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Toviah ben Eliezer's Commentary on The Song of Songs:
An Annotated Translation

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion
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Referee: Dr. Isaac Jerusalemi

DIGEST

The authors of *Shir haShirim Rabbah* wrote that The Song of Songs is the best of songs, the most excellent of songs, the finest of songs. A modern scholar has commented that "no composition of comparable size has provoked and inspired such a volume and variety of comment and interpretation as the Biblical Song of Songs." The commentary before us, the *Midrash Leqah Tov*, is the work of a medieval commentator, Toviah ben Eliezer, who wrote midrashic and aggadic commentaries to the Pentateuch and the Five Scrolls. With the exception of his commentaries to the latter three books of the Pentateuch, none of these had been available to the public until nearly 800 years after their formulation, when the manuscripts were published by Solomon Buber and other scholars. The commentary to The Song of Songs was published for the first time in 1909 by Albert William Greenup.

This thesis is the translation and annotation of the *Midrash Leqah Tov 'al Shir haShirim*, written in the late 11th century, and the most recently published of R. Toviah's commentaries. As part of the annotation the Biblical references presented by Greenup in his text have been researched, and the Talmudic and midrashic sources identified. As a general statement, much of the material in the *Midrash Leqah Tov* to The Song of Songs has been paraphrased from other sources.

Analysis of R. Toviah's writing reveals a terse style that at times makes elucidation of his text a formidable task. Though he at times presents grammatical explanations of words and phrases, the commentary is wrought with syntactical difficulties. In addition Biblical verses are frequently misquoted.

As to the content of the text, R. Toviah follows the poetry of the Song and gives *derash* explanations to point out its allegorical meaning. He stresses the traditional Rabbinic themes of repentance and prayer, the merit of the patriarchs and the sages of each generation. The precarious position of the Jew in exile among the nations is a recurring topic as well, as would be expected of a medieval pietist. Though it has been debated whether R. Toviah is from Mainz or Kastoria, he focuses special attention on the martyrdom during the First Crusade (1096 C.E.) of those Jews who were his contemporaries in Mainz. The work is significant in its exhortation to its readers not to despair, that despite all the difficulties in the world, God's promises of hope and redemption for the future will yet be fulfilled.

Remembering the past:

My grandparents:

M. Abraham Fine

Minnie Fine

Samuel Smolnick

May their memories continue to be a blessing.

Honoring the future:

My son:

Avishai Burstein Fine

Who is truly a source of blessing.

May this always be so.

Acknowledgements

To have arrived at this point in my Rabbinic and lifelong education is a great accomplishment. There have been times of elation and times of despair, times of doubt and times of confidence. As I look back on the work of this thesis I feel the need to acknowledge three people who as *madrikhim* have guided and propelled me.

The first is Hannah Shenhar. When I arrived in Israel some five years ago, I was entering a new world of language and scholarship. With Hannah's never ending patience and love of the Hebrew language I began to develop my skills in *lashon ha-kodesh*. With her encouragement, an otherwise insurmountable task was realized.

The second is Dr. Isaac Jerusalmi. As a scholar and teacher he has taught me the value of precision and of the vast beauty of Hebrew and Aramaic. As a *metargem* he has shown me the art that goes beyond translation, how mastery of nuance produces a work that accents the meaning intended by its writer. He is reminiscent of the attributes referred to in the Targum (5:13): Producing fine points and reasons like a garden full of spices. Through Dr. Jerusalmi I have come to appreciate the subtleties and beauty of language, and to enjoy the study of it for its own sake.

The third is my wife, Beth. Her patience and support have sustained me during my tenure at HUC. It is truly an act of love for her to have gone from listening to the Hebrew spoken in the streets of Jerusalem to that written in medieval commentaries. To translate freely from the Song of Songs (5:16): *She is my beloved and she is my friend.*

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Introduction

Proem

In *Mishnah Yada'im* (3:5) Rabbi Akiva is quoted: "All of the world is not as worthy as the day that *Shir haShirim* was given to Israel, for all the *Ketuvim* are holy and *Shir haShirim* is the holy of holies."

The study of *Shir HaShirim* has been an intriguing topic for Jewish commentators. Though a beautiful love poem, the text contains lexicographic and interpretive difficulties. Within it are large numbers of *hapax legomena*. In addition, there are explicit sexual references which must be explained so that the reader will not assume the Song of Songs to be licentious. With this in mind, the rabbinic commentators have portrayed it as an allegory of the relationship between God and Israel. This work, the *Midrash Legah Tov*, is an example of the use of *derash* and language to explain the hinted allegorical meaning of the text.

The Author

Ki legah tov natati lakhem (Proverbs 4:2), "Behold, I give you good instruction". Thus *Midrash Legah Tov*, written by Toviah ben Eliezer begins. In the introduction to his commentary to *Shir haShirim* he elaborates on "good" in the context of wine, since there are three verses within the scroll connecting "wine" with "good". This opening is his signature, with the aforementioned verse from Proverbs

appearing in full or part (*Qī tov, tov*) in the beginning of his commentary to the Torah, the weekly *parashot* and the *Megillot*.

It has been difficult to determine who Toviah ben Eliezer was and where he lived. The dates of his birth and death are unknown to modern scholars, as they were not included in any of his works. Much of what is known about R. Toviah has been gleaned from other works that mention the *Legah Tov* or from comments intrinsic to the work. Even the topic of his native land has been debated by scholars. Some scholars, most notably Zunz¹, Rapoport², Azulai³, and Conforte⁴, place Toviah in Mainz, a city in Western Germany. This conclusion is based on several facts. The first is the following passage in Parashat Emor:

"I am writing to serve as a memorial to the action done by the martyrs of the Congregation of Mainz who handed themselves, their wives, their sons and their daughters over on the first day of Shavuot, and were slaughtered together for the sanctification of the name of the God of Israel, in the year 4856 (1096) from the creation of the world"⁵

The second argument used by Rapoport is based on the use of German words. The word *mantil* is used by Toviah.

¹Zunz, pp. 293 *et seq.*, quoted in Buber

²Rapoport, pp. 122-123, note 33, quoted in Buber

³*Shem ha-Gedolim*

⁴*Qore ha-Dorot*, p. 8b, cited by Buber.

⁵*Legah Tov* to Leviticus 22:33

Rapoport, as quoted by Buber⁶, states that this is a German word, in use at the time of his research in the late 19th century, bolstering the claim that R. Toviah's origin's are German.

Third, Rapoport places R. Toviah in Mainz because of his name R. Toviah ben Eliezer⁷. Rapoport reasoned that Toviah was the grandson of Rabbi Isaac HaGadol, who had a son Eliezer. Since Isaac HaGadol lived in Mainz, it followed that R. Eliezer and R. Toviah were from Mainz as well.

Additionally, Toviah mentions a black stone in Mecca at which the Moslems worship. (*Midrash Legah Tov*, Numbers 11:29) Those who place Toviah in Germany have concluded that toward the end of his life he settled in the land of Israel and there learned of the practices of the Moslems.

Buber refutes the conclusions made by previous authors and determines that Toviah is from Kastoria, in Bulgaria. Buber's reasoning takes several directions. The first is the name of R. Toviah's father, R. Eliezer. This Rabbi Eliezer has been assumed to have been Eliezer ben Isaac HaGadol, one of Rashi's teachers⁸, of the Avun family of Worms. There was a well known scholar in Mainz in the 11th

⁶In Buber's introduction to *Legah Tov* on the Torah

⁷Note acrostic spelling of Toviah ben Eliezer, *hazak*, at the beginning of his commentary to the Torah

⁸Conforte, p. 8b, cited by Buber.

century known as Isaac HaGadol, whose son's name was Eliezer. Buber's contention is that there may have been many sages with the same name and we cannot use the mention of R. Eliezer as proof of lineage nor of R. Toviah's living in Mainz. Additionally, Buber examined the word *mantil* and found it to be common to several "Latin" languages, and in each of them it denoted a type of cloak or garment. Buber concludes that R. Toviah had contact with speakers of Roman languages, but that this was insufficient for determining his country of residence.

What is of central importance to Buber are references made by Judah Leon Mosconi, the Greek author of a supercommentary to Ibn Ezra's commentary to the Torah. In it he makes reference to a countryman, R. Toviah ben Eliezer and of his midrash on the Torah. He describes the work of a R. Meir and a R. Toviah, each of whom have commentaries which use their name. The verses of R. Meir begin with a reference to *or* (light) and the verses of R. Toviah begin with a reference to *tov* (good). Furthermore, within this manuscript⁹ are references to the place Kastoria, which Buber deduces to be Kastoria, in Bulgaria. Buber also uses references to the Karaites and refutations of their thought as evidence that R. Toviah was from a place where Karaites existed, which would exclude the region of Mainz. In

⁹See Berliner: *Magazin für die Wissenschafts des Judenthums*, Volume 4, 1877.

addition, the many references to Moslems and to the black stone in Mecca affirm Buber's conclusion that R. Toviah was from Greece, a place that afforded him contact with the Moslem world. Within the commentary to The Song of Songs (6:9) R. Toviah mentions the Kumans and the Pechenegs. These were rival Turkic peoples in Byzantium during the late 11th century, when R. Toviah wrote this commentary.

The commentary to the Song of Songs was written in the year 1096, indicated by his description in verse 1:3 ("Therefore do maidens love you") of the events occurring in German communities.

And maidens without number¹⁰ because they can observe the persistent declaration of the unity of God by the righteous who are killed for *qedushat hashem*, they come back unwillingly and acknowledge your great name as has been done in our time among Ashkenazic communities in the year 4856 (1096 C.E.) When the people of Seir (Rome) attempted to go to the Land of Israel they attacked the communities and the inhabitants were slaughtered for *qedushat hashem*.

Sources and Style

There are numerous sources which are quoted in *Leqah Tov*. Many are cited, especially the biblical verses which are preceded by the phrase *shene'emar* or *amru* (frequently abbreviated). Just the same there are a large number of verses that are misquoted, with words added to or missing from verses, or with the word order transposed. This is particularly noticeable with prooftexts from Ezekiel.

¹⁰ Song of Songs 6:8

Frequently gender or pronominal suffixes of prooftexts are changed in order to use verses taken out of context. R. Toviah's terse style often clouds the elucidation intended by the author. At times syntax does not follow the grammatical rules of Hebrew grammar and as a result, a clear translation of this work has been an elusive process.

R. Toviah frequently quotes *Abba Mari* as a sage who has interpreted passages of *The Song of Songs*. Buber has considered this person to be R. Toviah's father, that is Rabbi Eliezer¹¹. In Feinberg's research on the *Midrash Legah Tov* to *Kohélet*, he mentions Isaak ben Abba Mari of Marseille¹², who lived in the late 12th century, and can therefore be assumed to be the son of the Abba Mari mentioned by R. Toviah.

Rabbinic sources used by the author of this commentary include the *Targum*, both Talmuds, *Midrash Rabbah*, *Midrash Shir haShirim*¹³, *Pesikta Rabbati* and *Midrash Zuta*. In his extraction of materials from these sources he often paraphrases their comments, at times even restating their meaning, yet retains their vocabulary. Those familiar with the sources quoted would be able to follow his associations

¹¹In Buber's introduction to the *Legah Tov*, pp. 15-18.

¹²*Tobia ben Elieser's Commentar zu Koheleth*, p. 6.

¹³Published by Greenhut, 1897.

and have few problems reconstructing the *midrashim* from his abbreviations.

Use of the *Midrash Legah Tov* by Others

The *Midrash Legah Tov* to the Torah has been an oft-quoted commentary, though known by some scholars as *Pesikta Zutarta*, since the original manuscript (covering the latter three books of the Torah) lacked a title when discovered and the letters *peh.samekh'* preceded each expounded verse. The Torah commentary was used by Rashi's students, Rabbenu Tam, the Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, the Rosh, and numerous others. The *Yalkut Shimeoni* also has passages unique to the *Legah Tov*. The *Midrash Legah Tov 'al Shir haShirim* is mentioned by Buber in his introduction to the commentary on the Torah (1884) and extracts were first published by Jellenik in 1855.

Albert William Greenup, of the University of London, published this commentary to The Song of Songs in 1909, following his publication of Toviah ben Eliezer's commentary to *Eichah* in 1908. As Greenup notes in his foreword to this work, with the printing of this work all of the extant works of Toviah ben Eliezer are now available for the student. This commentary was one of twelve texts brought to public light by Greenup between 1908 and 1912. The source of the documents ranged from manuscript collections in the Vatican to libraries in Europe, including the British Museum, Canterbury and Munich. Among the books and articles

published are the *Malkhut haMakhiri* on the latter Prophets, Kimhi's Commentary on Psalms, *Iggereth Hamudot* of Elijah Hayyim ben Benjamin of Genazzano, and an astrological text, *Sefer Ha-levanah*.

As to modern use of the *Leqah Tov* on the Song of Songs, only Zlotowitz, in his 1977 allegorical translation of the Song includes several passages from the *Midrash Leqah Tov*. Works prior to these which contain passages unique to the *Leqah Tov* may have received them orally.

Themes of the Commentary

There are numerous themes that the author elaborates in his treatment of *Shir haShirim*. As a traditional rabbinic thinker, his concern is not with philosophy, as was Sforno, Maimonides and other scholars, nor with esoteric topics, but with elucidating the meaning of the text itself. This focus contributes to the *Midrash Leqah Tov's* unique style. Unlike the Targum or Ibn Ezra's commentary which follows Jewish religious history from revelation to redemption, this commentary, as is characteristic of R. Toviah, follows the progression of the text. It is part aggadah, part exegesis, yet most prominently concerned with allegorical, *derash* interpretation. As mentioned above, the *Midrash Leqah Tov* takes material from *Midrash Rabbah* as well as the *Midrash Zuta*, both Talmuds and the Targum. R. Toviah follows their general approach of Israel as the bride (4:10), the dove

(2:14) the vineyard (2:15), fruit (2:13) or flower (2:2) in relation to God. In this way the text becomes a symbol of the relationship between God and Israel and therefore the mundane human references are eliminated. As is written in the text:

His crown is finest gold. Scripture speaks of things which are understood by the human ear, such as a glorifies king, a valiant man, pleasing to look at, and attractive beyond measure [all told on account of God's actions.] (5:10)

Gazing from the windows, Scripture speaks in the language of humans who gaze and peer. (2:9)

The *midrashim* presented in the *Leqah Tov* follow the conversation of *Shir haShirim*, interpreting themes as they appear, rather than following a configuration that is laid onto the text, as does the chronological progression of the Targum. Of special concern to R. Toviah are the events of his time, though his commentary focuses on many themes, introduced by topic below.

Martyrdom

Psalm 44:23 (*It is for your sake that we are slain all day long, that we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered*), is quoted by R. Toviah five times throughout the midrash. [In verses 1:3, 1:15, 2:7, 4:9, 5:10.] This motif is stressed in the commentary to verse 5:7, as the author quotes from Daniel:

Some of the knowledgeable will fall¹⁴ by the sword and by flame¹⁵.

This same topic appears in the commentary to verse 1:3, wherein R. Toviah describes the martyrdom of his contemporaries in Mainz. Just the same, R. Toviah wants to remind the reader that it is those who are obeying God's commandments and maintaining the traditions of old that are being killed, not the deniers of God.

I would lead you, I would bring you. We are holding on to our ancestor's customs and we are being slaughtered for professing Your unity. (8:2)

Israel Among the Nations

Those verses in The Song of Songs which speak of a particular member of the flock or grove (e.g. *As a lily among the thorns*, 2:2; *Only one is my dove*, 6:9) lead to the allegorical presentation of Israel among the nations. R. Toviah describes the position of Israel vis-a-vis the nations of the world:

As a lily among the thorns. Just as the lily is beautiful among the thorns and everybody recognizes a moist lily, so is Israel recognized among the nations and is set apart from all their defilements and their impurities as a lily among the thorns.

Despite this approach of chosenness, of being set apart by God, the Jewish reader in the late 11th century would find

¹⁴Daniel 11:35

¹⁵ibid, 11:33

the time of the exile as a period of suffering. This is reflected in R. Toviah's commentary to verse 5:7:

The watchmen who go about the city found me, these are the nations of the world, since they strike, punish and wound Israel.

The watchmen of the walls stripped away my mantle, these are the kingdoms amongst whom Israel lives.

As a means of reconciling this suffering despite chosenness, the author presents the nations: not as hateful toward Israel, but rather as desirous of that which Israel has.

Jealousy as cruel as Sheol (8:6). The jealousy of the nations of the world who envy us because we declare the unity of Your holy name and so they hate us.

In this way the suffering inflicted by the nations is not punishment for sins, but a reward for the faith of pious Jews.

Theodicy

In the context of the events occurring in the Jewish communities of his time Toviah speaks of the difficulty of reconciling theodicy, i.e. Why do bad things happen to good people? The glimmer of hope had become increasingly dimmer for the Jew during the Crusader period and therefore the theophanic events of religious history could offer some hope. The question then was two-fold: One, Why are we suffering so, and two, when is this going to end? The answer, as R. Toviah saw it, was contained in the text. His

answer is that all that occurs in the world is part of God's divine plan. The following citation illustrates this:

They terrorize the vineyards. The vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the people Israel for they are terrorized in each and every generation. (2:15)

This verse demonstrates that it is God's intention that this harassment occur, that similar to the word of the prophet Isaiah¹⁶, God's acts through the nations of the world. Similarly:

God's rod of chastisement comes down only upon men whose hearts are soft like a lily¹⁷. Rabbi Eliezer said this can be compared to an orchard owner who only prunes [the tree] that is strong enough, thus God does not test the wicked.

Still the question of duration remained. This was considered by R. Toviah who responded implicitly within the *Legah Tov* (1:4, 1:5, 3:1, 3:2, 5:6) that there is no inferring the date of the end of days, for many times the signs have all appeared and yet the end still extends. As the commentary to verse 6:10 reads:

Who is she that shines like the dawn? Just as everyone waits for the dawn, so all Israel waits for the Messianic King. And just as the dawn comes after the darkness, so for Israel's deliverance, which comes after the troubles of exile.

¹⁶ see Isaiah 10:5

¹⁷ *Shir haShirim Rabbah*

Redemption

Despite the troubles of the European Community during this era, which had frequently been interpreted as messianic pangs, hope was essential. In order to sustain the world view which posited that God was supreme and controlling history, the Rabbi had to present evidence that redemption would ultimately occur. As mentioned above, the exile seemed to be continuing indefinitely. R. Toviah placed great emphasis on the past as a sign for the redemption of the future. The promises fulfilled by God in the past were an indication that the promises for the future were ultimately to be realized. Similarly, R. Toviah views the deliverances of the past as giving hope for the future. Just as the prayers of the past (e. g. at the departure from Egypt, at the Sea) were answered by God, so too, in the future will the prayers of those in trouble be answered. This parallel between the past and the future is explicitly called out by R. Toviah, especially in his commentary to the first chapter of *Shir haShirim*:

I have likened you, my beloved. Come and see in the exodus from Egypt they were bought out by Moses and Aaron but in the future it will be by Elijah and the Messianic King.

Thus, to a mare in Pharaoh's chariot's I have likened you my darling means I have likened this future redemption to the redemption of Egypt.

And from the sixth chapter of the Song:

For all that God intends to do is as if He had done it already, as in: *These are the promises - I will keep them without fail*¹⁸.

Also:

Just as in Egypt, when you were under the yoke of slavery, and I made them a mighty host, and brought you up from their midst, so will I deliver you from among the nations. (8:5)

Merit of the Patriarchs and the Righteous

The merit of the patriarchs was vital in establishing the covenant with God. By maintaining the link with them the Medieval Jew would follow the footsteps of the flock. (1:8). There are numerous references to the patriarchs, to their scent which wafted throughout the generations. (5:6) R. Toviah puns with the word *amana* (4:8), declaring that Abraham was *Rosh Amana*, the foremost of faith. As he states in verse 6:9:

God did not choose any nation or tongue but Israel, the offspring of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Paralleling these ancestors are the righteous who are in every generation. R. Toviah creates a parable wherein God exhibited a model of the future to come and showed it to the righteous:

"You are beautiful, my darling, Turn your eyes away from me". This is comparable to a king who invited guests and embroidered all kinds of festive

¹⁸ Isaiah 42:16

dishes on the tablecloth. When the guests saw them they were reassured. Thus, God started by exhibiting a model of the future to come, and showed it to the righteous. (6:5)

The desire is for all people to become righteous (4:2), since the righteous provide merit (the allegorical meaning of "shade" in 1:17) to the generation in which they live and are rewarded both in this world and the world to come. Their value is without measure, they are irreplaceable:

Just as the cedar and the date palm, when pruned, do not grow back, so for the righteous ones, when dead cannot be replaced. (1:17)

Sages

For R. Toviah the path to redemption is through good actions and repentance. The one who could lead the community down this path is the Torah scholar, the sage. The sage could feed the community what it lacked - Torah. Many of the attributes of the sage are discussed in detail. Sages are described as ugly on the outside, yet pleasant on the inside, due to the fear of God which is in their hearts. (1:5). Their role is to rebuke and then comfort. This stature and function in the community requires strength. Since strength is an attribute that can be described metaphorically, many of the explicit sexual or physical references in *Shir haShirim* are explained. This is apparent in the verses below:

My breasts are like towers, the sages of a generation are like breasts which nurse an infant, thus teaching Israel the ways of life like these towers which stand before the enemies. Thus the sages of Israel defend their generation. (8:10)

The legs of a sage are marble pillars, because he will have strength at judgement day because he has toiled in Torah. (5:15)

God's Love for Israel

The canonization of the love song contained in The Song of Songs presented a challenge that is retained in the Mishnah¹⁹. It is written explicitly in the Talmud that anyone who trills his voice in chanting the Song of Songs in the banquet halls and treats it as a secular song has no share in the world to come²⁰. It is clear that by this time the allegorical meaning of the book had been accepted. The lovers portrayed in the scroll are interpreted to be God and His beloved Israel. Though their mutual love and attraction is written in Song of Songs, Israel's relationship to God is depicted in this commentary as one of subservience, who asks for favors, while it is God's love for Israel that the *Midrash Leqah Tov* accentuates. The most fitting verse is 2:7, about which R. Toviah writes:

¹⁹ *Yada'im* 3:5

²⁰ *Sanhedrin* 101a

The love, until it please! This is the love with which God loved Israel, as it is said: I have loved you, said the Lord²¹.

Repentance

Repentance is briefly defined by Schechter in his Aspects of Rabbinic Theology (1961) as the means to reconciliation. R. Toviah describes his own generation as wretched (2:5) and in need of healing. Repentance is the means toward the end of reconciliation with God, and so the author of the *Legah Tov* encourages his listeners to repent, which is God's desire. (5:2 - 5:4). The commentary contains several illustrations of the reasons for repentance:

The Holy One longs after Israel's prayer and leads them to difficult times in order to bring them back to goodness, therefore it is said: *For your voice is sweet and your countenance comely.* (2:14)

I sought the one I love, I sought to return in repentance, perhaps I will be saved from the [foreign] nations. (3:1)

Israel will open the gate of repentance. And there are gates for every good action of Torah, of prayer of righteousness, of fair judgement and of the love of peace. (7:14, from *Midrash Zuta*)

Overall Significance

The work of the commentator is to give the otherwise unapparent meaning of a particular word or verse. This interpretation varies with the commentator and his theology. It includes the *peshat*/contextual, the *derash*/expositional, *remez*/the hinted, and the *sod*/the secret. Most often the

²¹Malachi 1:32

meanings given only contribute to the understanding of that particular word or phrase. The *Midrash Leqah Tov 'al Shir haShirim* is noteworthy in its dynamic interpretation. It presents the text as God's blueprint for the future. The vast majority of verses are presented as God's actions of the past and indications of God's promises for the future. One of the major tasks of the spiritual leader is to offer hope through strong religious faith. R. Toviah accomplishes this via his demonstration of the Song of Songs as the allegorical love poem of faithful lovers, God and the Jews. God's promises will come to fruition provided the Jews follow the mitzvot, repent, and remain steadfast despite the tempests around them.

Prologue*SHIR HASHIRIM*

It is written in the Bible: *Your mouth is like choicest wine, let it flow to my beloved as new wine*¹. Toviah ben Eliezer asked: "In the *Song of Songs*, what prompted Solomon, son of David, King of Israel to speak in the following three verses of *good* in the context of *wine*?"

