

Summer Reads: Ravelstein, Saul Bellow
On the gathering of stuff . . . and Rich towards God
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- On the reading of books in Summer

- Ravelstein, Saul Bellow

WIKI

Ravelstein is Saul Bellow's final novel. Published in 2000, when Bellow was eighty-five years old, it received widespread critical acclaim. It tells the tale of a friendship between two university professors and the complications that animate their erotic and intellectual attachments in the face of impending death.

SHORT GOSPEL EXCEPPT

‘Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for **one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.**

NOVEL EXCEPT

. . . once again Ravelstein was recovering from still another sickness and learning for what seemed the tenth time how to sit up. Nikki learned to operate the triangle-lift, and when Ravelstein began to improve Rosamund and I followed Nikki as he guided the wheelchair. Ravelstein with his eyes half shut dropped his head to one side. With Nikki pushing he rolled through the large apartment--meant for happier, more normal souls. But this was his kingdom, with all its possessions . . . The carpets and hangings, Lalique fixtures, pictures, books, and compact discs . . .

On these wheelchair tours of his apartment what he was feeling was stingingly apparent: What will happen to all this when I am gone? There's nothing that I can take with me into the grave. These beautiful

objects which I bought in Japan, in Europe, and New York, far and wide, with so many deliberations and discussions with experts and friends Yes, Ravelstein was going down. You might not have guessed, seeing him in his rolling chair, tucked into the plaid with a wide stooped back and the honeydew-melon head tipped far to the side, how physically impressive he was, and how little his quirks, tics, and idiosyncrasies, and recent infections counted.

Years ago, visiting my country house in New Hampshire, Ravelstein asked whether I had any proprietary feeling for the fieldstone house, the old maples and hickory trees, the gardens. The truthful answer was that though I liked them all well enough, I did not identify myself as the owner of these acres and objects . . . The rooms, the rocks, the vegetation had no hold on my vital organs.

GOSPEL

. . . ‘Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for **one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.**’ Then he told them a parable: ‘The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, “What should I do, for **I have no place to store my crops?**” Then he said, “I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And **I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.**” But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” So it is with **those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God.**’

ON BUFFERING AND COMPUTERS

In life . . . using possessions to buffer ourselves against what?

Death itself?

Possessions can only distract, consumer money and energy (iPhone 4 sales)

Where is eternal wisdom, the Gospel and similar investigations in other faiths

BUDDHIST WISDOM

Attachment is a common translation for the word trishna, which literally means thirst and is also translated as **desire, clinging, greed, craving, or lust**. Because we and the world are imperfect, impermanent, and not separate, **we are forever "clinging" to things, each other, and ourselves, in a mistaken effort at permanence . . .**

(Second part of 8-fold path) **Right aspiration is the true desire to free oneself from attachment, ignorance, and hatefulness.**

Return to Christian (Jewish) Wisdom

- Love God, Love neighbour
- Positive attachment through the lens of priority setting and ethical responsibility
- Impossible to totally refuse attachment
- Question is attach to what?

From PARISHIONER – ATTACHMENT OF A DIFFERENT SORT

I do find that (both) kindness and being in God's family (are) helpful and reassuring. I also am reminded often, that God is in control of everything and is a very personal God. He cares and is able. God is who we seek for all providence, and through others and in ways, He does this. This includes emotional, financial, parental, everything.

POPULAR CULTURE

1. You can't take stuff with you!
2. Why would you want to?

3. What does stuff do for you and others and creation?

4. To what and to whom do we attach ourselves?

LOVE GOD . . . LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR

TODAY'S GOSPEL – BE RICH, SURE, TOWARDS GOD