of Ecclesiastes and find a reconciliation? So here too let us make search. And how are its statements self-contradictory?-It is written, Answer not a fool according to his folly (Pr 26:4); yet it is also written, Answer a fool according to his folly (Pr 26:5)? There is no difficulty: the one refers to matters of learning; the other to general matters. Even as a certain person came before Rabbi and said to him, ‘Your wife is my wife and your children are mine.’ ‘Would you like to drink a glass of wine?’ asked he. He drank and burst.

A certain man came before Rabbi Hiyya and said to him, ‘Your mother is my wife and you are my son! Would you like to drink a glass of wine?’ asked he. He drank and burst.
Matters of learning’—what is that?—As Rabban Gamaliel sat and lectured, Woman is destined to bear every day, for it is said, *the woman conceived and bears simultaneously* (Jr 31:7). But a certain disciple scoffed at him, quoting, *There is no new thing under the sun* (Ec 1:9). Come, and I will show you its equal in this world, be replied. He went forth and showed him a fowl. On another occasion Rabban Gamaliel sat and lectured, Trees are destined to yield fruit every day, for it is said, *It shall bring forth boughs and bear fruit* (Ez 17:23) — just as the boughs [exist] every day, so shall there be fruit every day. But a certain disciple scoffed at him, saying, but it is written, *There is no new thing under the sun!* Come, and I will show you its equal in this world, replied he. He went forth and showed him the caper bush. On another occasion Rabban Gamaliel sat and expounded, Israel is destined to bring forth cakes and wool robes, for it is said, *There shall be an handful of corn in the land* (Ps 72:16). But a certain disciple scoffed at him, quoting, *There is no new thing under the sun! ‘Come, and I will show you their equal in this world,’* replied he. He went forth and showed him morels and truffles; and for silk robes [he showed him] the bark of a young palm-shoot.