First: *For your love is more delightful than wine*², second; *How much more delightful your love than wine*³, and third; *Your mouth is like choicest wine*⁴.

Despite the levity of wine, it is mentioned in the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings:

In the Torah, as in: *He drank of the wine and became drunk and he uncovered himself*⁵. In the Prophets it is written: *Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine*⁶, while in the Writings it is said: *Those whom wine keeps til the small hours, those who gather to drain the cups*⁷.

¹ *Song of Songs* 7:10

² *Song of Songs* 1:2

³ *Song of Songs* 4:10

⁴ *Song of Songs* 7:10

⁵ *Genesis* 9:21

⁶ *Isaiah* 5:22

⁷ *Proverbs* 23:30

We also find the praise of wine in the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings.

In the Torah, it was fit for pouring on the altar, as it is said: *You shall offer a quarter hin of wine*⁸, and again in the matter of the Fourth Year of the Vineyard⁹, as it is said: *And the fruit shall be set aside for jubilation before the Lord*¹⁰.

In the Prophets it is written: *Which gladdens God and people*¹¹, and *Producing young women like new wine*¹².

And in the Writings it is written: *Wine cheers a person's heart*¹³, and *Eat, O friends. Drink my wine and my milk*¹⁴, and *Drink your wine with a rejoicing heart*¹⁵.

This teaches that these verses were spoken only for later exposition, in order to grant a good reward to those who would expound them. Therefore, these three verses in the Song of Songs, of which Solomon spoke of good in the

⁸Numbers 15:5

⁹Maaser Shení 5:1

¹⁰Leviticus 19:24

¹¹Judges 9:13

¹²Zechariah 9:17

¹³Psalms 104:15

¹⁴Song of Songs 5:1

¹⁵Ecclesiastes 9:7

context of wine correspond to the three which are called good.

Both the name of the King, King of kings, the Holy One, the Torah and even Israel have been called by seventy names.¹⁶

The Holy One is called good as it is said: *Praise the Lord, for He is good, His steadfast love is eternal*¹⁷, and it says: *For you O Lord are good and forgiving*¹⁸, and so He is called by seventy names of praise. Corresponding to them Solomon in his wisdom said, "*For your love is more delightful than wine*", wine amounting to seventy. Eil, Elohim, One, Adonai, Lord, Mighty, I am, Bold, Truth, Long-suffering, The Last, Who does not hand over His Kingdom to another, Faith, A Cluster of Henna, Blessed, Creator, Great, Redeemer, Valiant One, Banner, All-Knowing, Eternal, Mindful, Living One, Benevolent, Gracious, Searcher, Wise, Good, Pure-sighted, Upright, Hidden Dweller, Honor, King, Hidden One, Awe-inspiring, Exalted, Victor, Preserver of lovingkindness, Forgiver of sin, Forgiver of iniquity, Forgiver of transgression, Avenger, Keeper, Eternal, existing before eternity, Pardoner, Raiser from the dust, Strength, Redeemer, Rock, The Righteous One, Gazelle, Lord

¹⁶See Schechter, *Agadat Shir haShirim*, pp. 50-51.

¹⁷Psalms 106:1

¹⁸Psalms 86:5

of Hosts, Holy One, Zealous One, Immanent, Merciful, Most High, First, Who did not receive His Kingdom from another, Abundant in lovingkindness, Guardian, Judge, Sovereignty, *Shaddai*, Dwelling Eternally, Blameless, Powerful. These are the seventy names for God.

Israel, too were called by seventy names of endearment: Wife of Youth, Harts of righteousness, Chiefs, Brethren, Beloved, Nation, Mother, *Ephraim*, Humanity, Mighty, Noble, Walnut, Bundle, Awesome, Children, Children of the living God, First-born, Chosen, Daughter, Pure, His son, Espoused, Great nation, Locked garden, Sealed spring, Vine, Overburdened, Desolate, Holy offspring, Sages, The Good Ones, Precious ones, Only Ones, Israel, *Yeshurun*, Jacob, Jews, Joseph, Child, Friends, Bride, Shoot, Vineyard, Priests, Servants, Kings, Sealed well, Inheritance, Noble ones, Attractive, Youth, Plant, Treasure, Superior ones, Humble, Witness, People, Slaves, Hebrews, Peoples, Redeemed, Ransomed, Flock, Righteous, Holy Ones, Acquired, Multitude, Tribes of God, Perfect Ones.

And God gave them the Torah, which is known by seventy names: Truth, Light, the Path of life, Lovely Doe, Pleasant Words, Fidelity, Pure, Covenant, Understanding, Strength, Honey, Knowledge, Law, The Eternal Path, Gold, Refined, Wisdom, Statute, Milk, Life, Purity, Good, Precious, Wine, Beauty, Graceful Woman, Inheritance, Upright, Fear, Honor, Silver, A good instruction, Graceful pendant, Bread, Sweet,

Counsel of Water, Restorer of the soul, Advocate, Enlightening the eyes, Rejoicing the heart, Judgement, Upright, Rebuttal, Making the simple wise, Commandment, Flowing Honey, Desirable, Pleasing, Leader, Foundation, Prudence, Testimony, Necklace, Wealth, Remembered Ones, Refined Gold, Pearls, Glory, Righteousness, Possession, Beginning, Oil, Third, Perfect, Councils, Wisdom, Torah, Testimony, corresponding to the seventy names of God.

It says: *For your love is more delightful than wine*¹⁹, as if to say that Your lovingkindness on our behalf is better than wine, because just as Your name is, so is Your praise, and corresponding to the seventy names of Israel it says: *How much more delightful Your name than wine*²⁰, because out of Your love You have been called by seventy names. Corresponding to the seventy names of the Torah it says: *Your mouth like choicest wine*²¹, since the Torah is *sweeter than honey, than the drippings of the comb*²² when it is expounded properly. *Let it flow gently to my beloved as new wine.* These are the righteous who will go to their graves while their souls go to their Creator because of their upright deeds. Thus they trust that their reward is

¹⁹ *Song of Songs 1:2*

²⁰ *Song of Songs 4:10*

²¹ *Song of Songs 7:10*

²² *Psalms 19:11*

prepared for them, as it is said: *Your righteousness shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard*²³, and it says: *For God has already accepted your works*²⁴. Gliding over the lips of sleepers, when Israel recites well-reasoned commentaries they cause the lips [of the deceased teachers] to move in the grave²⁵, as David, the King of Israel says: *I will dwell in Thy Tent forever*²⁶. Can a person possibly live in two worlds? Rather, David said thus, "Master of the world, when Israel sings Psalms it is as if I live forever".

Then Solomon his son arose in his place and composed three scrolls with the [guidance of] the spirit of holiness; Proverbs, The Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes.

Our rabbis of blessed memory said that these three scrolls were written in his old age. They said that they correspond to the three days that the world made use of the light of the *shekhina*, when the lights had not yet been created. Corresponding to these three scrolls he merited [to reach] three stages, which no one beside him merited: First, Solomon made silver as plentiful in Jerusalem as

²³ Isaiah 58:8

²⁴ Ecclesiastes 9:7

²⁵ *Shir haShirim Rabbah*, Sanhedrin 90b, Yevamot 96b-97a

²⁶ Psalms 61:5

stones²⁷, and it is written: *Silver did not count for anything in Solomon's days*²⁸. Second, *Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all those in the East*²⁹. Third, *Then Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord as King*³⁰.

How did he merit these three stages? Because he had asked for wisdom, as it is said: *Grant your servant an understanding mind*³¹.

Our rabbis made a comparison: To what is this similar? To someone³² to whom a king said: "Ask what I can give you." The man was bright and wise. He thought: "If I ask for silver and gold he will give it to me. So I will ask only for his daughter. If he gives me his daughter, he will also give me all the wealth which is in the treasury"³³.

Thus, Solomon asked only for wisdom, since He gave him wisdom, he merited through it all the bounty of the world. Therefore it says: *Acquire wisdom, acquire understanding*³⁴,

²⁷ I Kings 10:27

²⁸ *ibid*, 10:21

²⁹ *ibid*, 5:10

³⁰ I Chronicles 29:23

³¹ I Kings 3:9

³² *adam*, metathesis in typography

³³ the word *mitokh* misspelled as *matoq*

³⁴ Proverbs 4:5

the beginning of wisdom is to acquire wisdom³⁵, namely the wisdom of the Torah, and anyone who is wise in Torah expresses his wisdom only by speaking it.

Thus Rabbi Tanhuma, the son of Rabbi Abba expounded, a wise mind will make the mouth discerning. When a sage enters a city, who proclaims his wisdom? His mouth. This is comparable to a sealed cask, about which no one knows what is inside. Once it has been opened everyone knows what is inside. So, too, for Solomon, even though it is said about him that *he was wiser than all men*³⁶, we did not know what kind of wisdom he possessed until the spirit of holiness dwelt upon him, and he opened his mouth and from his lips he added this doctrine to the teaching of Torah by adding three scrolls: Proverbs, The Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes.

His father David wrote³⁷: *As an ancient proverb said*³⁸, while Solomon wrote [the book of] *Proverbs*.

David wrote: *A song of praise*, while Solomon wrote: *The Song of Songs*.

³⁵ *ibid*, 4:7

³⁶ *I Kings* 5:11

³⁷ literally "said"

³⁸ *I Samuel* 24:13, 24:14 in JPS

David wrote: *Humanity is futility*³⁹, while Solomon wrote: *Utter futility, all is futility*⁴⁰.

David reigned forty years and Solomon reigned forty years, therefore it is said: *Your sons will succeed your fathers*⁴¹.

³⁹ Psalms 62:10

⁴⁰ Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12:8

⁴¹ Psalms 45:17

CHAPTER 1

1.) *SHIR HASHIRIM*. Why was it said in the plural? Because it includes many songs that preceded it and followed it. For in the Song of the Sea, God's praise is written as *Who is like You, O Lord, among the celestials*¹ You will similarly find in the Song of Deborah and Barak: *I will sing, will sing to the Lord*². In the Song of Isaiah³ the Prophet you will find God's praise and praise of Israel similar to: *You my beloved are handsome, Beautiful indeed!*⁴; *Ah, you are fair, my darling*⁵, *Like a lily among thorns so is my darling [among the maidens.] Like an apple tree among trees of the forest, so is my beloved [among the youths.]*⁶

Another interpretation: *SHIR HASHIRIM*. Why was it said in the plural? Because in all the Songs you will find that their words are about one topic, whereas this one includes transgressions, situations and miracles.

The transgressions which it utters are about the Exodus from Egypt as in *I have likened you, my darling, To a mare*

¹Exodus 15:11

²Judges 5:3

³Isaiah 5:1 Let me sing for my beloved, a song of my lover about his vineyard.

⁴Song of Songs 1:16

⁵Song of Songs 1:15

⁶Song of Songs 2:2-3

in Pharaoh's chariots⁷. Also about the giving of the Torah as in: Let him give me of the kisses of his mouth! For your love is more delightful than wine.⁸ He also says: For in accordance with these commandments I make a covenant with you⁹.

Situations as in: I was asleep but my heart was wakeful¹⁰ as well as Turn back, turn back, O maid of Shulem!¹¹ which refers to the exile.

Miracles as in the passage: Hurry, my beloved, swift as a gazelle or a young stag¹² which is the time of the redemption. That is why it is called The Song of Songs.

A single song excludes two (songss). Here there are three since it is said: A Song of Ascents. Of Solomon.¹³ It is written as well: A Psalm of David. A song for the dedication of the House¹⁴. He informs us that Solomon dedicated the Temple but that it was named after his father

⁷Song of Songs 1:9

⁸Song of Songs 1:2

⁹Exodus 34:27

¹⁰Song of Songs 5:2

¹¹Song of Songs 7:1

¹²Song of Songs 8:14

¹³Psalm 127:1 (Shir HaMaalot, written as a s'mihut)

¹⁴Psalm 30:1 (Mizmor Shir, also written as a s'mihut)

David since he had laid its foundation. And so it is called here the *Song of Songs*, the most lofty of all the Songs, because there are in it the matters of Torah and praise of God the Holy One and of Israel and the gathering of the exiles. Abba Mari, of blessed memory, interpreted *Shir HaShirim* as a song that can be derived from the Five Books of the Torah. Thus he quoted: *He composed three thousand proverbs, and his songs numbered one thousand and five*¹⁵ The five because he brought them forth from the five books of the Torah and the thousand because he taught Israel.¹⁶

BY SOLOMON. By the ~~One~~² who composed it, the One to whom peace belongs¹⁷ for it is written *The words of Koheleth son of David, king in Jerusalem*¹⁸. It is also written: *The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel*.¹⁹ But here the name of his father is not mentioned, but (only) King of Israel. From this, our sages of blessed memory said that every mention here in *Shir HaShirim* of *Shlomo* is holy with the exception of: *There is Solomon's couch*²⁰. And

¹⁵I Kings 5:12. The "He" referred to is Solomon, having been divinely endowed with wisdom, discernment and understanding. (I Kings 5:9)

¹⁶Here Tobiah ben Eliezer is punning with the root aleph.lamed.peh.

¹⁷See also *Shevuot* 35b

¹⁸*Ecclesiastes* 1:1

¹⁹*Proverbs* 1:1

²⁰*Song of Songs* 3:7

observe that because Solomon had chosen wisdom for himself, the spirit of holiness dwelt on him.

From this Rabbi Pinhas ben Yair said that Torah leads to good deeds. Likewise he would quote: Study them and observe them faithfully²¹.

Good deeds lead to zeal as it is said: *He executed the Lord's judgements and His decisions for Israel*²².

Zeal leads to alertness as indicated in the verse: *He continued to instruct the people. He listened to and tested the soundness of many maxims.*²³

Alertness leads to cleanliness as it is written: *When he (the priest) has finished purging the Shrine*²⁴. The alertness of the High Priest would bring him to the Shrine.

By means of cleanliness he would be separated from all taint of impurity, as it is written: *For you must distinguish between the sacred and the profane*²⁵.

Separation brought him to ritual purity, as it is written: *The priest shall make expiation for him. Then shall he be clean*²⁶.

²¹Deuteronomy 5:1

²²Deuteronomy 33:21 referring to Gad

²³Ecclesiastes 12:9

²⁴Leviticus 16:20.

²⁵Leviticus 10:10

²⁶Leviticus 14:19-20

Purity leads to holiness from the verse: *He shall cleanse it and consecrate it*²⁷.

Holiness leads to humility as it says: *Forever dwells, whose name is holy: Yet with the contrite and the lowly in spirit*²⁸.

Humility leads to the fear of sin as it says in the verse: *The effect of humility is fear of the Lord*²⁹.

Fear of sin leads to piety as it says in the verse: *But the Lord's steadfast love is for all eternity toward those who fear Him*³⁰.

Piety leads to the spirit of holiness as expressed in the passage: *Then You spoke to your faithful ones in a vision*³¹.

The spirit of holiness leads to the resurrection of the dead as the text states: *I will put breath into you and you shall live again*³².

All this is to teach you the worthiness of Torah which confers several beneficial virtues to those who labor for it.

²⁷Leviticus 16:19

²⁸Isaiah 57:15

²⁹Proverbs 22:4

³⁰Psalms 103:17

³¹Psalms 89:20-21

³²Ezekiel 37:6, also quoted in Shir haShirim Rabbah

2.) *LET HIM GIVE ME THE KISSES OF HIS MOUTH.* Contained in this verse is the memory of the giving of the Torah on the day that God spoke with our ancestors at Horeb as it is said: *From the heavens he let you hear His voice*³³. It says as well: *"I will come to you in a thick cloud"*³⁴. And it says: *You heard the sound of words*³⁵.

He uttered this in the jussive since the community of Israel was seeking mercy, and so he said *Let him give me from the kisses of his mouth* because Solomon saw the full extent of the exile and saw that Israel would dwell many years with neither a prophet nor an instructing Priest and without Torah, for the Torah would be divided up by different ways of interpretation due to the lack of wisdom, since it would be repudiated by people, and so Israel was requesting mercy saying: "Master of the World, just as you brought our ancestors from Egypt and gave them the Torah and brought us to Your service, so may it still be God's will and *Let the Holy One Blessed be He kiss me with the kisses of his mouth*, similar to *nashku bar*, (pay homage)³⁶. It is the homage to Torah that will cause God to reveal the

³³Deuteronomy 4:36

³⁴Exodus 19:9

³⁵Deuteronomy 4:12

³⁶Psalms 2:12

Messiah and to send Elijah as a teacher of righteousness and He shall reconcile parents with children and children with their parents³⁷. The use of *min* with *neshika* is to imply that the kiss is real.

Out of God's great love for Israel, He mentions his mouth with this kiss, because according to the custom of the kings of the East and South, they kiss the hand, but here it is the kisses of his mouth.

His explanation about the Torah is to teach me knowledge as the text states: *I will put My Teaching into their inmost being and inscribe it upon their hearts. For all of them, from the least of them to the greatest, shall heed Me*³⁸. And it also says: *Thus I will cause you to follow my laws and faithfully to observe my rules*³⁹.

Also *yishakeni* connotes weaponry⁴⁰, for the Torah is compared to an instrument of war as the text states: *With paeans to God in their throats and two edged swords in their hands*⁴¹. This is the Torah that gives merit to a person in this world as well as the world to come.

³⁷Malachi 3:24

³⁸Jeremiah 31:32-33 although JPS considers these verses as Jeremiah 31:33-34.

³⁹Ezekiel 36:27

⁴⁰see also *Shir HaShirim Rabbah*

⁴¹Psalms 149:6

Abba Mari, of blessed memory, expounded *yishakeni* as purify me, similar to *kemashak gebim*⁴².

Similarly, in the Talmud our sages of blessed memory used the expression *mashikin*...they purify the water by contact with a clay vessel to cleanse it, which applies also to the Torah, which purifies those who study from it from all guilt and wrongdoing. Thus after each member of the people of Israel said to each other, *let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth* just as He did for our ancestors in Egypt, they continued saying to the *Shekhina*: *for your love is more delightful than wine*⁴³.

GOOD. These are the bounties which You repaid our ancestors since ancient times as it is written: *We will extend the same bounty that the Lord grants us*⁴⁴. Thus will You bestow goodness upon us at the end of days as it is said: *And He will make you more prosperous and more numerous than your fathers*⁴⁵.

THAN WINE. More than Your great strength in as much as You are called by 70 names of strength and of praise.

⁴²Isaiah 33:4. Tobiah ben Eliezer is using Hebrew roots to demonstrate that the verb is not *y.sh.q* but *sh.q.q*.

⁴³Song of Songs 1:2

⁴⁴Numbers 10:32. The Biblical text used by Tobiah ben Eliezer is not the one in current use. Greenup notes this.

⁴⁵Deuteronomy 30:5.

Another interpretation of *than wine*. On account of the Torah that You gave to us, since the Torah is compared to wine in the verse: *Come, eat my food and drink the wine that I have mixed*⁴⁶. Just as wine gladdens the heart, as in: *wine that rejoices the hearts of men*⁴⁷, so do words of Torah cause the heart of a person to rejoice as it says: *The precepts of the Lord are just, rejoicing the heart*⁴⁸. About wine it is written: *Give strong drink to the hapless and wine to the embittered*⁴⁹. And in the Torah it is written: *Your assurance soothes my soul*⁵⁰. Just as every time that good wine ages it improves, so it is with words of Torah: Whenever they age in a person's body they become more praiseworthy⁵¹. Just as wine is not kept in golden or in silver vessels, but in lesser vessels like clay or wood, similarly the Torah is not found either among the haughty or among the greedy, but rather among the modest⁵². Thus, he [Solomon] said: *A humble man will attain honor*⁵³. There is

⁴⁶Proverbs 9:5

⁴⁷Psalms 104:15, quoted in *Shir haShirim Rabbah*

⁴⁸Psalms 19:9

⁴⁹Proverbs 31:6

⁵⁰Psalms 94:19

⁵¹*Shir haShirim Rabbah*

⁵²*Shir haShirim Rabbah*

⁵³Proverbs 29:23

no honor but Torah as it is written: *The wise shall attain honor*⁵⁴ and *The blameless will prosper*⁵⁵. Just as anyone who drinks wine is noticed because of it, so a sage is known by his wisdom.

Another interpretation of *for your love is more delightful than wine*: Israel says before the Holy One: "Master of the World, your love and your closeness are better for us than what we obtain among the nations. With them it is different as for example in the verse: *Those who sit in the gate talk about me; I am the taunt of drunkards*⁵⁶.

Another interpretation: *More than yayin*⁵⁷, more than the 70 nations who rule over Israel⁵⁸.

Another interpretation of *your love is more delightful than wine*. The words of Your Torah are sweet to us, so that we are not as the nations of the world who gather at banquet halls and drink wine without telling of your praises, whereas we are mindful of your name everywhere.

⁵⁴Proverbs 3:35

⁵⁵Proverbs 28:10

⁵⁶Psalms 69:13

⁵⁷The gematria of yayin is 70.

⁵⁸Shir haShirim Rabbah

3.) *YOUR OINTMENTS YIELD A GREAT FRAGRANCE.* This is the scent of the oil of the righteous who are found in every generation, for the righteous one who acquires a good name can be compared to the good oil, as it says *A good name is better than fragrant oil*⁵⁹ and *Let your clothes always be freshly washed and your head never lack ointment*⁶⁰.

Why are the righteous compared to oil? To remind you that just as oil is initially bitter and then becomes sweet⁶¹, so it is with the righteous who are first rebuked and then become exalted, as it is written: *In old age they still produce fruit; they are still full of sap and freshness*⁶², and *Though your beginning be small in the end you will grow very great*⁶³.

Further, just as oil floats over all liquids, so are the righteous elevated above all people.

Similarly, just as oil is curative to a person and brightens his face, so are the works of the righteous therapeutic and illumine their faces as it is written: *It*

⁵⁹ Ecclesiastes 7:1

⁶⁰ *ibid* 9:8

⁶¹ *Shir haShirim Rabbah*

⁶² Psalms 92:15

⁶³ Job 8:7

will be a cure for your body⁶⁴ and A man's wisdom lights up his face⁶⁵.

Therefore the community of Israel says before the Holy One, "Master of the world, remember for us the scent of the righteous who stood in every generation and do not drive us into the hand of the nations".

YOUR NAME IS LIKE FINEST OIL. Abba Mari of blessed memory explained it as the name of an oil whose scent is pleasing for light⁶⁶ since it is not said *shemen yurak* with a masculine agreement because *shemen* is a masculine noun. In addition the word *shem* is a masculine noun. That is why it has been said that *turak* is the name of the oil.

Another interpretation of *Your name is like finest oil*. There is a *tav* instead of a *yod* because these imperfect preformatives are interchangeable. The interpretation of the verse is that just as when good oil is poured from vessel to vessel its scent wafts forth, so does the name of the righteous ones in a place where they have been killed for *kedushat hashem*.

For example *Rashbag*⁶⁷, a leader in Israel and Rabbi Yishmael ben Elisha, a high priest, son of a high priest.

⁶⁴Proverbs 3:8, referring to Torah

⁶⁵Ecclesiastes 8:1

⁶⁶See Exodus 27:20 where oil for the lamp is mentioned without further description.

⁶⁷*Rashbag*, Rabban Shimeon ben Gamliel

When the executioner came during the reign of the evil kingdom and found them sitting in the Temple court discussing *Pesah Halakhoth*, he took them and brought them before the king. As he was about to kill the *Rashbag*, *Yishmael* said to him: "By your life, start with me so that I may not see the death of my colleague for I am a high priest and the son of the high priest". When he was about to kill Rabbi *Yishmael*, the *Rashbag* said to him: "Let me go first for I am a leader, the son of a Prince". Immediately he severed the head of the *Rashbag* with a sword.⁶⁸ As he was trying to kill Rabbi *Yishmael*, the king's daughter sought to flay his skin (for he was as handsome as Joseph the righteous) and to flay his face from his beard up to where he placed his tefillin. Thus they accepted their sentence and they died for the sanctification of Your name.

Likewise even *Hutzpit* the interpreter whom Rabbi *Akiva* used to call *fairer than all men, your speech is endowed with grace*⁶⁹ for he knew the 70 languages of the world, they captured him and killed him! In the same fashion perished Rabbi *Yehudah* the Baker who never walked more than four cubits without Torah. Why was his name called *Yehudah* the Baker? Because he could bring out words of Torah that were

⁶⁸ *Avot de Rabbi Natan* 38:57b.

⁶⁹ *Psalms* 45:3

sweet like wonderful bread. They found him fleeing and killed him.

So, too, Rabbi Yehudah ben Baba whom they found studying and ordaining elders between Uhsa and Sh'far'am⁷⁰. They stuck three hundred iron spear-heads into his body⁷¹ until he was turned into a sieve.

So, too, for Ben Azzai, the son in law of Rabbi Akiva, who because of his love for Torah became estranged from his wife. They found him in the House of study and they killed him.

And also with Rabbi Akiva. They made points of reeds and put them under his fingernails. After twenty years they brought him out of prison and killed him. As he was reciting the morning *Sh'ma*, his soul departed him with the word *ehad*.

This also happened to Rabbi Hananiah ben Teradyon. One time the evil kingdom decreed that no one was to study Torah. They discovered him sitting and expounding with a Torah scroll placed on his chest. They wrapped him in the scroll, encircled him with bundles of twigs and set him ablaze.

Likewise with Rabbi Tarphon who was strict with mitzvot. Once there was a famine in the land of Israel and

⁷⁰ Both Uhsa and Sh'far'am are in the Galilee

⁷¹ Sanhedrin 14a

he married 300 women in order that they could eat *terumah*. They found him in the Temple court and blinded him.

This also happened to Rabbi Y'shavev who was of the remnant of the pious. He was caught on his bed and killed.

THEREFORE DO MAIDENS LOVE YOU, since the nations of the world have been are called maidens as in the verse: *And maidens without number*⁷² because they can observe the persistent declaration of the unity of God by the righteous who are killed for *kedushat hashem*, they come back unwillingly and acknowledge your great name as has been done in our time among Ashkenazic communities in the year 4856 (1096 C.E.) When the people of Seir (Rome) attempted to go to the Land of Israel they attacked the communities and the inhabitants were slaughtered for *gedushat hashem*.

Solomon saw all of these and others like these through the spirit of holiness and he spoke concerning them: *Your ointments yield a sweet fragrance, Your name is like finest oil*; these are the righteous ones who in every generation profess the unity of your name, while their names go out from one end of the world to the other end as fine oil.

This is what David meant when he wrote: *It is for Your sake that we are slain all day long, that we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered*⁷³.

⁷²Song of Songs 6:8

⁷³Psalms 44:23

Another interpretation of *Your oils yield a sweet fragrance*. Rabbi Hiyya in the name Rabbi Aha expounded: there are two oils, the oil of priesthood and the oil of royalty, while our teachers say that *your oils yield a sweet fragrance* represent the written Torah and the oral Torah⁷⁴. *Shemen turak*, this oil is the oil of Torah with which Israel is busy, as referred to concerning Hezekiah in the verse: *The yoke will be destroyed thanks to oil*⁷⁵. The yoke of Sanherib will be destroyed thanks to the oil of Hezekiah and his company who are busy in the Torah and the Mitzvot.

THEREFORE DO MAIDENS LOVE YOU. These are the true converts who see the oils of the righteous who cleave to their Creator, and go on converting to cleave to God.

Another interpretation of *Your ointments yield a sweet fragrance*. Because we know the goodness which You did for our ancestors since ancient times, though we have been exiled from our land we have not forgotten you while amongst the nations. *Your name is as oil poured forth* even though our oil has been poured on the streets as oil that is emptied from vessel to vessel and we have been devoid of all the goodness which you bestowed upon our ancestors, Your name is forever in our mouths as the text states: *All this*

⁷⁴ *Shir haShirim Rabbah*

⁷⁵ *Isaiah 10:27*

has come upon us, yet we have not forgotten You⁷⁶ rather Your Oneness has been in our midst. Therefore do maidens love You, because Israel has declared the unity of Your name in every generation, the maidens have loved You, all the time they have loved You in all of the places which You created, we have not forgotten You, whether in Israel or outside of it, Your name is always in their mouth!

Another interpretation of *maidens*, *'alamot*: to be read as *'al mavet*, above death they have loved You! Even though they are dying they are not denying Your name as in the verse: *When he struck them, they turned to Him and sought God once again.*⁷⁷

Another interpretation similar to *and maidens without number*⁷⁸ as if to say: Even the nations love You and cleave to Your Oneness because as they see Israel declare the unity of Your name, they, too, come under the wings of the *Shekhina*.

4.) *DRAW ME AFTER YOU, LET US RUN.* The community of Israel said before the Holy One: "Master of the World, draw us up from this exile because this exile is comparable to a pit" as in: *You have put me at the bottom of the Pit, in the*

⁷⁶ Psalms 44:18

⁷⁷ Psalms 78:34

⁷⁸ Song of Songs 6:8

darkest places, in the depths⁷⁹ and He lifted me out of the miry pit⁸⁰. Anyone who is in a pit needs someone to draw him out as in: They pulled Joseph out of the pit⁸¹. And so Israel wails before the Holy One from the midst of the exile to draw them out and raise them up.

AFTER YOU, LET US RUN! After You will have brought us out of exile, let us run after Your Torah and Your mitzvot. Furthermore, if we were few in number we will become many, as in the passage: And you will say to yourself, "Who bore these for me when I was bereaved and barren?"⁸². Thus he began with the singular and then he said let us run similar to let me run, as in: Let us make man⁸³ and perhaps I may smite him⁸⁴. This happens with some imperfect preformatives, which are used interchangeably.

Another interpretation of Draw me after you which is like Israel has won through the Lord triumph everlasting. You shall not be shamed or disgraced in all the ages to come⁸⁵. He started in the singular and he ended in the

⁷⁹ Psalms 88:7

⁸⁰ Psalms 40:3

⁸¹ Genesis 37:28

⁸² Isaiah 49:21

⁸³ Genesis 1:26

⁸⁴ Numbers 22:6

⁸⁵ Isaiah 45:17

plural because Israel is used in the singular and in the plural.

THE KING HAS BROUGHT ME INTO HIS CHAMBERS. Praised be the One who brought us out of Egypt and drew us to Him as in the verse: *Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; Therefore with affection have I drawn thee*⁸⁶, while here God has brought me into his chambers, which are the inner chambers of the Torah and the mitzvot, and the inner chambers of His Temple. And just as it says *He brought me then into his chambers*, so it says *draw me and bring me to Your chambers*, as You promised me in *I will bring them to My Holy mountain and let them rejoice in My House of prayer*⁸⁷. Similarly David wrote: *Send forth Your light and Your truth, they will lead me; they will bring me to Your holy mountain, to Your dwelling-place, that I may come to the altar of God, God my delight, my joy*⁸⁸.

LET US DELIGHT AND REJOICE IN YOU as in: *Our mouths shall be filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy*⁸⁹ and it says *Then shall maidens dance gaily, young men and old*

⁸⁶Jeremiah 31:2

⁸⁷Isaiah 56:7

⁸⁸Psalms 43:3,4

⁸⁹Psalms 126:3

alike⁹⁰. It also says: *Give us joy for the years You have afflicted us, for the years we have suffered misfortune.*⁹¹

IN YOU: Our sages of blessed memory made a comparison, that this is like a woman whose husband, sons and sons-in-law left for a distant land. After years they returned to their home. They said to her: "Your sons have come". She told them: "Go, notify my daughters-in-law and let them rejoice with them." They said: "Your sons-in-law have come." She replied: "Go, notify my daughters and let them rejoice with them". But, when they said "Your husband is coming" she exclaimed: "This is my joy".⁹²

So, too, when the prophet said: *Your daughters like babes on shoulders*⁹³. She then said: *Let Mount Zion rejoice*⁹⁴. At that time the prophet spoke: *Thy sons come from far*⁹⁵. She answered: *Let the women of Judah exult*⁹⁶. But as soon as he said to her: *Your deliverer is coming!*⁹⁷, she said: *I greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being*

⁹⁰Jeremiah 31:12

⁹¹Psalms 90:15

⁹²Shir haShirim Rabbah

⁹³Isaiah 60:4

⁹⁴Psalms 48:12

⁹⁵Isaiah 60:4

⁹⁶Psalms 48:12

⁹⁷Isaiah 62:11

*exults in my God*⁹⁸. That is why it has been said let us *delight and rejoice in you*.

There is the story of a woman in Sidon who had been married to her husband for ten years without giving birth to any children. He wished to divorce her. They came before Rabbi Shimeon ben Yohai who blamed both of them, saying: "Since you became a couple only in a setting of food and drink, so you will part from each other only in a setting of food and drink". They went and prepared a feast in the man's house. While they were eating and drinking the husband said to her: "My dear"⁹⁹, you may take any nice thing which you see in this house and go to your father's house." When she heard this she hinted to her servants to make him drunk. He feasted and slept. She instructed her servants to bring him on his bed to her father's house while he was asleep. When he woke up he noticed the walls and pillars and asked her: "Where have I been taken?" She replied: "Do you not remember what you told me last night: 'you may take any nice thing that you see in this house and go to your father's house'". I looked around and I wished for nothing better than you. It is you (*bakh*) that I wanted more than anything in the house". They went back to Rabbi Shimeon and

⁹⁸ *ibid*, 61:10

⁹⁹ literally "my daughter"

reported this incident to him. They were visited¹⁰⁰ and became parents.¹⁰¹

In this way Israel says: "Master of the World - more than all the bounties which You have bestowed upon our ancestors and upon us, we wish nothing more than You, as in *Let us delight and rejoice in you.*" Rabbi Yitzhak maintains that *bakh* represents the 22 letters of Torah.¹⁰²

LET US MENTION YOUR LOVE MORE THAN WINE. More than the wine of Torah as in the verse: *Drink the wine that I have mixed*¹⁰³. These are the laws of the Pesah sacrifice which are clarified at Pesah, the laws of the Atseret on Atseret and the laws of Sukkot on Sukkot as well as on the eve of the New Year since Israel mentions every thing at its right time.

*THE UPRIGHT ONES WHO ARE IN ISRAEL LOVE YOU*¹⁰⁴. As soon as the Holy One gathers the scattered ones of Israel and rebuilds His Temple for them, everyone will become a righteous person as it says: *And Your people, all of them righteous*¹⁰⁵, everybody will become upright and all will

¹⁰⁰Genesis Rabbah s. 58

¹⁰¹*Shir haShirim Rabbah*

¹⁰²*ibid*

¹⁰³Proverbs 9:5

¹⁰⁴Toviah ben Eliezer includes the word Israel in the text.

¹⁰⁵Isaiah 60:21

know God's way. That is why it says: *The upright ones love You.*

5.) *I AM DARK BUT COMELY.* The community of Israel says to the nations of the world: "Even though I am darkened by the exile among the nations, I am pleasing because of the merit of the patriarchs which endures forever." This parallels the text: *For the mountains may move and the hills be shaken but my loyalty shall shall never move from you, nor My covenant of friendship be shaken - said the Lord who takes you back in love.*¹⁰⁶

*I am darkened with reproof while pleasing with the consolations and the assurances which He promised me by His prophet, as in: If the Heavens above could be measured, and the foundations of the earth below could be fathomed, only then would I reject all the offspring of Israel for all that they have done - declares the Lord*¹⁰⁷.

*I am darkened because of servitude but pleasing with mitzvot to receive a good reward on account of the servitude of the exiles as in the verses: Happy is the one who waits and reaches*¹⁰⁸ *and But wait for Me - says the Lord*¹⁰⁹.

¹⁰⁶Isaiah 54:10

¹⁰⁷Jeremiah 31:36 from Qoren, 31:37 in JPS.

¹⁰⁸Daniel 12:12

¹⁰⁹Zephaniah 3:8

*I am darkened and rejected in the presence of the ruling kingdoms, but pleasing before God as has been said: Truly, the Lord is waiting to show you grace, truly He will arise to pardon you*¹¹⁰.

*I am dark and pleasing: just as I was tarnished in Egypt with mortar and bricks*¹¹¹ and I have become pleasant with the booty from the Egyptians as the text states: *In the end they shall go free with great wealth*¹¹² and the Lord disposed the Egyptians¹¹³.

Thus, even though *I am blackened* through servitude of the nations and bound by their hands, I am destined to become pleasant amidst their booty as it is said: *Instead of copper I will bring gold*¹¹⁴.

O DAUGHTERS OF JERUSALEM. Whether darkened or attractive¹¹⁵, we are the daughters of Jerusalem! You find even in what they sinned and they had become, the dark among the forgotten and yet concerning them, they became pleasing.

¹¹⁰ Isaiah 30:18

¹¹¹ See Exodus 24:10 as well as Targum

¹¹² Genesis 15:14

¹¹³ Exodus 12:36

¹¹⁴ Isaiah 60:17

¹¹⁵ This is a word play on *bein/b'not*

Darkened in the sea, as in the verse: *They...rebelled at the Sea, at the Sea of Reeds*¹¹⁶. And pleasing in the sea as in the verse: *This is my God and I will glorify Him*¹¹⁷. Darkened in bitterness for it is written: *And the people grumbled*¹¹⁸ and pleasant in bitterness as in the verse: *There He made for them a statute and an ordinance*¹¹⁹. Darkened at Rephidim as in: *Is the Lord present among us or not?*¹²⁰ while pleasing at Rephidim as in the verse: *And Moses built an altar*¹²¹.

Darkened at Horeb because of we will do, and obey¹²². I am dark in the wilderness, for it is written: *How often did they defy Him in the wilderness*¹²³ and yet pleasant in the wilderness with the erecting of the Tabernacle¹²⁴.

Darkened with the spies and pleasant because of Joshua and Caleb.

¹¹⁶ Psalms 106:7

¹¹⁷ Exodus 15:2

¹¹⁸ *ibid*, 15:24

¹¹⁹ *ibid*, 15:25,

¹²⁰ *ibid*, 17:7

¹²¹ *ibid*, 17:15

¹²² *ibid*, 24:7,

¹²³ Psalms 78:40

¹²⁴ Exodus 26:30

Darkened at Shittim¹²⁵ and pleasant with Pinhas¹²⁶.

Darkened with the actions of Ahan¹²⁷ and pleasant with Joshua and the elders.

Darkened with the Kings of Israel, but pleasant with the Kings of Judah.

Darkened with exile and pleasant with the ingathering of the scattered of Israel.

Daughters of Jerusalem: According to Rabbi Yohanan these are all of the kingdoms which are like towns vis-a-vis Jerusalem¹²⁸ as in the verse: *I shall give them to you as daughters¹²⁹.*

LIKE THE TENTS OF KEDAR who are rulers in barren lands. I am destined to be like the pavilions of Solomon. Likewise it is said: *I will let you dwell in your tents again as in the days of old¹³⁰,* as in the days when Israel was travelling by foot and the camp of the *shekhina* was amidst their camps.

¹²⁵ Numbers 25:1

¹²⁶ See Numbers 25:7-13, 31:6

¹²⁷ Joshua, Chapter 7

¹²⁸ *Shir haShirim Rabbah*

¹²⁹ Ezekiel 16:61

¹³⁰ Hosea 12:10

Like the tents of Kedar. Blackened on the outside but pleasant on the inside¹³¹. So are the Sages, ugly from the outside, because they have become blackened with the words of Torah, but pleasant from the inside as the fear of God which is in their hearts.

Another interpretation of like the tents of Kedar. Even though Israel has been made to wander from exile to exile like the tents of Kedar who carry their tents from place to place and never settle permanently in a quiet, undisturbed place like the heavens which do not move from their place, because these are the curtains of Solomon of the King, King of kings, to whom belongs peace, as it says: Who spread out the heavens like gauze, stretched them out like a tent to dwell in¹³²; Who spreads out the heavens like a tent cloth¹³³. Similarly, it says: To the end that your children may endure in the land¹³⁴.

Likewise Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaaqov taught that Israel is destined to be settled without any further wandering as in: A tent not to be transported, Whose pegs shall never be

¹³¹cf. *Shir haShirim Rabbah*

¹³²*Isaiah 40:22*

¹³³*Psalm 104:2*

¹³⁴*Deuteronomy 11:21*

pulled up¹³⁵. Then they shall be captors of their captors and masters to their taskmasters¹³⁶.

This is to teach that Solomon proclaimed the deliverance of Israel in the Song of Songs as David his father had said in his Psalms: O that the deliverance of Israel might come from Zion¹³⁷.

6.) *DON'T STARE AT ME BECAUSE I AM SWARTHY.* The Community of Israel says to the nations of the world: "Do not despise me because I have become dark from transgression", which is similar to: *And I will make a spectacle of you*¹³⁸, which is scornful language like *[The Lord] struck at the men of Beth-Shemesh because they looked into the Ark of the Lord*¹³⁹. What scorn did they display toward him since they were harvesting and bowing down? There are those who say they were saying thus: "The person who angered You because You walked with us and this person appeased You; still You came to us!". Meanwhile, she says to the nations when they say: "The Lord has already forgotten You, he has repudiated you and chosen us", the community of Israel says: "Who is on the

¹³⁵ Isaiah 33:20

¹³⁶ *ibid*, 14:2

¹³⁷ Psalms 53:7

¹³⁸ Nahum 3:6

¹³⁹ I Samuel 6:19

side of the idolators and how worthy am I since I have transgressed a few *mitzvot*? I have been exiled and made to serve you. You who have not observed even one of the *mitzvot* so all of you are sinning and transgressing. If the Holy One comes to visit upon you what security do you have?" Thus, it says: *In anger and wrath will I wreak retribution on the nations that have not obeyed*¹⁴⁰.

Our Rabbis of blessed memory made a comparison. This is like a Kushite maidservant who goes out to fill water from the spring and was saying to her companions: "Tomorrow my lord is going to divorce his wife and marry me". They said to her "Why?" She said to them: "Because she came to sit at his table and he saw that her hands were blackened". They said to her "Are you less than her? If your lady, when your husband saw that her hands were blackened, he wanted to divorce her, you, since you are entirely black and unattractive¹⁴¹ how much more so!"¹⁴²

DON'T STARE AT ME BECAUSE I AM SWARTHY. The community of Israel says to the nations: "Even though I have been placed in your subservience by God's anger, you are not permitted to look contemptuously¹⁴³ at me as in the verse: *I am very*

¹⁴⁰ Micah 5:14

¹⁴¹ See *Shir haShirim Rabbah* on 5:11

¹⁴² *Shir haShirim Rabbah*

¹⁴³ see Rashi

angry with those nations that are at ease; for I was only angry a little, but they overdid the punishment¹⁴⁴.

The proof of it is that every accuser of Israel is punished. There is no one that made Israel dearer than Moses our teacher and yet because he said "Listen, you rebels"¹⁴⁵ it was decreed concerning him that he would not enter the land. Isaiah, because he said "I live among a people of unclean lips"¹⁴⁶ it is written then one of the seraphim flew over to me with a live coal¹⁴⁷. It is not said *gahellet* but as *ritzpah*, (that is *ratzatz peh*), crushing the mouth¹⁴⁸ as where it says: it is a disgrace for the vessels of Elijah as it is written: the Israelites have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars¹⁴⁹. He showed him the 'ugat r'tzafim¹⁵⁰ (cake baked on hot stones). All of this crushed¹⁵¹ his mouth because he uttered an accusation against my children. Immediately God said to him "Anoint Elisha son of Shaphat of Abel-Meholah to succeed you

¹⁴⁴ Zechariah 1:15

¹⁴⁵ Numbers 20:10

¹⁴⁶ Isaiah 6:5

¹⁴⁷ *ibid*, 6:6

¹⁴⁸ *Shir ha Shirim Rabbah*

¹⁴⁹ I Kings 19:14

¹⁵⁰ I Kings 19:6

¹⁵¹ *Shir HaShirim Rabbah*

as prophet¹⁵²", as if to say: Your prophecies are incredible!

Woe to the nations of the world, for how grave would be the judgement for what they have been doing to Israel, as it says: "*Whoever touches you touches the pupil of his own eye*"¹⁵³.

Swarthy. Written *sh'harhoret* and not *sh'horah* from the womb of my mother because *the sun darkened me* like a person struck by the sun, where the sun sees that person and tans him while not blackening him to his very core. Ugliness from one's mother's womb cannot be compared to occasional unseemliness, because with the unseemliness caused by the sun, one can stay indoors for a few days and then return to his previous condition. This is the way that Israel views the sun and the moon and the stars they had worshipped and which caused them their exile. But when their sins were cleansed, immediately they returned to their former state.

Because *the sun darkened me* while they were worshipping the sun, as noted in the verse: *Their backs to the Temple of the Lord and their faces to the east; they were bowing low to the sun in the east*¹⁵⁴. This is what the prophet intended when he said: *For my people have done me a twofold*

¹⁵²I Kings 19:6

¹⁵³Zechariah 2:12

¹⁵⁴Ezekiel 8:16

wrong¹⁵⁵. One is this, the other is that they turned their backs to the Temple and worshipped the sun¹⁵⁶.

My mother's sons quarreled with me. Because the false prophets led Israel astray and caused them to suffer exile on account of God's wrath. This is found as well in Jeroboam son of Nebat who brought disaster upon Israel after the calf as it is said Your seers prophesied to you delusion and folly. They did not expose your iniquity¹⁵⁷.

Another interpretation of *my mother's sons* is that this refers to the sons of the nations. *My mother's sons quarreled with me*, these are the rebels in Israel who shake Israel from observing mitzvot and cause them to give money to the gentiles, for every time that Israel is held back from heresy the nations of the world take their money, as in the passage: *Because you would not serve the Lord your God, you shall have to serve your enemies¹⁵⁸.*

THEY MADE ME GUARD THE VINEYARDS. They set me in exile among the nations to serve the kings of the nations and to pay them tribute.

MY OWN VINEYARD I DID NOT GUARD. I rebelled against the kingship of the House of David. Now I am paying tribute,

¹⁵⁵Jeremiah 2:13

¹⁵⁶The author is filling in a detail missing in Jeremiah's reference to two sins.

¹⁵⁷Lamentations 2:14

¹⁵⁸Deuteronomy 28:47-48

poll taxes and produce taxes to the kings of gentile nations. It says as well: "Because that people has spurned the gently flowing waters of Siloam"- assuredly, My Lord will bring up against them the mighty massive water of the Euphrates¹⁵⁹.

Another interpretation of *They made me guard the vineyards*. They placed me in the lands of the gentiles, to pray for compassion for the peace of their lands as is indicated by the verse: *Seek the welfare of the city to which I have exiled you and pray to the Lord in its behalf; for in its prosperity you shall prosper*¹⁶⁰. So Israel prayed for the peace of the kingdom for compassion on the lands of the nations - to bestow dew and rain on the face of the earth.¹⁶¹

My own vineyard, my land and my kingdom I did not guard because we had been exiled from it, and we have neither king nor prince.

7.) **TELL ME.** The community of Israel offers a petition before God and says: "Master of the World, tell me, You whom I love so well" as in: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your*

¹⁵⁹ Isaiah 8:6-7

¹⁶⁰ Jeremiah 29:7

¹⁶¹ from *Birkat haShanim*

might¹⁶². For even though You take my life¹⁶³ I love You as it says: It is for Your sake that we are slain all day long, that we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered¹⁶⁴.

WHERE DO YOU PASTURE YOUR SHEEP? WHERE DO YOU REST THEM AT NOON? Where will you pasture at the time of the Messiah? Where will you rest your flock at noon? These are the two anguishes of exile, the pre-Messianic sufferings¹⁶⁵ that are like a dry heat storm (*sharav*) when the heat bears down on a person's head it is a peaceless time for all that lives. Whether going out or coming in there is no rest. With what merit will they be delivered from those sufferings?

FOR WHY SHOULD I BE AS ONE WHO VEILS HERSELF?. The *shin* is an independent participle as in *sh'atah*: that it is You who are speaking to me¹⁶⁶, and its explanation is: For why I should be as one who veils herself, like a shepherd whose flock has been mauled by wolves and he keeps covering himself in front of it and everybody talks about it saying: "The flocks of your companions are doing alright, while

¹⁶²Deuteronomy 6:5

¹⁶³Berakhot 54a, 61b

¹⁶⁴Psalms 44:23

¹⁶⁵Sanhedrin 98b

¹⁶⁶Judges 6:17

yours have been mauled", with him being ashamed and embarrassed by their words¹⁶⁷.

Rabbi Helbo in the name of Rabbi Huna says *let me not be as one who veils himself is like the mourner who veils his upper lip and is silent. Thus Israel, because their exile has been so long for them and all the predicted terms of redemption have passed by*¹⁶⁸, *they are passive and silent and lack a retort to reply to the nations as in: I would keep my mouth muzzled while the wicked man was in my presence*¹⁶⁹ *and it says: I am dumb, I do not speak up, for it is Your doing*¹⁷⁰.

8.) IF YOU DO NOT KNOW. The spirit of Holiness responded to Israel: "*If you do not know, what you will do and how will I deal with you during the exile and how will I give you rest at noon, in times of trouble, at the end of the anger preceding the coming of the Messianic upheaval?*"

GO FOLLOW THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE FLOCK. As to say: Go in the way of the Patriarchs. Just as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob trusted in Me and I did not forsake them nor abandon them for it is said: *They went wandering from nation to nation,*

¹⁶⁷ *Shir haShirim Rabbah*, Y. Avodah Zara II, 41c

¹⁶⁸ *Sanhedrin* 97b

¹⁶⁹ *Psalms* 39:2

¹⁷⁰ *Psalms* 39:10

*He allowed no one to oppress them*¹⁷¹. Follow their deeds and you will be redeemed by the footsteps of the flock in the flock's ways as in: *Your footsteps were not known*¹⁷².

AND FEED YOUR KIDS. After you go by their ways and you observe the trails that the righteous THREADED and you act like them and bring up your children by the tents of the shepherds in the Houses of Worship and Houses of Study, then they will be rescued from the sufferings of the Messiah, as it is said: *But everyone who invokes the name of the Lord shall escape*¹⁷³. So it is for our forefathers of blessed memory. What should a person do to be spared of the sufferings of the Messiah? Let him busy himself with Torah, acts of mercy, because the breath of the mouths of babes is music for Israel in the exile since they are sinless.

And know that the flock spreads out its hoof before it and its feet being split-hoofed; recognized are the places where it treads; places of right of way, therefore it is said: *in the footsteps of the flock*. This is a comparison to the righteous ones whose ways are recognized and all who want to follow after them will go and be delivered.

Likewise you find this with the Kings of Judah, for anyone who walked in David's path, the Holy One helped him.

¹⁷¹ Psalms 105:13-14

¹⁷² *ibid*, 77:20

¹⁷³ Joel 3:5

The Holy One cautions Israel to go in the ways of their patriarchs, righteous in order to be delivered.

Abba Mari, of blessed memory, expounded *O fairest of women*: this is the Community of Israel for she is fairer with her deeds and yet more scorned than all of the nations as it is said: *I have set you apart from other peoples to be Mine*¹⁷⁴. Among women - when they forget My holy name. Women is the same usage as *shavtah*¹⁷⁵ which is like *I forgot prosperity*¹⁷⁶. And graze your kids; Make great the Holy One since they are the dwelling places of the shepherds since when there are no righteous ones in a generation the young are seized for the debt of that generation. And this is a midrashic explanation. But a biblical verse must follow its literal sense: Dwelling places are in reality a place where meditators live, and those are the synagogues and the places of study.

9.) *TO A MARE IN PHARAOH'S CHARIOTS*. This matter is explained as applying to the Holy One in the past at the splitting of the Sea of Reeds when the Holy One made Himself look like the horses of Pharaoh, and He represented Peace in feminine form. The horses of the Egyptians were doubly equipped and

¹⁷⁴Leviticus 20:26

¹⁷⁵ibid, 26:35

¹⁷⁶Lamentations 3:17

the Egyptians followed that image and they drowned their riders in the sea as it is said: *Horse and driver He has hurled into the sea*¹⁷⁷. Then I have likened you, my darling is I have silenced you from your complaining with the tongue *vayidom* since they were complaining about Moses and saying: *Was it for want of graves that we were not buried in Egypt?*¹⁷⁸. When they saw their enemies dying at the shore of the sea, they were silenced from their complaining. My beloved is the same usage as my love, like: *For the sake of my brothers and my fellows*¹⁷⁹. Abba Mari, of blessed memory, explained to a *mare* as the language of enticement (*hasata*), since God enticed the Egyptians to pursue Israel in order to drown them in the sea¹⁸⁰. Likewise it says: *The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart and he gave chase to the Israelites*¹⁸¹.

In this way you can explain all of the previous verse in the past tense, but I have to explain to a *mare* in *Pharaoh's chariot's* in the future as I have explained everything from the beginning of this book. Up until now it has been about matters of the exile. I have likened you, my

¹⁷⁷Exodus 15:1

¹⁷⁸Exodus 14:11

¹⁷⁹Psalms 122:8

¹⁸⁰*Shir haShirim Rabbah*

¹⁸¹Exodus 14:8

darling, *To a mare in Pharaoh's chariot's.* The spirit of holiness announces to Israel that just as He exacted punishment from the former generations, so He will exact punishment from the latter ones. So it says: *I will show him wondrous deeds as in your going forth from the land of Egypt*¹⁸². Just as He enticed Pharaoh and his army to chase after the Israelites and He destroyed them, so will God entice the families mentioned in Psalm 83:2: *O God, do not be silent to rise up over Israel to drive them from the world.*

I have likened you, my beloved. Come and see in the exodus from Egypt they were brought out by Moses and Aaron but in the future it will be by Elijah and the King Messiah. The King Messiah corresponding to Moses as it is said: *Then He became King in Yeshurun*¹⁸³. Elijah corresponds to Aaron, the holy one of God.

When Israel departed from Egypt, they ate the manna. In the future it is written: *Let there be abundant grain in the land, to the tops of the mountains*¹⁸⁴.

When Israel departed from Egypt a thick cloud was spread out to cover them, while in the future it is written:

¹⁸²Micah 7:15

¹⁸³Deuteronomy 33:5

¹⁸⁴Psalms 72:16

*Which will serve as a pavilion for shade from heat by day and as a shelter for protection against drenching rain*¹⁸⁵.

When Israel departed from Egypt He caused water to drip for them from a rock, while in the future where will it come from? It will go forth from God's Temple.

When Israel departed from Egypt, it says God redeemed¹⁸⁶ while in the future it is written: *The Lord will give victory to His anointed*¹⁸⁷ and it says: *The Lord will give victory to the tents of Judah first*¹⁸⁸, and many more similar instances.

Thus, to a mare in Pharaoh's chariot's I have likened you my darling means I have likened this future redemption to the redemption of Egypt, just as when I enticed Pharaoh to pursue with his chariots and horsemen.

10.) *YOUR CHEEKS ARE COMELY WITH ORNAMENTS.* This passage is explained with reference to the past, about the standing at Mount Sinai, since Israel was standing in rows. *Your neck with strings of jewels.* These are the camps, where each person knew his banner and his tribe. Another interpretation: *Your neck with strings of jewels.* These are

¹⁸⁵ Isaiah 4:6

¹⁸⁶ Exodus 14:30

¹⁸⁷ Psalms 20:7

¹⁸⁸ Zechariah 12:7

the seventy elders (after Moses) who were strung with those pearls.¹⁸⁹

Another interpretation: Your cheeks are comely with ornaments. God says to Israel: "Why have I likened you, my beloved to the miracles of Egypt? So that you would be busy with Torah amidst the pressure in the exile."

What is meant by with jewels? These are the Torot (laws) that are in the Torah. This is the law of the beast and of the fowl¹⁹⁰. This shall be the law of the leper¹⁹¹. This is the law of the meal offering¹⁹². This is the law of jealousy¹⁹³. This is the law of the guilt offering¹⁹⁴. This is the law of the sacrifice of peace offering¹⁹⁵. This is the law when a man dies in a tent¹⁹⁶. This is the law for a nazirite¹⁹⁷. Your cheeks are comely with ornaments. Just as those cheeks were not created but for speech, so Israel was not created except for Torah. Your neck with

¹⁸⁹ cf. *Shir haShirim Rabbah*

¹⁹⁰ Leviticus 11:46

¹⁹¹ *ibid*, 14:2

¹⁹² *ibid*, 6:7

¹⁹³ Numbers 5:29

¹⁹⁴ Leviticus 7:1

¹⁹⁵ *ibid*, 7:11

¹⁹⁶ Numbers 19:14

¹⁹⁷ *ibid*, 6:13

strings of jewels. These are the students who sit row after row before their teacher¹⁹⁸. With the merit of the Torah Israel is taken away from troubles.

11.) *LET US MAKE YOU ORNAMENTS OF GOLD WITH RINGS OF SILVER.* This is like when each girl's turn came¹⁹⁹. This has already been explained with reference to the past when God said to the community of Israel when they went forth from Egypt. *Ornaments of gold.* This is the booty obtained at the sea. *With rings of silver.* This is the booty obtained in Egypt. Just as gold is more valuable than silver, so was the booty obtained at the sea more valuable than the booty obtained in Egypt. *Let us make you* is like *Let us make man in our image*²⁰⁰ and this is like *I will make.* Another interpretation of *Let us make (for you)* is that it is like *We have won no victory on earth*²⁰¹. Everywhere that you find *lach* with a *sh'va* it is masculine. With a *patach* it is feminine, except for the *etnahta*, *sof pasuk* or *zakeif*.

Let us return to the booty at the sea and the booty made in Egypt: *Ornamented with jewels*²⁰². *Ornamented;* this

¹⁹⁸ *Shir haShirim Rabbah*

¹⁹⁹ *Esther 2:12*

²⁰⁰ *Genesis 1:26*

²⁰¹ *Isaiah 26:18*

²⁰² *Ezekiel 16:7*

is the booty of Egypt. With jewels; this was the booty at the sea with rings of silver.

Another interpretation of *Let us make you rings of gold*; this refers to the giving of the Torah which is more desirable than gold, than much fine gold²⁰³. Rabbi Abba bar Kahana said these are the letters. Rabbi Aha said these are the words.

And so, in the future, *Let us make for you ornaments of gold* this is the deliverance destined to come which will be greater than all previous deliverances. With rings of silver: with all the goodness that God has bestowed on Israel from ancient times.

Another interpretation of *Let us make you ornaments of gold* is as: *Instead of copper, I will bring gold*²⁰⁴. With rings of silver: *instead of iron, I will bring silver*²⁰⁵. *The riches of nations shall flow to you*²⁰⁶. *Dust clouds of camels shall cover you. The dromedaries of Midian and Ephah, their gold and silver with them*²⁰⁷.

²⁰³ Psalms 19:11

²⁰⁴ Isaiah 60:17

²⁰⁵ *ibid*

²⁰⁶ *ibid*, 60:5

²⁰⁷ *ibid*, 60:6

12.) *WHILE THE KING WAS ON HIS COUCH.* With reference to the past, while God was revealed at Sinai to give the Torah to Israel.

MY NARD GAVE FORTH ITS FRAGRANCE. The scent of the golden calf's incense has already ascended. This is comparable to a king who betroths a woman of noble descent. While preparing the *huppah* he finds that she is committing licentiousness. A bride is unsuited who thinks of faithlessness while under the *huppah*²⁰⁸. Abba Mari, of blessed memory, explained *gave forth its fragrance* as *let off its good fragrance*, similar to: *But Sihon did not let*²⁰⁹. Sihon would not let Israel go in peace.

In the future, *While the king is on his couch* will mean while the *shekhina* is in the highest heavens. *My nard gave forth its fragrance* will mean there is authority for punishment from the nations²¹⁰ as it is said: *Jacob vowed*²¹¹ to wipe out what is left of *Ir*²¹². And says: *And break down*

²⁰⁸Shabbat 88b

²⁰⁹Numbers 21:23

²¹⁰Midrash Zuta

²¹¹Genesis 28:20

²¹²Numbers 24:19

all the sons of Seth²¹³ while Israel is triumphant²¹⁴ and it is said: For I will make an end of all the nations²¹⁵.

13.) MY BELOVED TO ME IS A BAG OF MYRRH. With reference to the past, even though my nard has given forth its fragrance, the Holy One has pardoned him as it is written: And the Lord said, "I pardon, as you have asked"²¹⁶. The myrrh is His shekhina which one finds between the two columns of the Ark as it is said: LODGED BETWEEN MY BREASTS. Just as the breasts are covered by a woman's clothes, so were the two columns of the Ark covered by the parokhet as it is written: The poles projected so long that they were not visible outside²¹⁷; i.e. that they were both visible and invisible, protruding as the two breasts of a woman²¹⁸. It is written: There I will meet with you...from between the two cherubim²¹⁹.

In the future my beloved is to me as a bag of myrrh, whether He hands me over into exile, whether He acts bitterly towards me through the servitude of the kingdoms,

²¹³Numbers 24:19

²¹⁴ibid, 24:18

²¹⁵Jeremiah 30:11

²¹⁶Numbers 14:20

²¹⁷I Kings 8:8

²¹⁸Yoma 54a

²¹⁹Exodus 25:22

He is my beloved, my love. I will not forget, nor have I forgotten Him, as in: *All this has come upon us, yet we have not forgotten You*²²⁰. *Lodged between my breasts. My love is always in my heart, His Unity is connected with my soul.*

Another interpretation of a *bag of myrrh*: Just as a woman places a bag of myrrh between her breasts for perfume, so is the *shekhina* between the two columns of the Ark.

14.) *A CLUSTER OF HENNA BLOOMS IS MY BELOVED TO ME.* With reference to the past, even though Israel sinned with the (golden) calf, the Holy One did not depart from their midst, as it is said: *Lodged between my breasts*²²¹. It is called a *cluster of henna* which is a cluster of perfume as *henna with nard*²²². Its explanation is: a man to whom everything belongs²²³, i.e. the Holy One. *The cluster; who pardons me for all of my transgressions*²²⁴.

In the vineyards of Ein-Gedi. There is a place in the land of Israel whose name is Ein-Gedi. Its vineyards are pleasing and Scripture praises it because there they have made wine with purity for libations and for sacrifices. It

²²⁰ Psalms 44:19

²²¹ Song of Songs 1:13

²²² Song of Songs 4:13

²²³ Shabbat 88b, (*mi shehakol shelo*) and *Shir haShirim Rabbah* (*ish shehakol bo*)

²²⁴ Targum

is expounded as that after God forgave Israel for making the calf, He cautioned them against the sacrifices and the libations in order to benefit them. Therefore it is said: *The book VaYigra*²²⁵ following the making of the calf.

Bar Nazira explained the cluster of henna as the man to whom everything belongs, this is the Holy One for it is said: *The Lord is a man of war*²²⁶ who calls the nations to account and delivers Israel, and it the proof of this matter is the *Battle of Yehoshaphat*²²⁷ which was in the vineyards of *Ein-Gedi*, as it is said, this is *Hazazon-Tamar*²²⁸. And it is written: *After that, Moabites, Ammonites, together with some Ammonim, came against Yehoshaphat to wage war*²²⁹ and they were cut down before Yehoshaphat. In this way the Holy One intends to call the nations to account and to bring Israel close.

With reference to the future, a cluster of henna will mean Israel who has waited for God's deliverance²³⁰ and who has suffered the pangs of exile and has said to the nations

²²⁵ *Vayigra*, the third book of the Torah

²²⁶ Exodus 15:3

²²⁷ II Chronicles 20:2

²²⁸ *ibid*

²²⁹ *ibid*, 20:1

²³⁰ Sanhedrin 97b

"The world is mine", will have to say *my beloved is mine*²³¹. Thus it is that God loves Israel as a cluster of henna blooms in the vineyards of Ein Gedi and is sending His Anointed to them for it is said: He tethers his ass to a vine, his asses' foal to a choice vine²³². For the vineyards of Ein-Gedi are very famous and Israel is compared to a vine: The vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the House of Israel, and the seedlings He lovingly tended are the men of Judah²³³. Therefore it is said in the vineyards of Ein-Gedi which is Hazazon Tamar.

15.) *BEHOLD, YOU ARE FAIR, MY LOVE.* With reference to the past, when I spoke with you at Sinai you said: "All that which God has spoken we will do and we will obey"²³⁴.

YOU ARE FAIR, WITH YOUR DOVE-LIKE EYES. These are the eyes of the community²³⁵, since they are instruct Israel concerning prohibitions and permitted things. Just as each dove knows its station, so for the Sanhedrin²³⁶, where everyone knows his position. You are fair, my love with mitzvot. You are

²³¹ Song of Songs 1:13

²³² Genesis 49:11

²³³ Isaiah 5:7

²³⁴ Exodus 24:7

²³⁵ Shir haShirim Rabbah

²³⁶ ibid

fair, since your eyes are dove-like with acts of loving-kindness. Just as doves are perfect, so is Israel perfect with mitzvot. Just as doves are pleasing in their goings, so is Israel pleasing in their going on their pilgrimage ascents three times a year²³⁷.

And with reference to the future you are fair, my love is for when Israel will be gathered from the four corners of the world. My love, when I will make you beloved and loved behold you are fair, with your dove-like eyes, a generation all of whose actions are pleasing as in: And Your people, all of them righteous²³⁸ and it says: Such is the generation of them that seek after Him, that seek Your presence²³⁹. Then, they will come to Zion as doves as has been said: Who are these who float like a cloud, like doves to their cotes?²⁴⁰

Indeed Israel has been compared to doves since doves do not struggle when they are slaughtered, so Israel hand themselves over for the sanctification of God's name, as has been said: It is for Your sake that we are slaughtered all day long, that we are regarded as sheep to be

²³⁷ *ibid*

²³⁸ Isaiah 60:21

²³⁹ Psalms 24:6

²⁴⁰ Isaiah 60:8

slaughtered²⁴¹. Just as a dove is blameless, so is Israel blameless and just as a dove, even when you carry off her chicks from under her she does not leave her dwelling, so Israel, even though they have forgotten the Temple and abolished the sacrificial system, they have not forgotten Jerusalem, the holy city, as has been said: *If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its cunning*²⁴². And, just as a dove draws other birds with her, so Israel draws the nations with her. Just as doves produce their young every month²⁴³, so concerning Israel it is written for the future, as has been said: *And new moon after new moon, all flesh shall come to worship me*²⁴⁴.

16.) *YOU MY BELOVED, ARE HANDSOME, PLEASING INDEED!* This is with reference to the past - when the Holy One stood pleasing before Israel as in: *Truly good to Israel*²⁴⁵ and Israel gave praise to the Holy One for all of the goodnesses that He bestowed upon them as has been said: *I will recount the kind acts of the Lord, the praises of the Lord for all the Lord*

²⁴¹ Psalms 44:23, also quoted in *Shir haShirim Rabbah*

²⁴² *ibid*, 137:5, also in *Shir haShirim Rabbah*

²⁴³ *Targum*

²⁴⁴ Isaiah 66:23

²⁴⁵ Psalms 73:1

has bestowed upon us²⁴⁶. *Pleasing, indeed!* And even though He came unto us in anger and wrath He remembers His mercy and is pleasant to us as has been said: *In wrath remember compassion*²⁴⁷.

ALSO OUR COUCH IS VERDANT, also our patriarchs who are our resting place, the bed which came to us from them. For they were verdant and strong about the Unity of God. Whatever came to them received it favorably whether it was good or whether it was the opposite. So David said: *In God, whose word I praise, in the Lord, whose word I praise*²⁴⁸. Whether by the divine attribute of justice or by the divine attribute of punishment. And he said: *I raise the cup of deliverance and invoke the name of the Lord*²⁴⁹.

Another interpretation: *You my beloved are handsome, this is God, He is good and pleasing to Israel in delivering them from the hand of their enemies. Also our couch is verdant; the land of Israel too is verdant with her fruits as referred to when it is said: But you, O mountains of Israel, shall yield your produce and bear your fruit for My people Israel*²⁵⁰ and it says: *All kinds of trees for food*

²⁴⁶ Isaiah 63:7

²⁴⁷ Habbakuk 3:2

²⁴⁸ Psalms 56:11

²⁴⁹ *ibid*, 116:13

²⁵⁰ Ezekiel 36:8

will grow on both banks of the stream. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail²⁵¹.

Another interpretation of also our couch is verdant, this is the Temple, for during the entire time that it stood Israel was fruitful and multiplied as it is said: Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sands of the sea²⁵² and just as the bed is made for rest, so as long as the Temple stood Israel was at peace as it is said: Praised be God who gives rest to His people Israel²⁵³.

17.) *THE BEAMS OF OUR HOUSE ARE CEDARS.* These are the righteous ones²⁵⁴ as in: The righteous bloom like a date palm, they thrive like a cedar in Lebanon²⁵⁵. And why does he liken them to a date palm and cedars? Since just as they have extensive shade, so the reward of the righteous ones is extensive in this world and in the world to come. In this world it is written: He gives food to those who fear Him²⁵⁶ and for the world to come it is written: How abundant is the

²⁵¹ibid, 47:12

²⁵²I Kings 4:20

²⁵³ibid, 8:56

²⁵⁴*Shir haShirim Rabbah*

²⁵⁵Psalms 92:15

²⁵⁶ibid, 111:5

good You have in store for those who fear You²⁵⁷. And just as with these trees, their core is directed to heaven, so are the hearts of the righteous ones directed to Heaven. Just as the cedar and the date palm, when pruned, do not grow back, so for righteous ones, when dead cannot be replaced. The beams of our house are cedars these are the people versed in Torah by whose merit Israel exists.

CYPRESSES THE RAFTERS, these are cypresses, types of cedars. The rafters are placed corresponding to the beams so that humans may walk over them since they are strong. The explanation is that these are the students, both of these protect the generation.

²⁵⁷ibid, 31:20

CHAPTER 2

1.) *I AM THE NARCISSUS OF SHARON.* The Community of Israel says before God: "Master of the world, our ancestors were strong in declaring the oneness of God, and I, too, even though I am in exile, in the servitude to the nations, I have not abandoned my good scent nor veered from His commandments. I am covered by the shade of the Torah which dwells¹ in the Ark."²

LILY OF THE VALLEYS. A lily in the depths of the Torah. I am the narcissus of Sharon. Just as the narcissus of Sharon does not grow without water, so Israel does not grow without Torah and sages. *Lily of the valleys*, since it is moist and not wilted, so Israel is moistened by the commandments³, whereas a lily of the hills does wilt, that is why it is said *lily of the valleys*, just as this lily is beautiful, so is Israel beautiful with their actions.

2.) *AS A LILY AMONG THE THORNS.* Just as the lily is beautiful among the thorns and everybody recognizes a moist lily, so is Israel recognized among the nations and is set apart from all their defilements and their impurities as a lily among

¹Targum

²*Shir haShirim Rabbah*

³*Shir haShirim Rabbah*, cf. *Sanhedrin* 92b

the thorns. If it leans one way or the other it is torn by the thorns⁴.

Likewise if Israel leans from the path of the Lord, the nations of the world immediately come upon them, striking and punishing them.

As a lily among the thorns. Just as it is difficult for this lily to be picked from among the thorns, so it is difficult for Israel to be redeemed from among the nations⁵.

As a lily among the thorns. Just as this lily is for nothing other than smell, so Israel was created only to waft praise to God as it is said: *This people I formed for Myself, they will tell My praise*⁶.

As a lily among the thorns. Just as the lily wilts in a heat spell⁷, so does Israel suffer because of Esau. For when Esau will be wiped out, it is said: *And no survivor will be left of the House of Esau*⁸, Israel will immediately bloom like the lily, as it is said: *I will be to Israel like dew, he shall blossom like the lily*⁹. The lily when it is small is called a narcissus but when it is grown is called a

⁴Leviticus Rabbah: Ahare Mot

⁵Shir haShirim Rabbah

⁶Isaiah 43:21

⁷Shir haShirim Rabbah

⁸Obadiah 1:18

⁹Hosea 14:6

lily, but because Israel is among the nations amidst all kinds of troubles that is why she is called as a *lily among the thorns*.

3.) *LIKE AN APPLE AMONG THE TREES OF THE FOREST, SO IS MY BELOVED AMONG THE YOUTHS*. The Community of Israel says: "Just as the apple has a good scent and is recognizable among the trees of the forest, where there are no fruit [trees] besides it, so the Holy One is unique to Israel and they have not chosen anyone other than Him, as in: *If we forgot the name of our God and spread forth our hands to a foreign god*¹⁰." Why does it say *apple* above other kinds of fruit? To tell you that just as an apple is not ripe until the month of *Sivan*, so the Torah was not given until *Sivan*, and lo, it is what protects Israel in the exile¹¹.

I DELIGHT TO SIT IN HIS SHADE. Even though the nations of the world are plotting against me to oppress me, we have not forgotten His Oneness, nor did we cheat on His covenant.

HIS FRUIT SWEET TO MY MOUTH and His Torah is sweet to my mouth for the Torah is called a fruit, as it is said: *My fruit is better than gold, fine gold*¹². Rabbi Ahava son of Zeira says just as this apple, from the time that it blooms

¹⁰ Psalms 44:21

¹¹ *Shir haShirim Rabbah*

¹² Proverbs 8:19

until its fruit is ripe is 50 days, so the time from Israel's going out from Egypt until they received the Torah was 50 days.

4.) *HE BROUGHT ME TO THE BANQUET ROOM.* This is Mount Sinai¹³, and why is it called the banquet room? Just as wine invigorates the body, so do lessons of Torah invigorate those who study them as it is said: *For they are a graceful wreath upon your head*¹⁴ and it says: *Through me kings reign and rulers declare just laws*¹⁵. And, just as there are several kinds of wine, so do words of Torah have several understandings. Just as wine is not to be served in anything but a good vessel, so words of Torah are fulfilled only in a good person¹⁶ and in the same way it is said: *He reserves sound wisdom for the upright*¹⁷.

HIS BANNER OF LOVE WAS OVER ME. This is the banner of the Torah, for sages are the Torah's banners. With reference to the future, He will bring me to the Temple, for just as a person delights in a banquet room, so the Temple is a joy for Israel as it is said: *That I may come to the altar*

¹³ *Shir haShirim Rabbah*

¹⁴ *Proverbs 1:9*

¹⁵ *ibid, 8:15*

¹⁶ *literally "body"*

¹⁷ *ibid, 2:7*

[Temple] of God, God my delight, my joy¹⁸ and it says: And let them rejoice in My House of Prayer¹⁹. This is: He brought me to the banquet room and His banner of love was over me, i.e. when the Holy One will raise a flag to the nations and assemble the driven ones of Israel and will gather the dispersed of Judah²⁰. This flag [in Isaiah] is the banner [in the Song of Songs].

5.) *SUSTAIN ME WITH RAISIN CAKES.* Ashishot is used only for strengthening as in: For the raisin cakes of Kir-hareseth you shall moan most pitifully²¹. At first, when Israel was living in tranquility, Israel's sages would expound for them words of rebuke and words of restraint in order to keep them humble so that they would not depart from the words. These represent the raisin cakes. But when difficult straits would increase and the time of the Messianic pangs will begin, the sages will expound with words of comfort in order to enhearten Israel to profess the Oneness of the Holy One as it is said:

REFRESH ME WITH APPLES for just as the scent of apples is appealing so are the words of Torah and the comforts

¹⁸ Psalms 43:4

¹⁹ Isaiah 56:7

²⁰ Isaiah 11:12

²¹ Isaiah 16:7

attractive to Israel. Likewise, David says: *When I am filled with cares, Your comforts delight my soul*²².

FOR I AM SUFFERING WITH LOVE. I am pained over love of You and yet have not cheaten on Your covenant. Suffering with love as in: *No one of you is suffering with me*²³ as if to say no one of you is pained about me to tell me the words of my beloved. Another interpretation of *for I am faint with love* as when you find Amnon faint about Tamar's love, out of his great love of her as it is said: "Why are you so dejected, O son of the king, morning after morning? Tell me!" and it is also written: Amnon said "I am in love with Tamar, the sister of my brother Avshalom"²⁴. And even though the one is prohibited and the other is permitted this is but a parable and a case that Israel is faint in the exile for love of their Creator each and everyday hope for His deliverance and bear the yoke of the foreign nations, serving out of love and joy amidst affliction. What is the Scriptural basis for comparing the words of Torah to apples? It is said: *Like golden apples in silver showpieces is a word fitly spoken*²⁵. Therefore it is said:

²² Psalms 94:19

²³ I Samuel 22:8

²⁴ II Samuel 13:4

²⁵ Proverbs 25:11

REFRESH ME WITH APPLES, the words of Torah, the words of the prophets, the words of the sages, and the words of comfort and the promises that have been spoken in order to mitigate the heart's grief, and so David said: *Were not Your Torah my delight*²⁶.

Our rabbis, may their memories be blessed, made a comparison to a woman whose husband went overseas and was detained from [returning] to her. Her neighbor women would say: "Why do you wait all this time? Don't you know that your husband does not intend to return?" What did she do? She would bring her *ketuba* out and look at it each and every day and her mind would be at ease.

So when Israel faces trouble, they look at the words of Torah and are comforted for it is written in the Torah: *For the Lord will again delight in your well being, as in that of your ancestors*²⁷ and it is said: *Then the Lord your God will turn your captivity and take you back in love*²⁸, for the Lord your God is a compassionate God²⁹, this I recall to my mind³⁰.

²⁶ *Psalms 119:92*

²⁷ *Deuteronomy 30:9*

²⁸ *ibid*, 30:3

²⁹ *ibid*, 4:31

³⁰ *Lamentations 3:21*

Another interpretation of *for I am sick with love*. Just as a person who is sick needs healing, so Israel needs healing as it is said: *I will heal your afflictions*³¹ and just as a sick person feeds himself nothing but warm bread and soft foods so this generation does not search after [Talmudic] tractates, nor logical inferences but aggadic thinking and the conversation of the sages³². All the more so in this, our wretched generation that if sages have spoken this way in their generation, what should we say? Rabbi Yitzhak said at first, they would want to hear the words of *Mishnah* and the words of *Talmud*, but now they want to hear Bible and *aggadah*. Rabbi Levi said when there was plenty³³ they wanted to listen to *Mishnah* and *Talmud*, while now, when nothing is plentiful³¹, and furthermore when they are *sick* from enslavement, they want to hear words of *aggadah* and comfort.

6.) *HIS LEFT HAND UNDER MY HEAD* as it is written: *In that day the Lord will set His hand the second time*³⁴. *HIS RIGHT HAND EMBRACES ME* as it is written: *The Lord has sworn His right*

³¹Jeremiah 3:22

³²Midrash Zuta

³³literally: "when the *perutah* was found"

³⁴Isaiah 11:11

hand, by His mighty arm³⁵. His left hand under my head, and His right hand embraces me. Praise to God for the left hand pushes away and the right hand brings close³⁶ and similarly it says: In slight anger, for a moment I hid my face from you, but with kindness everlasting I will take you back in love³⁷ and says: For in anger I struck you down, but in favor I take you back³⁸ and says: For he is angry but for a moment, and when He is pleased there is life³⁹.

7.) I ADJURE YOU, O MAIDENS OF JERUSALEM. Rabbi Eliezer says swear by the heavens, by the earth and by the Heavenly Host and by the host of the earth⁴⁰.

OR BY THE RAMS OF THE FIELD. These are the people of the generation of religious persecution who did God's will since they shed their blood as the blood of the stag and as a ram as it is said: It is for Your sake that we are slain all day long⁴¹.

³⁵ *ibid*, 62:8

³⁶ *Sanhedrin* 107b

³⁷ *ibid*, 54:8

³⁸ *ibid*, 60:10

³⁹ *Psalms* 30:6

⁴⁰ *Shir haShirim Rabbah*

⁴¹ *Psalms* 44:23

DO NOT WAKE OR ROUSE. Rabbi Helbo said there are four oaths here. One, God adjures Israel that they will not rebel against God's Kingdom. and one that they will not prolong the end [of days]. One, adjuring the Kingdoms not to make the yoke too heavy upon Israel, for if they make the yoke too heavy upon Israel, they would cause the end [of days] to arrive before its time. And one that [Israel] will not reveal their secrets to the nations of the world.⁴²

THE LOVE, UNTIL IT PLEASE! This is the love with which God loved Israel, as it is said: *I have loved you, said the Lord*⁴³. *Until it please the Kingdom of Heaven, from God, as it is said: When a flag is raised in the hills, take note. When a ram's horn is blown, take heed*⁴⁴. *By gazelles or hinds of the field.* The oath is that they would not rebel against the [foreign] kingdoms, for if they would rebel against the [foreign] kingdoms, their blood would be spilled as a gazelle or a hind.

Another interpretation of *by the gazelles or hinds* is the Lord of Hosts. And by the One who wounds hinds by His decree until it please, as in: *I will wreak my vengeance on Edom through My people Israel*⁴⁵.

⁴²Toviah ben Eliezer's text is a composite of several midrashim found in *Shir haShirim Rabbah*.

⁴³Malachi 1:32

⁴⁴Isaiah 18:3

⁴⁵Ezekiel 25:14

8.) *THE SOUND OF MY BELOVED! BEHOLD HE IS COMING, LEAPING.* With reference to the past, Rabbi Yehudah says: When Moses said to Israel *"This month is marked for you"*⁴⁶ and says to them *"In this month you are to be redeemed"*, he said, *"Did not the Holy One say to Abraham, our father, And they shall be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years"*⁴⁷? This is not our thinking, but rather that of Rabbi Yehudah. He said to them: *"In as much as He pleases in your redemption, He does not look at your time calculations, but is leaping over the mountains, skipping over the hills. Leaping over the terms of redemption and skipping over the time calculations"*⁴⁸. Rabbi Nehemiah expounded *leaping over the mountains* by the merit of the Patriarchs, *skipping over the hills* by the merit of the Matriarchs.

And with reference to the future, Rabbi Yudan and Rabbi Hunia in the name of Rabbi Eliezer the son of Rabbi Yosi the Gallilean say that when the King Messiah will come and say to Israel: *"In this month you are to be redeemed"*, they will say: *"God swore that He will enslave us among the seventy nations"* and he will reply: *"leaping over the mountains, skipping over the hills"*. When one of you who is exiled to

⁴⁶Exodus 12:2

⁴⁷Genesis 15:13

⁴⁸Targum, Pesikta Rabbati, piska 15

one nation, it is as though the entire nation had been enslaved by them for the evil kingdom has rulers among all the nations and they rule over Israel. The sound of my beloved! Behold, He is coming! These are the sounds that are destined to come before the Messiah. Leaping over the mountains, skipping over the hills, this is Elijah, as is said about him: How welcome on the mountains are the footsteps of the herald; announcing happiness, heralding good fortune, announcing victory!⁴⁹

9.) MY BELOVED IS LIKE A GAZELLE, which is light on its feet OR A YOUNG STAG, which is small among the stags. And why is He like a gazelle? Just as the stag sleeps with one of his eyes open, so when God is angry at Israel and places them in difficult straits, He stands by them and saves them as it is said: In all their straits He was troubled⁵⁰.

THERE HE STANDS BEHIND OUR WALL, as if to say, God is for Israel, as it is said: His help is very near to those who fear Him⁵¹, and even if one from Israel is at the end of the earth, when he calls out to God, immediately He answers him,

⁴⁹Isaiah 52:7

⁵⁰ibid, 63:9

⁵¹Psalms 85:10

as it is said: *From the end of the earth I will call to You*⁵² and it says: *The Lord is near to all who call Him*⁵³.

GAZING FROM THE WINDOWS, Scripture speaks in the language of humans who gaze and peer and its explanation is: God looks down from His holy heavens to deliver the righteous as in: *Look down from Your holy abode, from heaven*⁵⁴ for He looks down from His holy height; the Lord beholds the earth from heaven to hear the groans of the prisoner, to release those condemned to death⁵⁵ and because stags and hinds have sixteen⁵⁶ eyes therefore Scripture likens God to a gazelle or a young stag and says: *GAZING FROM THE WINDOWS, PEERING THROUGH THE LATTICE-WORK*, since the Holy One has eyes too pure to look upon evil⁵⁷. And it says: Truly the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him, who wait for His lovingkindness⁵⁸ and it says: *My eyes are on the faithful men of the land, to have them at my side*⁵⁹ and it says: *The eyes of the Lord are on*

⁵² *ibid*, 61:3

⁵³ *ibid*, 145:18

⁵⁴ Deuteronomy 26:15

⁵⁵ Psalms 102:20,21

⁵⁶ The *rashei teivot* are *yod.waw*, normally abbreviated *tet.zayin*

⁵⁷ Habakkuk 1:13

⁵⁸ Psalms 33:18

⁵⁹ *ibid*, 101:6

the righteous⁶⁰ and it says: For now I have seen with My own eyes⁶¹ and it says: As for Me, I respond and look on him⁶², therefore it is said: Gazing from the windows, peering through the lattice-work, for God is gazing and seeing the wretchedness of His people and scouts and looks at the troubles that Israel suffers for the sanctification of His great name.

10.) MY BELOVED SPOKE AND SAID TO ME, this is the time of the redemption, [when] God intends to send Elijah the prophet, as it is said: Lo, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before the coming of the great awesome day of the Lord⁶³. My beloved spoke through Elijah AND HE SAID TO ME through the Messianic King, ARISE MY DARLING as in: Arise, sit [on your throne] Jerusalem⁶⁴ and it says: Arise, shine, for your light has dawned⁶⁵. Arise, from the dust⁶⁶.

MY DARLING, MY FAIR ONE; a nation that knows me and has not exchanged me [for another]. Hear O Israel, the Lord is

⁶⁰ibid, 34:16

⁶¹Zechariah 9:8

⁶²Hosea 14:9

⁶³Malachi 3:23

⁶⁴Isaiah 52:2

⁶⁵ibid, 60:1

⁶⁶op cit.

our God, the Lord is One⁶⁷. My fair one, for you have made me fair before all the nations, for you have not exchanged my religion for the religion of the nations.

COME AWAY! as in: But the redeemed shall walk there⁶⁸.

11.) *FOR NOW THE RAINY SEASON IS PAST.* These are the difficult straits of the four empires, which are like the rainy season, a time of snow and wind and cold and mid-winter.

THE RAINS ARE OVER AND GONE, all of them will all end and have perish as it is said: I will make an end of all the nations among which I have banished you⁶⁹ such nations shall surely be destroyed⁷⁰ and their peoples shall be burnings of lime, thorns cut down that are set on fire⁷¹.

12.) *THE BLOSSOMS APPEAR ON THE EARTH,* these are the righteous ones who will arise close to Elijah's coming.

THE TIME OF PRUNING HAS COME, after the righteous ones arise as in: The knowledgeable among the people will make many understand⁷² and it says: But the knowledgeable will

⁶⁷Deuteronomy 6:4

⁶⁸Isaiah 35:9

⁶⁹Jeremiah 46:28

⁷⁰Isaiah 60:12

⁷¹ibid, 33:12

⁷²Daniel 11:33

understand⁷³, then He will make retribution against the wicked and the nations of the world as in: *Swing the sickle for the crop is ripe*⁷⁴ and it says: *He shall strike down earth with the rod of His mouth and slay the wicked with the breath of His lips*⁷⁵, the crushing of the transgressor and the sinners shall be together and those who forsake the Lord shall perish⁷⁶.

THE SONG OF THE TURTLEDOVE IS HEARD IN OUR LAND, this is Elijah's voice. Just as the turtledove SURRENDER its life on behalf of its mate, so Elijah surrendered his life on behalf of Israel as it is said: *Answer me O Lord, answer me*⁷⁷ and it says: *When it was time to present the meal offering the prophet Elijah came forward and said..."I am your servant"*⁷⁸. He spoke before the Master of the World: "You intend to send me at the end of days. If my words of prophecy are useless now, how will they receive me at the end of days?" Elijah's mission here is like the mission of Moses our teacher at Israel's exodus from Egypt. Just as Moses our teacher arose and stood in the breach because of

⁷³ *ibid*, 12:10

⁷⁴ Joel 4:13

⁷⁵ Isaiah 11:4

⁷⁶ *ibid*, 1:28

⁷⁷ I Kings 18:37

⁷⁸ *ibid*, 18:36

the calf, so is Elijah destined to stand in the breach on behalf of Carmel and all this matter can be expounded as applying to the past or to the future.

Rabbi Berekiah in the name of Rabbi Yitzhak said the blossoms appear on the earth these are the four craftsmen⁷⁹. Elijah, the righteous priest and Melchizedek⁸⁰ and the King Messiah and the Anointed of War⁸¹. The time of pruning has come, to impose retribution upon the nations, punishment upon the peoples⁸². The sound of the turtledove is the sound of the coming of deliverance.

13.) *THE FIG TREE PUTS FORTH GREEN FIGS* is comparable to a king who invited guests to a feast. Some guests came on their own, uninvited. What did the king do? He placed a person at the door of the banquet hall with a guest list and he said to him: "Anyone whose name is written on the list, let him enter, but anyone who is not written, do not let him in." So it was when Moses came to redeem Israel; all the wicked of Israel died during the three days of eating and so it will be in the future. *The fig tree puts forth green figs.* These are the wicked of Israel who are like unripe

⁷⁹Zechariah 2:3

⁸⁰Genesis 14:18, Psalms 110:4

⁸¹*Shir haShirim Rabbah*

⁸²Psalms 149:7, the last word in the verse has been separated into two words in the Greenup text.

green figs. For Israel is comparable to a fig tree⁸³ as it is said: *Your ancestors seemed to Me like the first fruit to ripen on a fig tree*⁸⁴ and God intends to bring the righteous ones close and to gladden them and to push away the wicked and to shame them as it is said: *Thus said the Lord God: "My servants shall eat while you shall hunger, my servants shall drink while you shall thirst. Behold my servants shall be glad and you shall be shamed"*⁸⁵. These are the righteous ones whose deeds are recorded as it is said: *At that time, your people will be rescued, all who are found recorded in the book*⁸⁶.

Rabbi Hiyya the son of Abba said shortly before the days of the Messiah a great plague will come upon the world and all the wicked will be destroyed in it, while for those who remain, He says: *Those who remain in Zion and are left in Jerusalem, all inscribed for life in Jerusalem shall be called holy*⁸⁷.

14.) *MY DOVE IN THE CRANNY OF THE ROCK*. Israel has been compared both to a dove and to an animal to tell you that even though

⁸³Targum

⁸⁴Hosea 9:10

⁸⁵Isaiah 65:13

⁸⁶Daniel 12:1

⁸⁷Isaiah 4:3, quoted in *Shir haShirim Rabbah*

before the *shekhina* they are perfect as a dove, among the nations they are sturdy as animals. Indeed Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah⁸⁸ were impassible before Nebuchadnezzar's decree as it is said: *Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego said in reply to the king: "O, Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you...for God will save us from your power"*⁸⁹. They said: "In the matter of tributes and civil obedience you are king over us, but in having to worship your image you Nebuchadnezzar are not King over us"⁹⁰. Therefore Israel is compared to a dove since they are perfect like a dove⁹¹. *My dove in the cranny of the rock.*

Rabbi Ishmael taught: Why was Israel, when it was standing by the sea, compared to a dove which when she flees from her nest⁹² begins to flap her wings? So that the owner of her dovecote will hear her and save her. So Israel was afraid to enter the sea which had not yet been split. They could not retreat behind them since Pharaoh had already come close. What did they do? *The Israelites cried to the Lord*⁹³. *LET ME SEE YOUR FACE*, the good actions that are within

⁸⁸ Daniel 1:19,20

⁸⁹ Daniel 3:16,17

⁹⁰ *Shir haShirim Rabbah*

⁹¹ Midrash Psalms on 68:13

⁹² *Targum, Tanhuma Shofetim*

⁹³ Exodus 14:10, cited in *Shir haShirim Rabbah*

you. *LET ME HEAR YOUR VOICE*, stand ye in prayer, *FOR YOUR VOICE IS SWEET* as a song.

AND YOUR COUNTENANCE IS COMELY, which they were showing to each other [and said:] *This is my God, I will glorify Him*⁹⁴. Rabbi Yosi the Gallilean began, reading it for the future. *My dove in the cranny of the rock*, this is Israel who are hidden among the kingdoms. *Let me see your face*, this is good action⁹⁵. *Let me hear your voice*, this is study of Torah. *For your voice is sweet*, before God. *Your countenance is comely*, with your good actions⁹⁶. Another interpretation of: *My dove in the cranny of the rock*, this is Israel who are subject to Esau as it is said about him: *Who dwell in the crannies of the rock about Israel*⁹⁷. *HIDDEN BY THE CLIFF*, subject to Esau whose hiding is in the cemeteries. *Let me see your face*, the Holy One requests from Israel to do good actions. *Let me hear your voice*, by increasing regular prayers and supplications. *For your voice is sweet and and your countenance comely*, since Israel is redeemed by the merit of prayer and study and good actions.

⁹⁴Exodus 15:2

⁹⁵Shir haShirim Rabbah

⁹⁶ibid

⁹⁷Obadiah 1:3

Another interpretation of: *My dove in the cranny of the rock*. The Holy One said: "Even though Israel has been reduced to dust and have come down to the lowest level, if they display good actions and raise their voices in Jewish learning and prayer, they will be rescued. So great is learning that it was made holy by the action of the forty years that Israel wandered in the wilderness. Learning is greater [than action]⁹⁸ for learning leads to action⁹⁹ as it is said: *So learn them and keep them to do them*¹⁰⁰. How can one endure without learning? God desires the prayer of the righteous and brings suffering upon them in order that they will pray for mercy from Him. Why was Rebecca barren? In order that Isaac would plead with the Lord¹⁰¹ and likewise you find with Israel: *Greatly frightened, the Israelites called out to the Lord*¹⁰² and it says: *When He saw that they were in distress, when He heard their cry*¹⁰³. Likewise the Holy One longs after Israel's prayer and leads them to difficult times in order to bring them back to goodness, therefore it is said: *For your voice is sweet and your*

⁹⁸Yerushalmi Hagiga 1:7, Pesakhim 3:7

⁹⁹Shir haShirim Rabbah

¹⁰⁰Deuteronomy 5:1

¹⁰¹Genesis 25:21

¹⁰²Exodus 14:10

¹⁰³Psalms 106:44

countenance comely. Likewise, Devorah said: Louder than the sound of archers, there among the watering places, let them rehearse the righteous acts of the Lord¹⁰⁴. Then did the people of the Lord march down to the gates, for when Israel is dispersed¹⁰⁵ immediately they will march down to the gates of prayer.

A comparison is made to a king who had an attractive daughter. He loved to hear her voice and to see her beauty, yet she would hide herself from him. What did the king do? He commanded his servants to frighten her so she would think that they were brigands; she began to scream: "Father, father!" and he had her released to the king. He said to her: "Let me see your face, let me hear your voice"¹⁰⁶.

So, at a time when Israel gives up hope from God, God frightens them through the nations and they pray for mercy from Him, and do good deeds and he delivers them.

15.) *FOXES HAVE TAKEN HOLD OF US.* With reference to the past, the Egyptians were seizing the infants and throwing them into the Nile as it is said: *LITTLE FOXES.* To the waters of the Nile as it is said: *Who measured the waters with the*

¹⁰⁴Judges 5:11

¹⁰⁵transposing *peh.zayin.reish.* for
peh.reish.zayin.

¹⁰⁶cf. *Shir haShirim Rabbah*

*hollow of His hand*¹⁰⁷. Therefore it is written with a defective waw, and why are the Egyptians called foxes? For just as the foxes retrace their steps, so did the Egyptians retrace their steps and reconsider, saying: "If we cause them to fall into fire, behold He has already destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah by fire. So let us cause them to fall into the water, for the Lord has sworn that He will not bring a flood again." What they did not know is that God would not bring a flood upon them, but that He would bring them and cause them to fall into the sea.

WHILE OUR VINEYARD IS IN BLOSSOM, while they were destroying among Israel, they [the Israelites] were being fruitful and increasing as it is said: *The more they were oppressed the more they increased and spread out*¹⁰⁸.

With reference to the future, the four kingdoms will have ruled over Israel and will be called foxes because they will have plotted craftily against Israel as it is said: *They plot craftily against Your people*¹⁰⁹ and there is nothing craftier than animals. As *little foxes*, this is the wicked kingdom, Esau, the father of Edom as it is said: *For I will make you least among nations*¹¹⁰, and even though he

¹⁰⁷ Isaiah 40:12

¹⁰⁸ Exodus 1:12

¹⁰⁹ Psalms 83:4

¹¹⁰ Jeremiah 49:15

is his father, he called him elder, as it is said: *His elder son*¹¹¹ while the Holy One calls him least as it is said: *For I will make you least among nations*¹¹² and *THEY TERRORIZE THE VINEYARDS*. The vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the people Israel whom they kill and terrorize in each and every generation. While our vineyards are in blossom. As in: *I will not reject them or spurn them so as to destroy them, annulling my covenant with them*¹¹³ for the Lord will never abandon His people¹¹⁴ nor will He forsake His very own¹¹⁵.

16.) *MY BELOVED IS MINE AND I AM HIS*, He is my God and I am his nation. He is my God, *I am the Lord your God*¹¹⁶ and I am His nation as it is said: *Hearken to Me, My people, and give ear to Me, O My nation*¹¹⁷. He is my Father as it is said: *For You are our Father*¹¹⁸ and I am His son, as it is said: *Israel is my son, My first born*¹¹⁹. He is my Shepherd as it

¹¹¹Genesis 27:1

¹¹²op cit.

¹¹³Leviticus 26:44

¹¹⁴I Samuel 12:22

¹¹⁵Psalms 94:14

¹¹⁶Exodus 6:17, Leviticus 11:44 [30 other citations]

¹¹⁷Isaiah 51:4

¹¹⁸ibid, 63:16

¹¹⁹Exodus 4:22

is said: Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel¹²⁰ and I am His flock as it is said: For you, the flock I tend, are men¹²¹. You are the Guardian, as it is said: Behold, the Guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps¹²² and I am His vineyard as it is said: For the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the House of Israel¹²³. I have called out: This is my beloved¹²⁴, He responded: Fortunate are you, O Israel, who is like you?¹²⁵ then I said: Who is like You, among the mighty, O Lord? Who is like You?¹²⁶. He said to me: And who is like Your people Israel, a unique nation on earth¹²⁷? Then I said: The Lord is our God, the Lord is One¹²⁸. He responded: And what a great nation¹²⁹ and I said: Great is the Lord and highly praised¹³⁰. My beloved is mine and I am His. My beloved is mine as it is said: I am the Lord, your

¹²⁰ Psalms 80:2

¹²¹ Ezekiel 34:31

¹²² Psalms 121:4

¹²³ Isaiah 5:7

¹²⁴ Shir haShirim 5:16

¹²⁵ Deuteronomy 33:29

¹²⁶ Exodus 15:11

¹²⁷ II Samuel 7:23

¹²⁸ Deuteronomy 6:4

¹²⁹ *ibid*, 4:8

¹³⁰ Psalms 48:2

God¹³¹ and it says: He is the Lord our God¹³² and we are His people¹³³. And I am His; You shall be My treasured possession among all peoples¹³⁴.

WHO SHEPHERDS AMONG THE LILIES, when He shepherds Israel, as it is said: Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel¹³⁵ and said: Mind well the looks of Your flock, pay attention to Your herds¹³⁶. Your flocks, these are the majority of the people¹³⁷; Your herds, these are the great scholars in the generation¹³⁸. My beloved is mine, as in: I will espouse you with faithfulness¹³⁹. Three times it is said: I will espouse you¹⁴⁰ as a parallel to the three eternal patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I will espouse you with five things¹⁴¹ by which the world endures: Righteousness, lovingkindness, justice, compassion and

¹³¹Exodus 19:2

¹³²II Chronicles 13:10

¹³³Psalms 100:3

¹³⁴Exodus 19:5

¹³⁵Psalms 80:2

¹³⁶Proverbs 27:23

¹³⁷literally "the rest of the people"

¹³⁸cf. Midrash Zuta

¹³⁹Hosea 2:22

¹⁴⁰Hosea 2:21

¹⁴¹Midrash Shir haShirim

faithfulness and likewise it says: *Zion shall be redeemed with justice, her repentant ones with righteousness*¹⁴² and it is said: *But My lovingkindness will never be removed from you*¹⁴³ and it says: *I will not betray My faithfulness*¹⁴⁴ and it says: *With great compassion I will gather you*¹⁴⁵. *Who shepherds among the lilies, with the connotation of shattering*¹⁴⁶. God's rod of chastisement comes down only upon men whose hearts are soft like a lily¹⁴⁷.

Rabbi Eliezer said this can be compared to an orchard owner who prunes only [the tree] that is strong enough, thus God does not test the wicked. Rabbi Hanina said the flax beater strikes only the flax that is strong enough, for each time he strikes it, it becomes better. Thus God tries only the righteous, as it is said: *The Lord tries the righteous*¹⁴⁸.

Rabbi Yohanan said the potter strikes and examines only the sturdy jars, for even though he [may] strike them

¹⁴²Isaiah 1:27

¹⁴³ibid, 54:10

¹⁴⁴Psalms 89:34

¹⁴⁵Isaiah 54:7

¹⁴⁶resh.ayin.ayin instead of resh.ayin.heh

¹⁴⁷Shir haShirim Rabbah

¹⁴⁸Psalms 11:5

several times, they are not broken¹⁴⁹ and likewise it says: *His master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph*¹⁵⁰ for he was righteous and withstood any trial.

Thus at the end of days, God will try only those holy congregations and people of loving-kindness and their righteous ones who are in the generation, as it is said: *Some of the knowledgeable will fall by the sword and by flame*¹⁵¹ and it says: *purging, refining and purifying themselves*¹⁵², and about them it says: *But I will leave within you a poor humble people and they shall find refuge in the name of the Lord*¹⁵³.

17.) *UNTIL THE DAYS COOLS OFF*, Rabbi Berekiah said: until the day cools off is while God makes the day hot with the fire of His wrath¹⁵⁴ as in: to blow upon him, to set loose upon him Your blazing fire¹⁵⁵, and it says: *For lo, that day is at hand, burning like an oven*¹⁵⁶.

¹⁴⁹ *Shir haShirim Rabbah*

¹⁵⁰ *Genesis 39:7*

¹⁵¹ *Daniel 11:33,35*

¹⁵² *Daniel 12:10, verb order transposed.*

¹⁵³ *Zephaniah 3:12*

¹⁵⁴ *from Ezekiel 21:36*

¹⁵⁵ *Ezekiel 22:20*

¹⁵⁶ *Malachi 3:19*

THE SHADOWS FLEE, these are shadows of sorrow and sighing as it is said: *The ransomed of the Lord shall return...while sorrow and sighing flee*¹⁵⁷. *The shadows flee*, as the trial of the nations will depart, as was said with reference to the past: *Their protection has departed from them*¹⁵⁸. *TURN, BE LIKE A GAZELLE OR A YOUNG HIND*. At the end, God will turn around for them from His attribute of justice to His attribute of mercy and will hurry with their redemption as a stag or a hind, which are quick on their feet.

UPON THE HILLS OF SPICE. As the kingdoms drop their crowns. Another interpretation: *Upon the hills of Betar*, for what they did at Betar. Rabbi Yohanan said: "Upon orders¹⁵⁹ of Hadrian Caesar at Betar killing eighty thousand myriads"¹⁶⁰.

¹⁵⁷ Isaiah 35:10

¹⁵⁸ Numbers 14:9

¹⁵⁹ literally "voice"

¹⁶⁰ T. Jerushalmi Ta'anit 4:5

CHAPTER 3

1.) *DURING THE NIGHTS, ON MY BED, I SOUGHT THE ONE I LOVE.* The exile is like a night as it is said: *Watchman, what of the night. Watchman, what of the night*¹, while the community of Israel says: *"During the nights on my bed when I laid down in exile I remember God's mercies and the miracles that He did for me during the nights of Pesah as David said: I recall at night their jibes at me, I commune with myself, my spirit inquires*²". God has already assured Israel about bringing them out of the exile as He brought them out from the land of Egypt as in: *That was for the Lord a night of watching to bring them out of the land of Egypt; that same night is the Lord's ... throughout the ages*³, which teaches that Israel is destined to be redeemed again at Pesah and because Israel has been delayed in the exile, David, in the spirit of holiness said about them: *Has God forgotten to be gracious? Will His promise be unfulfilled for all time?*⁴ *The Lord does not reject forever*⁵ *and never again show favor*⁶

¹ Isaiah 21:11

² Psalms 77:7, also cited in *Shir haShirim Rabbah*

³ Exodus 12:42

⁴ Psalms 77:9

⁵ Lamentations 3:31, Toviah ben Eliezer has changed the order of the words in the verse

⁶ Psalms 77:8

rather, *Has He in anger stifled His compassion?*⁷, even though He has been angry, *His mercies endure*⁸. I sought the one I love, I sought to return in repentance, perhaps I will be saved from the nations.

I SOUGHT, BUT FOUND HIM NOT. This is the length of this exile, as in: *For there is yet a prophecy for a set term*⁹ while it is said: *It will be as I have called out*¹⁰ and also: *For you will call to my ears, but I will not answer*¹¹. During the nights, on my bed.

Rabbi Abba bar Kahana said on my bed is as in: *He does not die, but has to take to his bed*¹² for Israel is like a sick person who takes to his bed during the nights¹³.

Rabbi Levi said: The community of Israel said before the Holy One, "Master of the World, in the past You would wake¹⁴ me up between night and day; between the night of Egypt and the night of Babylonia; between the night of

⁷ Psalms 77:10

⁸ *ibid*

⁹ Habakkuk 2:3

¹⁰ Unable to trace verse, possibly a misquote

¹¹ Unable to trace verse, possibly a misquote of Ezekiel 8:18

¹² Exodus 21:18

¹³ *Shir haShirim Rabbah*

¹⁴ *mem.aleph.yod.reish*; "set me alight" in *Shir haShirim Rabbah*

Babylonia and the night of Media; between the night of Media and the night of Greece; between the night of Greece and the night of Edom; while now that I have grown lax about observing the mitzvot, night(s) after night(s) have become joined for me¹⁵. I sought the one I love, this is the Messianic King. I sought, but found him not as it is said: Far from me is my comforter who might revive my spirit¹⁶.

2.) *LET ME RISE AND GO ABOUT*; to wake up from my sleep, and go about with repentance and good actions.

IN THE TOWN. With an angel and the holy one¹⁷ to seek mercy from Him.

THROUGH THE SQUARES AND THE STREETS, these are the towns and the cities where Israel is dispersed in the various localities.

LET ME SEEK THE ONE I LOVE, I SOUGHT HIM BUT FOUND HIM NOT. This is the length of the exile, for when Israel thinks, "Now the end is complete", still the end extends, for Israel has had many signs and all of them have come to an end, and have passed, and still they [Israel] are waiting.

¹⁵ *Shir haShirim Rabbah*

¹⁶ *Lamentations 1:16*

¹⁷ *Daniel 4:10*

3.) *THE WATCHMEN THAT GO ABOUT THE TOWN FOUND ME*, these are the watchmen that are in each and every generation. That go about the town, that go about the world. These are the nations, for among which they have been enslaved.

HAVE YOU SEEN THE ONE I LOVE? As if to say: "Have you seen a god as our God? The One I love, He has no other beside Him, and so how can we set aside His worship to cleave to their gods?"

4.) *SCARCELY HAD I PASSED THEM.* When God will deliver the remnant of His people from the nations, all of the troubles that have passed over them will be in their eyes as naught, as it is said: *When the Lord restores the fortunes of Zion we are like dreamers*¹⁸ and it says: *The former troubles shall be forgotten, shall be hidden from My eyes*¹⁹.

UNTIL I FOUND THE ONE THAT I LOVE, then I will be God's people.

I HELD HIM, I WOULD NOT LET HIM GO, so that there will be no other exile, as it is said: *They shall never languish again*²⁰.

UNTIL I BROUGHT HIM TO MY MOTHER'S HOUSE, this is specifically the land of Israel, home of my people.

¹⁸ Psalms 126:1

¹⁹ Isaiah 65:16

²⁰ Jeremiah 31:11 in Qoren, [31:10 in JPS]

TO THE CHAMBER OF SHE WHO CONCEIVED ME, this is the Temple²¹
as in: In the bed chamber²².

5.) I ADJURE YOU, DAUGHTERS OF JERUSALEM, since Israel went up
from Egypt.

BY GAZELLES OR HINDS OF THE FIELD, by the tribes which have
been likened to hinds as it is said: Naphtali is a hind let
loose²³, Judah is a lion's whelp²⁴, Benjamin is a ravenous
wolf²⁵.

DO NOT STIR OR ROUSE, so that you will not delay the end
[of time] nor ascend walls of defense and that you will not
embitter the nations.

LOVE UNTIL IT PLEASE, love which is between Me and you.

6.) WHO IS SHE COMING UP FROM THE WILDERNESS? Did He bring them
up from the desert? Is it not from Egypt that He brought
them up as it is said: I will bring you up from the misery
of Egypt²⁶? Is not this a reference to Israel's love before
God, that they are as dear to Him as a find that a person

²¹Midrash Shir haShirim

²²I Kings 11:2

²³Genesis 49:21

²⁴ibid, 49:9

²⁵ibid, 49:27

²⁶Exodus 3:17

finds in the wilderness? Thus it says: *He will find him in a land of wilderness*²⁷ and it says: *I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness*²⁸.

AS PILLARS OF SMOKE, just as this smoke is troublesome in every place where it penetrates, so have all the nations been troubled when Israel went up from Egypt as it is said: *Now are the clouds of Edom dismayed, the tribes of Moab - troubling grips them - all the dwellers in Canaan are aghast*²⁹ and so Rahab the prostitute said: *"When we heard about it, we lost heart"*³⁰.

PERFUMED OF MYRRH, the merit of our patriarch Abraham since he was the foremost of faith and was compared to myrrh which is foremost among spices as it is said: *Choice spices; five hundred weight of flowing myrrh*³¹.

AND FRANKINCENSE, this is the merit of Isaac, for just as frankincense perfumes the altar, so did Isaac set himself on the altar when his father bound him, for priests, kings and pious ones have descended from him and he is the one who wrestled with the angel and prevailed³².

²⁷Deuteronomy 32:10

²⁸Hosea 9:10

²⁹Exodus 15:15

³⁰Joshua 2:11

³¹Exodus 30:23

³²Genesis 32:25,26

Likewise for the future, *who is she coming up from the wilderness?* Israel is destined to go out to the wilderness because of the troubles, and from there Elijah will be revealed to them, as it is said: *I will cause you to dwell in your tents again, as in the days of old*³³ and then they will come up as a bride, *PERFUMED OF MYRRH AND FRANKINCENSE MORE THAN ALL OF THE POWDERS OF THE MERCHANT.* He mentions these three as against the three patriarchs.

7.) *THERE IS SOLOMON'S COUCH*, this is the Temple³⁴, which belongs to the King, to whom peace belongs, for just as this couch is used as a resting place so is the Temple used as a resting place for Israel, as it is said: *Because you have not yet come to the allotted rest and the inheritance*³⁵, and so too Solomon said: *Praised be the Lord who has granted a haven to His people Israel, just as He promised*³⁶.

ENCIRCLED BY SIXTY WARRIORS, like the four priestly guards and the four levitical guards to minister the priest's service while the twelve tribes of Israel teach that all Israel is destined to be gathered to become ministers in the Temple, as in the past and ancient times as it is said:

³³ Hosea 12:10

³⁴ Targum

³⁵ Deuteronomy 12:9

³⁶ I Kings 8:56

There the tribes went up, the tribes of the Lord as testimony to Israel, there to give thanks to the name of God³⁷ and it says: There Judah and all the House of Israel, all of them, will worship me³⁸.

8.) ALL OF THEM TRAINED IN WARFARE, all of them will be trained in Torah and so it says: With high praise to God in their throats and two-edged swords in their hands³⁹, and what is meant by executing the doom decreed⁴⁰? Eye for an eye, tooth for tooth⁴¹, executing the doom decreed means: You shall tread upon their high places⁴².

SKILLED IN BATTLE, battles of Torah.

EACH WITH SWORD ON THIGH, BECAUSE OF FEAR DURING THE NIGHTS, to wreak revenge against Esau, since they had made them [Israel] afraid in the exile, and so it says: I will wreak vengeance on Edom through My people Israel⁴³ and it says: And no survivor shall be left of the House of Esau - for the

³⁷ Psalms 122:4

³⁸ Ezekiel 40:20, quoted inaccurately

³⁹ Psalms 149:6

⁴⁰ Psalms 149:9

⁴¹ Leviticus 24:20

⁴² Deuteronomy 33:29

⁴³ Ezekiel 25:14

Lord has spoken⁴⁴ and it says: Edom will be a possession and Israel is made victor⁴⁵.

9.) KING SOLOMON MADE ME A LITTER, the King to whom peace belongs who made a Temple for Himself to dwell in among Israel.

OUT OF THE WOOD OF LEBANON, as He did for Israel when they went out from Egypt, so [He] intends to do again, to dwell amongst them⁴⁶, to build a Temple for them.

10.) [HE MADE] ITS POSTS OF SILVER, just as it says.

ITS BACK OF GOLD - this is the cover on the Holy Ark.

ITS SEAT OF PURPLE - this is the Holy of Holies⁴⁷.

WITHIN, INSET WITH LOVE -these are the tablets. This informs you that just as the ark was hidden during Josiah's time God intends to uncover it to Israel, as it is said: They will come to Zion with singing, crowned with joy everlasting⁴⁸. Joy everlasting, that is the ark.

FROM THE MAIDENS OF JERUSALEM, to take vengeance from the nations for what they have done against Jerusalem.

⁴⁴Obadiah 1:18

⁴⁵Numbers 24:18, cited inaccurately

⁴⁶Exodus 25:8

⁴⁷Targum

⁴⁸Isaiah 51:11

Another interpretation of *King Solomon made me a litter*. This is the eternal covenant, since it is made in stone.

OUT OF THE WOOD OF LEBANON, like a person who builds a house out of the wood of Lebanon.

HE MADE ITS POSTS OF SILVER, these are the mountains, since they are like posts.

ITS BACK OF GOLD, this is the firmament, since it is like gold.

ITS SEAT OF PURPLE, this is the throne of glory.

WITHIN, INSET WITH LOVE, these are the souls of the righteous, which are not mixed with those of the evil ones.

11.) *GO FORTH AND GAZE, O DAUGHTERS OF ZION*. The daughters of Zion came to the nations who saw the miracles and wonders that God was doing for His people, and the honor and the crown with which He was crowning in the day of ingathering as in: *The Lord will reign for ever and ever*⁴⁹ and it says: *The Lord is King for ever and ever, the nations will perish from His land*⁵⁰ and it says: For deliverers will come up on Mount Zion to wreak judgement on Mount Esau⁵¹.

⁴⁹Exodus 15:18

⁵⁰Psalms 10:16

⁵¹Obadiah 1:21

*HIS MOTHER, His people*⁵².

*ON HIS WEDDING DAY, these are the days of the Messiah as it is said: And as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will God rejoice over you*⁵³.

*AND IN THE DAY OF HIS HEART'S GLADNESS, this is the Temple and the rebuilding of Jerusalem, as it is said: I will rejoice in Jerusalem and delight in her people*⁵⁴.

⁵² Targum

⁵³ Isaiah 62:5

⁵⁴ ibid, 65:19

Chapter 4

1.) *BEHOLD, YOU ARE FAIR* with prayer¹. *BEHOLD YOU ARE FAIR, YOUR EYES ARE LIKE DOVES* with good actions². Behold, you are fair when I perform miracles for you. Behold you are fair, your eyes are like doves this refers to the day of the gathering of the exiled.

(*FROM BEHIND YOUR VEIL*, because you have restrained yourself and suffered the troubles caused by the nations as in: They have ended my life in a pit and cast stones at me³ and so David says: How long O Lord? Will you forget me forever?⁴ Another interpretation of from behind your veil [is] because you are joined together as one group rather than as separate groups of classes or factions, similar to a woman who bundles up her hair behind herself, and it is beautiful to her. So Israel, when they are restrained they are beautiful. Your veil is like: Remove your veil, strip off your train, bare your leg⁵.

YOUR HAIR LIKE A FLOCK OF GOATS for just as hair is beautiful on a woman, so do the righteous ones in Israel protect the members of their generation.

¹ *Shir HaShirim Rabbah*

² cf. *Shir haShirim Rabbah*

³ *Lamentations 3:53*

⁴ *Psalms 13:2*

⁵ *Isaiah 47:2*

STREAMING DOWN MOUNT GILEAD this is the exile of Jerusalem for professing the unity of the Holy One among the nations. Another interpretation is that *streaming down* is like *he is bald at the forehead* for the Targum reads "he is bald-headed"⁶. *From Mount Gilead* this is Jerusalem, a pile of stones which is witness for Israel that God chose them.

2.) *YOUR TEETH*; these are the fit ones in Israel for just as the teeth strengthen the entire body, so do the fit ones in Israel strengthen them to fear their Creator like in *AS A SHORN FLOCK*, these are the ewes which are pregnant, so the shepherd separates them from the rest of the the flocks because they are pregnant. In this way God separates the righteous ones from the wicked.

COMING UP FROM THE WASHING POOL since they are clean of sin and clean of all transgression and iniquity as it is said: *When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion*⁷.

ALL OF THEM ARE PAIRED just as this ewe nurses twins, so does Israel sit in pairs and busy themselves in Torah⁸.

⁶Leviticus 13:41, In this verse the Hebrew *gibbeah* is translated into Aramaic as *g'lush*.

⁷Isaiah 4:4

⁸Midrash Shir haShirim

AND NOT ONE LOSES HER YOUNG, all of the generation that in the future the Holy One intends to choose will be righteous as it is said: *Your people, all of them righteous*⁹.

3.) *YOUR LIPS ARE LIKE A CRIMSON THREAD* this is the thread of the curtain. He compares the sages of Israel to the *crimson thread* of the curtain which was spread out before the Holy of Holies, separating the holy and the Holy of Holies. Thus the sages of Israel distinguish between lesser matters and greater matters, between one law and another, between the prohibited and the permitted. *Your lips*, these are the learned of Israel who teach with their lips.

YOUR SPEECH IS BEAUTIFUL and their words are beautiful, and similar to it is: *Nor does your speech elevate*¹⁰.

YOUR TEMPLES ARE LIKE A SECTION OF POMEGRANATE, these are those who sit in houses of study¹¹ who are filled with commandments like a pomegranate.¹²

FROM BEHIND YOUR VEIL, since they restrain themselves to hear words of Torah which restrain them in the exile and suffer troubles, so the text likens Israel to the bettering of a woman who is beautiful and modest.

⁹ Isaiah 60:21

¹⁰ Psalms 75:7

¹¹ Midrash Zuta

¹² Targum

4.) *LIKE THE TOWER OF DAVID.* Just as the *Tower of David* was higher than all of the towers in Jerusalem, so was the Temple higher than all else¹³.

YOUR NECK, this is the Temple. Just as this neck is to the head, so that if it is destroyed there is no more life, so since the destruction of the Temple the strength of Israel has been diminished. Just as the neck is beautiful for the body, so is the Temple beautiful for the world. Just as most jewelry is around the neck¹⁴, so when the Temple was in existence most of the world's good qualities belonged to Israel.

BUILT TO HOLD WEAPONS, a mound upon which all mouths pray¹⁵. Talpiot, since prayers are received from the four directions. The Holy One said: "I have made a mound and I will in the future build upon it", as it is said: *The city shall be rebuilt on its mound and its fortress in its proper place*¹⁶.

¹³ *Shir haShirim Rabbah*

¹⁴ *Shir haShirim Rabbah*

¹⁵ *B. Berakhot 30a, cf. Shir haShirim Rabbah*

¹⁶ *Jeremiah 30:18*

HUNG WITH A THOUSAND SHIELDS, this is the Torah, as is said about it: *The word which He commanded to a thousand generations*¹⁷.

ALL THE ARMOUR OF THE WARRIORS, these are midrashic masters as it is said: *Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are sons born to a man in his youth*¹⁸. Abba Mari, Rabbi Eliezer, said a thousand shields, this is the teaching of the Holy One, since it is a shield for Israel, as it is said: *It is a shield to all who take refuge in it*¹⁹. The basic notion of talpiot is that it is built square shaped rather than round, and they would hang there pegs in it the way cities' towers have shields hung on them.

Another interpretation of *your neck is like the tower of David*: Why is the Temple compared to a neck? Just as the neck is between a person's shoulders, so is the Temple between Mount Zion and the Temple Mount, as it is said: *He dwells between the shoulders*²⁰.

Rabbi Berekiah in the name of Rabbi Isaac said: "Abraham our father said before God: 'Master of the World, You have become a shield, but to my son a shield has not been made'. God said to him: 'For you I became one shield

¹⁷ Psalms 105:8

¹⁸ Psalms 127:4

¹⁹ II Samuel 22:31

²⁰ Deuteronomy 33:12

as it is written: *I am your Shield*²¹ while for your descendants I have become many shields' as it is said: *Hung with a thousand shields, all the armour of the warriors, this is the priesthood and the kingship.*"

5.) *YOUR TWO BREASTS ARE LIKE TWO FAWNS*, these are the Messianic King and the righteous priest, who in the future will deliver Israel as did Moses and Aaron²². And why did he compare them to breasts? Just as these breasts nurse an infant²³, so did Moses and Aaron teach Torah to Israel, and so in a future context will the King Messiah and the righteous priest do the same. *Like two fawns*, since their eyes are not like those of the other animals. Like a young stag, which accepts human care after it is domesticated.

TWINS OF A GAZELLE, just as Moses and Aaron loved each other, as in: *When he sees you, he will be glad*²⁴, so will the King Messiah and the righteous priest love each other as is said referring to Zerubabel and Joshua the high priest: *Harmonious understanding will be between them*²⁵. Thus is the way of twins among whom there is no jealousy, so [that

²¹Genesis 15:1

²²The theme of Moses and Aaron occurs frequently in *midrashim* on this verse.

²³*Shir haShirim Rabbah*

²⁴Exodus 4:14

²⁵Zechariah 6:13

when] one sucks from his nipple the twin does not sense it, and when one of them leaves his nipple his twin does not sense it. Thus the former will possess his kingdom and the latter will possess his priesthood as Moses and Aaron did, the *shepherds among the lilies*²⁶ who supported Israel for they were called *lilies*, because they are gentle like *lilies*.

6.) *UNTIL THE DAY BLOWS GENTLY AND THE SHADOWS FLEE*, until God heats up fire against the wicked ones and those who cause Israel to suffer, as it is said: *For lo! That day is at hand, burning like an oven. All the arrogant and the doers of evil shall be like straw, and that day is coming - said the Lord of Hosts*²⁷. *The shadows flee, day, when the shadows flee, when the examiner of the nations flees as in: Their protection has departed from them*²⁸.

Another interpretation of *and the shadows flee* is as in: *While sorrow, sighing flee*²⁹ since they darken Israel.

²⁶ Song of Songs 2:16

²⁷ Malachi 3:19. This is quoted in *Midrash Zuta* as well, but without the intervening description by Toviah ben Eliezer which introduces context.

²⁸ Numbers 14:9

²⁹ Isaiah 35:10

LET ME GO TO THE MOUNT OF MYRRH, to Mount Moriah³⁰, the mount of myrrh for from there He teaches instruction to Israel as it is said: For out of Zion will come forth Torah and the word of God from Jerusalem³¹

TO THE HILL OF FRANKINCENSE, for from there Israel's sins are whitened.

7.) EVERY PART OF YOU IS FAIR, MY DARLING. When will this be? When the wicked ones will be destroyed from the world and all Israel will be fit and fair with mitzvot and good actions as it is said: And Your people, all of them righteous shall possess the land for all time³².

THERE IS NO BLEMISH IN YOU, an actual blemish, as it is said: Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened³³. The Holy One said: "I exiled you among the nations, I placed my shekhina in the land of the peoples for your sake, as it were, as it says:

8.) COME WITH ME FROM LEBANON MY BRIDE, COME WITH ME FROM LEBANON'. Why is the Temple called Lebanon? Since it whitens the

³⁰ Targum

³¹ Isaiah 2:3, Micah 4:2

³² Isaiah 60:21

³³ ibid, 35:5

sins³⁴ of Israel and it says with me from Lebanon My bride, for when you went out from Lebanon to to the land of the peoples, you went out with me, and when you come back from the land of the nations it will be to Lebanon. A mem is used in place of the lamed for instance: He did not put them with Laban's flock³⁵ is explained as the people of the Laban's flock³⁶; on the kidneys³⁷, with the kidneys³⁸ and similarly skirt, Solomon. Another interpretation of from Lebanon is in Lebanon³⁹, just as: When the word of the Lord in the mouth of Jeremiah was fulfilled⁴⁰, as though it was from the mouth of Jeremiah, and thus it says: Then the Lord your God will turn your captivity⁴¹.

YOU WILL GAZE FROM AMANA'S PEAK. It is a river⁴² from the rivers of Damascus as in: Are not the Amana and the

³⁴Midrash Zuta

³⁵Genesis 30:40

³⁶The midrash here revolves around the interchange of the letters lamed and mem.

³⁷Leviticus 3:4

³⁸See note 36

³⁹Though the Greenup text has a prefix kaf, the bet and kaf are often interchanged, possibly due to difficulties in transcription from the original manuscript. In light of the verse quoted, a bet would make more sense here.

⁴⁰II Chronicles 36:22

⁴¹Deuteronomy 30:3

⁴²Targum

*Pharphar, the rivers of Damascus better than all the waters of Israel?*⁴³. This teaches that as the exiles come to the edge of the land of Israel they will say the psalm for the ingathering of the exiled.

FROM THE PEAK OF SENIR AND HERMON, these are the mountains of the land of Israel. This teaches that all the mountains will be filled with people who will keep singing as it is said: *For in joy you will leave and be led home secure. Before you, mount and hill shall shout aloud*⁴⁴.

FROM THE DENS OF LIONS, FROM THE HILLS OF LEOPARDS. These are Israel since they have gone forth from the dens of lions and they have escaped from the hills of leopards. The lions and the leopards, are the kingdoms in whose power Israel was and so it says: *Den of lions and pasture for young lions, where lion and lion's breed/young walked*⁴⁵.

Another interpretation of gaze from the peak of Amana is *Bring (Me a) sacrifice*⁴⁶ as in: *gifts for the king*⁴⁷. *From the peak of Amana by virtue of Abraham, your patriarch*

⁴³ II Kings 5:12

⁴⁴ Isaiah 55:12

⁴⁵ Nahum 2:12. Toviah ben Eliezer has reversed the order of words in the verse.

⁴⁶ *Shir haShirim Rabbah*, which uses the word *qorban* instead of *minhah*. Instead of reading *tavo'i*, (qal) the author is reading it *ta'vi'i*, (hiphil).

⁴⁷ Isaiah 57:9. See also I Samuel 9:7 and BDB.

who from the beginning was foremost of believers⁴⁸, as it is said: Hermon I will remember by virtue of your ancestors, for whom I guided in the wilderness forty years⁴⁹ and whom I brought to the Jordan. Hermon is Senir as it is said: Sidonians called Hermon Sirion, and the Amorites call it Senir⁵⁰ and he mentions for him the name that the Amorites called it, and Israel's name, because Israel expelled the Amorites from it. But Shion⁵¹ and Sirion he did not mention, since they are ancient names. From the dens of lions, from the hills of leopards, these are the kingdoms through which Israel has passed, which were more evil than lions and leopards.

9.) *YOU HAVE CAPTURED MY HEART, MY OWN*⁵², *MY BRIDE*. God said: "I was heartened towards you at the beginning, to be merciful to you", as in: *He will show you mercy, and in His mercy He will cause you to increase*⁵³ "and you added to My mercies upon you, as it is said: *YOU HAVE CAPTURED MY HEART WITH ONE OF YOUR EYES*, because you have suffered the yoke of the kingdoms

⁴⁸Genesis 15:6

⁴⁹Midrash Zuta

⁵⁰Deuteronomy 3:9

⁵¹Joshua 19:19

⁵²literally "my sister", this follows the JPS translation

⁵³Deuteronomy 13:18

with love I will show mercy upon you" as it is said: Therefore will the Lord wait, that He may be gracious unto you and therefore will He be exalted, that He may be merciful to you, for the Lord is a God of justice⁵⁴. With one of your eyes, with one coil of your necklace⁵⁵, for just as you have stretched out your neck for Me to be killed for declaring the Unity of My name as it is said: It is for Your sake that we are killed all day long, that we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered⁵⁶.

10.) *HOW SWEET IS YOUR LOVE, MY OWN, MY BRIDE.* Rabbi Yohanan said that just as a bride is not attractive, save with adornments⁵⁷, so Israel is not attractive, save with sages.

HOW MUCH MORE DELIGHTFUL YOUR LOVE THAN WINE. Just as wine heightens the body so do sages heighten Israel⁵⁸ and so Elisha said to Elijah: O father, father, Israel's chariots and horsemen⁵⁹.

⁵⁴ Isaiah 30:18

⁵⁵ Again, the text has a kaf in place of the bet - it is difficult to know if this is the intention of Toviah ben Eliezer or if Greenup text is corrupt.

⁵⁶ Psalms 44:23

⁵⁷ Midrash Zuta

⁵⁸ Midrash Shir haShirim

⁵⁹ II Kings 2:12, cf. Moed Katan 26a

YOUR OILS ARE MORE FRAGRANT THAN ANY SPICE, these are the sacred oils; the oil of priesthood and the oil of kingship, for no people nor language has any that are like them.

Rabbi Berekiah and Rabbi Helbo in the name of Sh'muel bar Nahman said that in ten places Israel was called a bride⁶⁰ as it is said: *With me from Lebanon My bride*⁶¹, *You have captured My heart, my bride*⁶², *How sweet is your love, My own, My bride*⁶³, *O bride, your lips drip as the honey*⁶⁴, *A garden locked is my own, my bride*⁶⁵, *I have come to my garden, My own, My bride*⁶⁶, which is six and four are in the Prophets, *As a bridegroom rejoices over His bride*⁶⁷, *As a bridegroom adorned with a turban and as a bride*⁶⁸, *The voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride*⁶⁹, *Gird thyself with them, as a bride*⁷⁰.

⁶⁰ Also listed in *Shir haShirim Rabbah* to verse 4:8

⁶¹ Song of Songs 4:8

⁶² Song of Songs 4:9

⁶³ Song of Songs 4:10

⁶⁴ Song of Songs 4:11

⁶⁵ Song of Songs 4:12

⁶⁶ Song of Songs 5:1

⁶⁷ Isaiah 62:5

⁶⁸ Isaiah 61:10

⁶⁹ Jeremiah 7:34

⁷⁰ Isaiah 49:18

There are ten "garments" that God will wear in the future as it is said: *The Lord is king, He is robed in grandeur; the Lord is robed, He is girded with strength*⁷¹ *He clothed Himself with garments of retribution, wrapped Himself in zeal as a robe*⁷². *Why is your clothing so red?*⁷³ *This is Glory in His attire*⁷⁴, *You are clothed in glory and majesty*⁷⁵, *He clothed Himself in righteousness*⁷⁶. Ten are to be punished from the ten families mentioned with reference to God saying "do not emulate them", since they caused Israel to violate the ten commandments with which Israel was made prominent as a bride.

11.) *DRIP AS HONEY*. Rabbi Yudan in the name of Rabbi Shimeon ben Lakish said that just as a bride⁷⁷ needs to be adorned with the twenty-four adornments that are in the book of Isaiah as it is said: *On that day the Lord will strip off*

⁷¹ Psalms 93:3

⁷² Isaiah 59:17

⁷³ *ibid*, 63:2

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 63:1

⁷⁵ Psalms 104:1

⁷⁶ Isaiah 59:7

⁷⁷ the text has transposed the *lamed* and *khaf*, so that it reads *halakha* instead of *ha-kalah*

the ankle ornaments⁷⁸, so a sage needs to be learned in twenty-four books. If he lacks one of them, he is not a sage⁷⁹.

Rabbi Huna in the name of Rabbi Shimeon ben Lakish said that just as a bride needs to be modest, so does a sage need to be modest⁸⁰.

Rabbi Tahlipha of Ceasaria said in the name of Rabbi Shimeon ben Lakish that just as a bride needs for there to be three witnesses so that she will be [declared] pure and clean, so does a sage require that everyone testify that he has no blemish.

Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yossi the son of Rabbi Hananiah and [other] rabbis have said that anyone who publicly expounds words of Torah in a way which is unpleasant to his audience, it would be better for him that he had never said them, as it is said: *Honeycomb drips, honey and milk under your tongue*, for words of Torah should be beautiful when you expound them like honeycomb and honey, sweetened with milk.

THE SCENT OF YOUR ROBES IS LIKE THE SCENT OF LEBANON, so that the pleasing scent of sages comes from afar and thus you say your oils yield a sweet scent⁸¹. Thus you find with our

⁷⁸ Isaiah 3:18 ff., this passage also appears in *Midrash Shir haShirim*

⁷⁹ *Shir haShirim Rabbah*

⁸⁰ *ibid*

⁸¹ Song of Songs 1:3

patriarch Jacob, as it is said: *He smelled the scent of his clothes and blessed him*⁸². This is the scent of good actions which resided in him.

Come and see how harsh [was] iniquity, for before Adam sinned everything feared him. Once he sinned, not only did nothing fear him, but now he feared others, and thus it says: *Sinners of Zion are frightened*⁸³, while before he sinned it is written: *All the peoples of the earth shall see that the Lord's name is proclaimed over you and they shall stand in fear of you*⁸⁴. Just as a bride is not suspect, so a sage is not shamed. It is necessary that he not be shamed each time he expounds. *Your lips drip honey*, in the future to come Israel will be praised above every people and tongue. *Honey and milk are under your tongue*, this refers to the love between the Davidic Messiah and the Ephraimite Messiah. *The scent of your robes is like the scent of Lebanon*, these are good actions.

12.) *A GARDEN LOCKED IS MY OWN, MY BRIDE*, this is the Torah since the *parashioth* of the Torah are considered to be a garden. Rabbi Hananiah or Rabbi Mena, one [of them] said a

⁸²Genesis 27:27

⁸³Isaiah 33:14

⁸⁴Deuteronomy 28:10

garden locked is like a *fountain locked*, until a wise person comes and brings forth its fruits⁸⁵.

A *FOUNTAIN LOCKED*, A *SEALED-UP SPRING*, this is the Torah since it is likened to a *sealed-up spring* until a wise person comes, as it is said: *The instruction of the wise is a fountain of life*⁸⁶. Someone said a *garden locked*, these are the young men since they are not like those who delight in incest. A *fountain locked* is *my own, my bride*, these are the young women who have locked their openings for their husbands. Abba Mari, of blessed memory, explained a *fountain locked* as connoting a gate and is in the language of the Talmud as *close the gate*⁸⁷.

Our rabbis have said that a *fountain locked, my own, my bride* these are the times of the End for they are locked and closed up as it is said: *For these (words) are shut up and sealed*⁸⁸. A *fountain locked, a sealed up spring* for they have not cast the yoke of heaven off of themselves during the entire length of the *exile*. A *garden locked*, Rabbi Yohanan said these are the unmarried women. A *fountain locked*, these are the married women. A *sealed up spring* these are the men.

⁸⁵ *Midrash Shir haShirim*

⁸⁶ *Proverbs 13:14*

⁸⁷ *Berakhot 28a*

⁸⁸ *Dan 12:9*

13.) *YOUR LIMBS ARE AN ORCHARD OF POMEGRANATES*, in the language of the Mishnah it is an irrigated field, a field which always needs rain, as is taught in a mishnah, water an irrigated field in season⁸⁹. The neighborhoods surrounding Jerusalem were irrigated fields filled with all kinds of spices.

Another interpretation: *Your limbs* are your children who are like an orchard of pomegranates. Just as this orchard of pomegranates is beautiful, so is Israel beautiful with good actions. Just as pomegranates are beautiful and tasty, so is Israel filled with commandments and thus Israel is destined to become like an orchard of pomegranates through Elijah.

OF ALL LUSCIOUS FRUITS, as if to say the great ones with the lesser ones.

14.) *OF HENNA AND OF NARD*-⁹⁰ *NARD AND SAFFRON, FRAGRANT REED AND CINNAMON WITH ALL AROMATIC WOODS, MYRRH AND ALOES, FOREMOST OF PERFUMES*. Here there are twelve kinds of spices paralleling the twelve tribes of Israel who in the future will be

⁸⁹ Moed Qatan 1:1

⁹⁰ From the previous verse, though the text has it here for midrashic reasons, since there is a listing of plants.

gathered in the days of the Messiah as it is said: There the entire House of Israel will worship Me⁹¹.

15.) A FOUNTAIN OF GARDENS, A WELL OF FRESH WATER, this is what Scripture says: In that day fresh water shall flow from Jerusalem, part to the Eastern Sea and part to the Western Sea⁹² and it says: A spring shall issue forth from the House of the Lord and shall water the wadi of the Acacias⁹³. Its explanation is that these are the waters that in the future will go out from under the Temple's threshold as in Ezekiel: He measured one thousand cubits and led me across the water, the water was knee deep. He measured off another thousand and led me across the water, the water was up to the waist⁹⁴. Further on is the swimming waters⁹⁵ and it says: All kinds of trees for food will grow up on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail...because the water for them flows from the Temple⁹⁶.

⁹¹Ezekiel 20:40. The author has misquoted the original verse, adding yehudah and changing the pronominal suffix from 1st to third person.

⁹²Zechariah 14:8

⁹³Joel 4:18

⁹⁴Ezekiel 47:3,4. In addition to the corrections presented by Greenhut, there is an extra word, b'amah that does not appear in the Qoren Bible.

⁹⁵Ezekiel 47:5

⁹⁶Ezekiel 47:12

[Between] Rav and Shmu'el one said to loosen God's mouth and one said to loosen the mouth of the barren, and both of them say the same thing.

A fountain of gardens, this is the fountain with which God will in the future purify Israel, as in: *The blood of Jerusalem shall be cleaned from its midst*⁹⁷. Already Israel has been called a menstruous woman by Ezekiel as in: *Their ways before Me were like the unpureness of a menstruous woman*⁹⁸. He did not call them defiled by a carrion or defiled by an unclean animal, but defiled by menstrual blood. Just as a menstruous woman immerses in water and she becomes fit for her husband, so when Israel rinses in ritually clean water they become ritually clean as it is said: *I will sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall become ritually clean, I shall cleanse you from all of your uncleanness*⁹⁹.

Another way of thinking: About the prophecy in which he is compared to water, this teaches that in the future, the spirit of holiness will dwell upon everything, as it is said: *Your sons and daughters shall prophesy; your old men dream dreams and your young shall see visions*¹⁰⁰.

⁹⁷ Isaiah 4:4

⁹⁸ Ezekiel 36:17

⁹⁹ Ezekiel 36:25

¹⁰⁰ Joel 3:1

16.) *AWAKE O NORTH WIND, COME, O SOUTH WIND,* these are the exiles who are like sleepers and the Holy One makes them fit, for they are destined to be awakened from their sleep as it is said: *Awake and shout for joy, you who dwell in the dust*¹⁰¹ and it says: *I will say to the North: "Give back!" I will say to the South: "Do not withhold!"*¹⁰².

BLOW UPON MY GARDEN, LET ITS SCENT FLOW, this is the land of Israel as it is said: *It will be on that day that the hills shall drip with wine*¹⁰³ and it says: *But you O mountains of Israel shall yield your produce and bear your fruit for My people Israel, for their return is near*¹⁰⁴.

LET MY BELOVED COME TO HIS GARDEN, this is the Holy One who will cause His shekhina to dwell among them¹⁰⁵ as it is said: *I will dwell among the Israelites and I will be their God*¹⁰⁶. *AND EAT HIS PRECIOUS FRUITS,* these are the sacrifices.

¹⁰¹ Isaiah 26:19

¹⁰² *ibid*, 43:6

¹⁰³ Joel 4:18

¹⁰⁴ Ezekiel 36:8

¹⁰⁵ *Shir haShirim Rabbah*

¹⁰⁶ Exodus 29:45

CHAPTER 5

1.) I HAVE COME TO MY GARDEN, MY OWN, MY BRIDE announcing to Israel that the Holy One will come and will cause His shekhina to dwell among them forever as in former times.

I HAVE PLUCKED MY MYRRH AND SPICE, this is the scent of the incense¹ and the frankincense² as in: With your sweet scent will I accept you³.

I HAVE EATEN MY HONEYCOMB AND HONEY, these are the main⁴ sacrifices, with their fat, which are as sweet as honey.

DRUNK MY WINE AND MY MILK, these are the libations⁵ and the meal offerings, which are as white as milk.

EAT⁶, O FRIENDS. These friends are the righteous ones who are called friends of God, as it is said: For the sake of my kin and friends, I pray for your well being⁷.

¹ Targum

² Shir haShirim Rabbah, Pesikta Rabbati 5:5

³ Ezekiel 20:41

⁴ More likely ayin.guph.reish.yod rather than aleph.khaf.reish

⁵ Targum

⁶ understood to be aleph.khaf.lamed.waw rather than aleph.lamed.khaf.waw

⁷ Psalms 122:8

DRINK, DRINK ABUNDANTLY, O BELOVED/ LOVE, these are Israel who have been called beloved prophets, as it is said: How sweet is your love, my beloved, my own, my bride⁸.

This teaches that Israel is destined to delight in the goodness of the shekhina as it is said: For as the seed of peace, the vine shall produce its fruit, the ground shall produce its yield⁹ and it says: And you shall eat your fill and praise the name of the Lord your God, who dealt so wondrously with you - and you shall know that I am in the midst of Israel; that I am the Lord your God and there is no other. And my people shall be shamed no more¹⁰, then our eyes will see¹¹ and our hearts rejoice¹².

2.) I WAS ASLEEP, BUT MY HEART WAS AWAKE. The Community of Israel said: "I was asleep during the reign of the [foreign] kingdoms like a person who has gone through many troubles and in the midst of the troubles, a slumber descends upon him and he falls asleep." So Israel in exile are like sleepers, since they do not know to what level they have descended, and they fiercely cry out to God, perhaps He will

⁸ Song of Songs 4:10

⁹ Zechariah 8:12

¹⁰ Joel 2:26,27

¹¹ Jeremiah 13:20

¹² Psalms 33:21

be merciful to them, restoring them to their original kingdom. That is why the prophet said to the Community of Israel: *Listen to this, unhappy one, who are drunk but not with wine!*¹³. *But my heart was awake, this is the Holy One as in: God is the rock of my heart and my portion forever*¹⁴, and He, may His name be praised forever and to all eternity, for his deliverance will abide forever for us, as it is said: *See the guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps!*¹⁵.

*HARK, MY BELOVED CALLS through the prophets*¹⁶. [BE] *OPEN TO ME, as if to say return in repentance*¹⁷ until I come and redeem you¹⁸. Thus it says through Moses, the man of God¹⁹: *When you are in distress because of all these things that have befallen you, and in the end, return to the Lord your God and obey Him*²⁰ and it says: *The Lord thy God will turn thy captivity...and He will gather you from all the*

¹³ Isaiah 51:21

¹⁴ Psalms 73:26, also quoted in Shir haShirim Rabbah and Midrash Shir haShirim

¹⁵ Psalms 121:4

¹⁶ Midrash Shir haShirim

¹⁷ Targum

¹⁸ Midrash Shir haShirim

¹⁹ Joshua 14:6

²⁰ Deuteronomy 4:30

peoples²¹ where the Lord your God has banished you²². While through the prophets²³ it is said: If you return to Me, if you remove your abominations from My presence and do not waver²⁴. MY OWN, MY DARLING, MY DOVE, MY FAULTLESS ONE, corresponding to the four [foreign] kingdoms²⁵ since you suffered under their yoke, as it is said: All this has come upon us, yet we have not forgotten you, or been false to your covenant²⁶.

FOR MY HEAD/FORE/CROWN IS DRENCHED WITH DEW as if to say from the day that I exiled you and did not choose another nation nor say to any one of the nations to build a Temple for Me to dwell in, for I am God, not man, The Holy One is in your midst: I will not come into a city²⁷. This means I will not come into a city other than Jerusalem as it is said: Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen²⁸, for He is like one who is outside his house and he dew falls upon him, AND THE DAMP OF THE NIGHT, since exile is compared to a night as it is

²¹ *ibid*, 30:3

²² *ibid*, 30:1

²³ Targum, Midrash Shir haShirim

²⁴ Jeremiah 4:1

²⁵ Midrash Shir haShirim

²⁶ Psalms 44:18

²⁷ Hosea 11:9, Toviah ben Eliezer is reading b'ir as "in a city", rather than "in fury"

²⁸ I Kings 11:36

said: *Watchman what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?*²⁹.

3.) *I HAVE TAKEN OFF MY ROBE - HOW SHALL I PUT IT BACK ON?* The Community of Israel says before the Holy One: "Open³⁰ the gate of repentance, so that I will redeem you", and she [the community of Israel] says: "How will I repent? I have taken off my robe; the vestment of the kingship, the vestment of the priesthood, and the vestment of prophecy, each one of which is called a robe by itself! While the Temple stood we would make pilgrimages and offer sacrifices and the Holy One would pardon all our sins. Since the Temple was destroyed and we were placed under the power of the nations, we do not know how we should repent to open the gates of repentance" and so she said: "*I have taken off my robe - how shall I put it back on to return to my previous condition?*"

I HAVE BATHED MY FEET - HOW SHALL I SOIL THEM? And if perhaps it will occur to the nations, that I will enter their religion, assimilating with them, this too is the [dark] night for me, to be soiled with idolatry, since already I have bathed my feet from it³¹. Their³² idolatry

²⁹Isaiah 21:11

³⁰corrupt text, the feminine yod of *pithi* does not agree with the masculine noun.

³¹*Shir haShirim Rabbah*

³²Israel's

has been done away with since the destruction of the first Temple, for while among the nations of the world Israel does not take share their ways, yet they lack the strength to worship God as is fitting because of the nations and because the Temple was destroyed and they do cannot follow properly the laws of the Torah. My father of blessed memory expounded *I have bathed my feet* that these are the *shekhina's* words to Israel as if to say: "Did I not say when they made the [golden] calf that *I will not go in your midst*³³, but still my *shekhina* is among you, thus you, [even] if you took off your clothes, *again you shall take up your timbrels*³⁴.

4.) *MY BELOVED SENT FORTH HIS HAND FROM THE HOLE* because when the Holy One observed Israel becoming idle in regard to repentance, as a lazy man who is in bed and is lazy about coming out of it, immediately He sent His stripe as it is said: *My beloved sent forth His hand from the hole* since God does not send forth His stripe with all of His strength from the door or from the window, but gently *from the hole* in order to scare them and to frighten them, to cause them to return in repentance, letting the nations loose upon them and scaring them as He did in the days of Haman, so to cause

³³Exodus 33:3

³⁴Jeremiah 31:3

them to do well. *AND MY HEART WAS STIRRED FOR HIM*, My heart stirred in their midst in the presence of the vengeful foe³⁵ and because of the oppression of the wicked, for they bring evil upon me and furiously harass me³⁶. God did all this and changed the heart of the nations to despise His people, so that they will call and cry aloud to Him as it is said: *When you are in distress because all these things have befallen you and, in the end return to the Lord your God and obey Him*³⁷, then the Lord will turn thy captivity and have mercy upon you and return and gather you³⁸.

5.) *I ROSE UP TO OPEN TO MY BELOVED*, this occurs in every generation when Israel is in trouble, they immediately gather themselves in the synagogues and houses of study, set fasts and pray intensely to open the gate of repentance.

MY HANDS DRIPPED MYRRH, MY FINGERS FLOWING MYRRH, these are those who perform *tsedakah*, who open their hands to the poor and whose gifts are considered as flowing myrrh, like aromatic incense³⁹. *My fingers flowing myrrh*, these are the teachers of young children, since they teach them with their

³⁵ Psalms 44:17

³⁶ *ibid*, 55:4

³⁷ Deuteronomy 4:30

³⁸ *ibid*, 30:1

³⁹ Targum. *Qe'toret hasamim*, the aromatic incense, is a biblical reference - see Exodus 31:11 or 35:15.

fingers, and in spite of this exile continues because of the *HANDLES OF THE BOLT*, since the gates of prayer are closed⁴⁰ as it is said: *And when I cry out and plead, He shuts out my prayer*⁴¹, *You have covered yourself with a cloud, that no prayer may pass through*⁴². The gates of prayer are closed and the Deliverer is diverted as you find in Ezekiel, for [it reads] there: *an iron plate...between you and the city*⁴³.

6.) *I OPENED THE DOOR FOR MY BELOVED.* Many times has Israel opened the gate of repentance and they thought they were redeemed *BUT MY BELOVED HAD TURNED AND GONE.* While the end is lengthened for them just as the prophets had prophesied to Israel: *Pray early and late*⁴⁴, but they did not listen, thus they cried out in exile and they were not answered, [for] *my Beloved had turned and gone.*

MY SOUL FAILED ME WHEN HE SPOKE, these are the words of the prophets since they spoke in the name of our God. We hoped and trusted and Israel handed their souls over to His word,

⁴⁰ Berakhot 32b

⁴¹ Lamentations 3:8

⁴² *ibid*, 3:44

⁴³ Ezekiel 4:3, Toviah ben Eliezer has used the third person pronominal suffix in place of the second person suffix in *bein'kha*.

⁴⁴ Gittin 7a

as it is said: *In His word do I hope*⁴⁵ and it says: *My soul waits for the Lord, more than watchmen for the morning, watchmen for the morning*⁴⁶, *for my soul failed me when He spoke. And it says: My soul is always in danger*⁴⁷ since Israel has hoped in every generation for God's deliverance while they were being slaughtered and butchered for His Holy Name, and still they trust and wait and hope, perhaps there is hope and [so] it says: *O Israel, trust in the Lord, for with the Lord there is steadfast love and great power to redeem*⁴⁸.

I SOUGHT HIM, BUT FOUND HIM NOT, as in: *For the vision is yet for the appointed time*⁴⁹ and it says: *For the Israelites shall go a long time without king, without prince, without sacrifice and without cult pillars*⁵⁰.

I CALLED, BUT HE DID NOT ANSWER ME as in: *My God, I call by day, You answer not, by night and have no respite*⁵¹ and it says: *I am weary with calling, my throat is dry, my eyes*

⁴⁵ Psalms 130:5

⁴⁶ *ibid*, 130:6

⁴⁷ *ibid*, 119:109

⁴⁸ *ibid*, 130:7

⁴⁹ Habakkuk 2:3

⁵⁰ Hosea 3:4

⁵¹ Psalms 22:3

fail while I wait for God⁵² and it says: How long, O lord, shall I cry out... "Violence!"⁵³ and it says: How long will You hide? Forever?⁵⁴ and there are many references like these in Scripture about the length of the exile in which we are.

7.) THE WATCHMEN WHO GO ABOUT THE CITY FOUND ME, these are the nations of the world, since they strike, punish and wound Israel, as it is said: THEY STRUCK ME, THEY BRUISED ME and so it says: I offered my back to the floggers, and my cheeks to those who tore out my hair⁵⁵ and I will hide my countenance from them, they shall be ready prey and many evils and troubles shall befall them⁵⁶.

THE WATCHMEN OF THE WALLS STRIPPED AWAY MY MANTLE these are the kingdoms amongst whom Israel lives wherein conflicts have destroyed their pious as it is said: Some of the knowledgeable will fall⁵⁷ by the sword and by flame⁵⁸, and

⁵²ibid, 69:4

⁵³Habakkuk 1:2

⁵⁴Psalms 13:2, a paraphrase of the verse

⁵⁵Isaiah 50:6

⁵⁶Deuteronomy 31:17

⁵⁷Daniel 11:35

⁵⁸ibid, 11:33

it says: *That they may be refined and purged and whitened until the time of the end*⁵⁹.

8.) *I ADJURE YOU, O MAIDENS OF JERUSALEM*, this is the oath with which Israel adjured the prophets⁶⁰ at the time of consolation⁶¹ when they came to comfort Israel, and said to them [the prophets]: "We adjure you, if the spirit of holiness dwells upon you, *IF YOU FIND MY BELOVED, WHAT WILL YOU TELL HIM* about the troubles that Israel has encountered in exile, among the nations? *THAT I AM FAINT WITH LOVE*. I am faint in exile out of the love of the Holy One as it is said: *Lament like a maiden girt with sackcloth for the husband of her youth*⁶².

I adjure you, this is the oath with which Israel adjured the nations of the world, when they had tried to coerce them to depart from under the protection⁶³ of the *shekhina* and Israel adjured them: "Leave me alone! For we

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, 11:35, Toviah ben Eliezer has *litsror* instead of *litsrof bahem*

⁶⁰ *Targum*

⁶¹ see Isaiah 50:1

⁶² Joel 1:8, the verb has been changed from the feminine imperative to the plural imperative, which corresponds to its midrashic use here. Also quoted in *Midrash Shir haShirim*

⁶³ literally "wings"

will not listen to you, because there is none like Adonai, our God."

If you find my Beloved, if you knew our God's Torah what would you tell Him? You would praise us and say: "In goodness they have done this, for [they are] faint with love", since we are faint out of the great endearing love of our God. If only you would have understood our Torah, you would never have tried to coerce us to forsake our Torah, for it is a Torah of truth, and professing the Unity of God is better than all the silver and gold that is in the world. This is the principle that the verse below supports, as it is said:

9.)⁶⁴ *HOW IS YOUR BELOVED BETTER? FOR YOU ADJURE US SO.* And in terms of the above explanation with reference to the prophets, this is their answer to Israel⁶⁵, *How is your Beloved better? For you adjure us so, as if to say, from where have you gained an understanding of God's praise, and you know that none is like Adonai, our God? They answered you: In many ways I know that God is a living God, the Everlasting King and besides him there is no saviour⁶⁶.*

⁶⁴ 5:9 is not delineated in the Greenup text

⁶⁵ Targum

⁶⁶ cf. Isaiah 43:11

10.) *MY BELOVED IS SCORCHING AND RED, PRE-EMINENT AMONG TEN THOUSAND,* and this entire matter of *how is your Beloved better*⁶⁷ is the nations' answer to Israel who persist in declaring the Unity of the Creator, since everyone has been killed for His Holy Name, as it is said: *It is for your sake that we are slain all day long*⁶⁸, while the nations of the world were confounded about this matter and said to Israel: *How is your Beloved better? What favors has Adonai, your God bestowed on your people more than the gods of the nations? THE FAIREST OF WOMEN*, this is the Community of Israel, for she is embellished by possessing her Torah, since whenever the nations fall into exile, immediately they forget their gods and their laws and they forget their earlier good intentions, but Israel, even though exiled, do not change their actions nor their Torah and do not forget their God. That is why the Community of Israel is called *the fairest of women*.

*How is your beloved better that you adjure us so? Were you not slaves in Egypt 400 years?*⁶⁹. And from there, the kings of Assyria and the kings of the Chaldeans ruled over you! And now he Has abandoned you into the power of every nation and language! Why don't you assimilate into the

⁶⁷ Song of Songs 5:9

⁶⁸ Psalms 44:23

⁶⁹ Exodus 12:40

manners of the nations and rather than being set as an oddity and a mockery among all the peoples.

MY BELOVED IS SCORCHING AND RED, this is the answer with which Israel responds to the nations of the world because they had said to them: "How is your Beloved better?" so they [Israel], answered: "This is My beloved"⁷⁰, I have no other, there is none like Him, and beside Him, there is no saviour⁷¹. *Scorching and red*, He is scorching to Israel, as it is said: And [God will] satisfy your soul in scorched places⁷² and red when He exacts punishment from the enemies of His people, as it is said: Why is your clothing so red?⁷³ and it says: Who is this coming so reddened?⁷⁴. *Scorching and red*, Comparisons are made using similes by the prophets, as it is said: Through the prophets I have used similitudes⁷⁵. Twice He is likened to a warrior, as it is said: The Lord goes forth alike a warrior⁷⁶ and The Lord,

⁷⁰ Song of Songs 5:16

⁷¹ cf. Isaiah 43:11

⁷² Isaiah 58:11

⁷³ *ibid*, 63:2, referred to in *Midrash Shir haShirim*
5:16

⁷⁴ *ibid*, 63:1

⁷⁵ Hosea 12:11, quoted in *Midrash Shir haShirim*

⁷⁶ Isaiah 42:13

the warrior⁷⁷. Twice as an old man, as it is said: *Ancient of Days*⁷⁸, this is one⁷⁹.

PRE-EMINENT AMONG TEN THOUSAND, [He is] an ensign among ten thousand, among His host, He is incomparable. He trains our feet against the nations of the earth as it is said: *He will set you, in fame and renown and glory, high above all the nations He has made*⁸⁰. *Pre-eminent among ten thousand*, as in: *In the name of our God we will set up our standards*⁸¹. The soldiers of a human king⁸² enter into war with him, to help him; and we, His people, enter into war, as it is said: *The Lord, the warrior, Adonai is His name*⁸³ and we will call on the name of Adonai, our God⁸⁴, yet the Lord, the God of Hosts, must be invoked as Adonai⁸⁵.

⁷⁷Exodus 15:3

⁷⁸Daniel 7:9

⁷⁹The text does not include the second reference

⁸⁰Deuteronomy 26:19

⁸¹Psalms 20:6

⁸²literally "of flesh and blood"

⁸³Exodus 15:3

⁸⁴Psalms 20:8

⁸⁵Hosea 12:6

11.-15.)⁸⁶ *HIS FORE/CROWN IS FINEST GOLD*, because the nations of the world asked Israel: "What did you see to cleave to God more than all the peoples' gods?" they told them briefly His praise: *Scorching and red, His banner is pre-eminent among the ten thousand, His fore/crown is finest gold, His locks are curled and black as a raven, His eyes are like doves by watercourses, bathed in milk, sitting by a brimming pool, His cheeks are like a garden of spices, like banks producing perfumes. His lips are like lilies; they drip flowing myrrh. His hands are rods of gold, studded with beryl; His belly a tablet of ivory, wrapped with sapphires. His legs are marble pillars, set in foundations of fine gold. He is as majestic as Lebanon, stately as the cedars. His mouth is sweet, He is completely delightful*", as these 24 kinds of praise correspond to the 24 books [of the Bible].

His fore/crown is finest gold. Scripture speaks of things which are understood by the human ear, such as a glorified king, a valiant man, pleasing to look at, and attractive beyond measure, and all this is told on account of God's actions and the Torah which He gave to His people, to let all humanity know that there is none like Adonai, our God, and there is no Torah like the Torah of Moses our teacher, *man of God*⁸⁷.

⁸⁶ Song of Songs 5:10-16

⁸⁷ II Chronicles 30:16

Thus, we are strengthened by our Creator, and by His Torah, as it is said: *Seek the Lord, while He can be found*⁸⁸, *seek the Lord and His strength, seek His countenance constantly*⁸⁹. His fore/crown is finest gold, the Torah which He gave us, since it is called "first", as it is said: *The Lord created me first of His course, preceding all of His works of old*⁹⁰. *Finest gold, more delightful than gold, than much fine gold*⁹¹ and it says: *The finest gold of Ophir cannot be weighed against it*⁹².

His locks are curled, since it begins with the head, it speaks of the hair on the head. It is explained as the shape of the letters of a word, for if a dalet and a reish, or a vet and a khaf, or a heh and a het are switched, it would destroy the entire world⁹³. And so our ancestors, may their memories be blessed, determined that there were piles

⁸⁸Isaiah 55:6

⁸⁹I Chronicles 16:11

⁹⁰Proverbs 8:22, also quoted in *Shir haShirim Rabbah* and *Aggadat Shmuel*

⁹¹Psalms 19:11, again quoted in *Shir haShirim Rabbah* and *Aggadat Shmuel*

⁹²Job 28:16

⁹³*Midrash Shir haShirim, Shir haShirim Rabbah, Tanhuma Ch. 19, VaYiqra Rabbah 9b.*

upon piles of laws⁹⁴ on each and every crown⁹⁵ [of the letters] of the Torah.

Thus it is said: *His locks are curled and black as a raven*, since black hair is attractive for a young man, and even though it is written [in the Bible]: *The hair of His head was like pure wool*⁹⁶, each time it is before us it is to be explained according to its context.

Black as a raven, for if a person does not blacken [himself] at the dark of both morning and night, from the darkness of the house of study, studying words of Torah, the Torah will not be preserved by him⁹⁷.

Black as a raven, for if a person is not relentless with regard to himself, as a raven over its offspring, words of Torah will not be preserved by him⁹⁸.

Black as a raven. All of the [other] colors become black, while black does not change to become any other. Thus, all the other religions have changed to a different religion, but the Torah will always be dynamic but unchanged, as it is said: *The fear of the Lord is pure*,

⁹⁴ *Shir haShirim Rabbah, Eruvin 21b*

⁹⁵ *Menachot 29b*

⁹⁶ *Daniel 7:9*

⁹⁷ *Shir haShirim Rabbah, Midrash Shir haShirim, Eruvin 22a*

⁹⁸ *Midrash Shir haShirim, Eruvin 22a*

abiding forever⁹⁹ and it says: *For it will never be lost from the mouths of their offspring*¹⁰⁰.

Another interpretation of *His locks are curled*, this is the lineation [used by Torah scribes]¹⁰¹. *Dark as a raven*, this is the text which is black on white.

Another interpretation of *His locks are curled*: When a person enters to study Torah and he hears the piles upon piles of *halakhoth*¹⁰² if he is lazy¹⁰³ he rushes out, but if he is learned he will be happy that he has found ample work, and that the reward is proportionately great.

12.) *HIS EYES ARE LIKE DOVES BY WATERCOURSES*. Just as these doves fly over the entire land observing bad and good, so too the eyes of God observe the bad and the good¹⁰⁴. *His eyes are like doves by watercourses*, these are the sages, since they open the eyes of a man¹⁰⁵. *By watercourses*, when they sit and busy themselves in Torah, God sends bursts of wisdom and enlightens their eyes, as it is said: *The commandment of the*

⁹⁹ Psalms 19:10

¹⁰⁰ Deuteronomy 31:21, literally "his offspring"

¹⁰¹ *Shir haShirim Rabbah*, Midrash *Shir haShirim*

¹⁰² *Shir haShirim Rabbah*, Eruvin 21b

¹⁰³ cf. Midrash *Shir haShirim*: ayin.tsadi.lamed.

¹⁰⁴ Proverbs 15:3, Midrash *Shir haShirim*. The same usage appears in II Chronicles 16:9

¹⁰⁵ Midrash *Shir haShirim*

*Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes*¹⁰⁶ and it says: *Open my eyes, that I may perceive the wonders of your Torah*¹⁰⁷.

BATHED IN MILK. Have you ever seen doves bathed in milk? Instead this teaches that the entire matter speaks about the wisdom of the Torah. When sages busy themselves in Torah, they make the words of Torah clear¹⁰⁸ like milk¹⁰⁹, and eliminate any doubt that could be in them.

SITTING BY A BRIMMING POOL, for they sit and busy themselves in the Torah like a person who sits by a *brimming pool*, drawing water and watering [around them]. So sages speak with wisdom and teach it in public¹¹⁰.

13.) *His cheeks are like a garden of spices*, these are the cheeks of sages, which are like a *garden of spices*, full of various spices. Thus their cheeks are full of well reasoned commentary/ta'amei Torah. Like banks producing perfumes, which grow various perfumes in their mouths, namely well reasoned commentary/ta'amei Torah¹¹¹, and in praise of the Creator, all this is in *HIS LIPS ARE LIKE LILIES*, these are the

¹⁰⁶ Psalms 19:9, Midrash Shir haShirim

¹⁰⁷ ibid, 119:18

¹⁰⁸ literally "white"

¹⁰⁹ Shir haShirim Rabbah

¹¹⁰ Midrash Shir haShirim

¹¹¹ Targum

lips of teachers, as in: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children and speak of them¹¹².

THEY DRIP FLOWING MYRRH, just as the scent of the myrrh floats in every breeze around it, so does the scent of the sages float everywhere.

Another interpretation of *His cheeks are like a garden of spices*. Anyone who places his cheeks like gardens, upon which everybody walks, the words of Torah are preserved through him¹¹³.

Like banks producing perfumes. Just as [when] a perfume cabinet is opened and it gives off much scent, so for a wise person, when he opens his mouth, well reasoned commentaries/ta'amei torah should be heard. His lips are like lilies, soft like the lilies. They drip flowing myrrh, it is bitter to go over them¹¹⁴.

14.) HIS HANDS ARE RODS OF GOLD, this is the Torah, which was given by the hand of God, as it is written: Lightning flashed at them from His right hand¹¹⁵ and it says: Written with the finger of God¹¹⁶.

¹¹²Deuteronomy 6:7

¹¹³Eruvin 54a

¹¹⁴Midrash Shir haShirim to verse 5:16

¹¹⁵Deuteronomy 33:2

¹¹⁶Exodus 31:18 and Deuteronomy 9:10

STUDED WITH BERYL. In each word there are well reasoned commentaries/*ta'amei Torah* studded with precious stones such as the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper¹¹⁷. Hananiah ben Ahi and Rabbi Yehudah would expound on each word and the detailed minutiae of the Torah. Just as between every two large waves [in the sea] there are smaller waves¹¹⁸, so sages expound *midrash* and *aggadah* amidst *halakha*.

HIS BELLY A TABLET OF IVORY. This is the explanation of the Torah which comes out of the Torah, [which] is expounded from the body [itself]. Thus, the Talmud comes out of the Torah scroll, and is like a tablet of ivory, a piece of elephant ivory, which is attractive and strong and the commandments are made clear through it.

WRAPPED WITH SAPPHIRES, as in: Covered her face with a veil, wrapped herself up¹¹⁹. Thus the Torah is covered with great wisdom and there is no end to praising the wisdom of the Torah. Commentaries/*Ta'amei Torah* are compared to sapphires, since they are valued in the eyes of the righteous, as it is said: *She is more precious than rubies*¹²⁰ and it says: *The finest gold of Ophir cannot be*

¹¹⁷ Ezekiel 28:13, though these stones are named in Exodus, this passage works midrashically

¹¹⁸ *Shir haShirim Rabbah*, Midrash *Shir haShirim*, T. Jerushalmi: *Sheqalim* 1:5

¹¹⁹ Genesis 38:14

¹²⁰ Proverbs 3:15, "she" refers to wisdom, understood to be Torah

weighed against it, nor precious onyx, nor sapphire¹²¹.
 Another thought: Covered with sapphires, expensive and cast
 with stones of sapphire.

15.) *HIS LEGS ARE MARBLE PILLARS.* All of the prophets saw the
shekhina only in the shade of the sun. The legs of a sage
 are marble pillars, because he will have strength at
 judgement day because he has toiled in Torah.

SET IN FOUNDATIONS OF FINE GOLD, since the actions of the
 righteous are based on by the Torah, which is a foundation
 of fine gold.

A righteous person's *APPEARANCE/MAJESTY IS LIKE LEBANON*, as
 in: His branches shall spread out far, his beauty shall be
 like the olive tree, his fragrance like that of the
 Lebanon¹²². Stately as the cedars, as it is said: The
 righteous shall flourish like the palm tree; they shall
 grow like a cedar in Lebanon¹²³.

16.) *HIS MOUTH IS SWEET.* The mouth of a sage brings forth
 commentaries/ta'amei Torah which are sweeter than honey, the
 drippings of the comb¹²⁴.

¹²¹ Job 28:16

¹²² Hosea 14:7

¹²³ Psalms 92:13

¹²⁴ *ibid*, 19:11

IT/HE IS COMPLETELY DELIGHTFUL, since the Torah guides humanity to be completely delightful.

IT/HE IS COMPLETELY DELIGHTFUL, this is the commentary of the Torah, as in: Then He saw and gauged it, He measured it and probed it¹²⁵. Then He saw is the Bible. Gauged it - the Targum. Measured - these are the commentaries. And probed - this is the vocalization.

THIS IS MY BELOVED, AND THIS IS MY FRIEND, O MAIDENS OF JERUSALEM! A people who has an awesome God, and a Torah like this, can anyone change him? This is my beloved and this is my friend. There is no people nor tongue like him, as it is said: He has not dealt so with any other nation¹²⁶.

¹²⁵Job 28:27

¹²⁶Psalms 147:20

Chapter 6

1.) "WHERE HAS YOUR BELOVED GONE, O FAIREST OF WOMEN?" The nations of the world ask Israel, since your God is so exalted and your Torah is so magnificent, why did He leave you under the power of the nations? Where is He, God supreme and Lord supreme¹, who fills the upper and lower spaces of the world?, as it is said: *The heavens to the uppermost reaches belong to the Lord your God, the earth and all that is on it!*² and now He has left you this entire time".

LET US SEEK HIM WITH YOU³, for if He will redeem you, we too will make offerings worshipping Him as you do, as it is said: *Then I will make the people pure of speech, so that they will all invoke the Lord by name*⁴. And it says: *Whoever would harm you shall fall because of you*⁵ and: *Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you*⁶.

2.) "MY BELOVED HAS COME DOWN TO HIS GARDEN" the Community of Israel replies, God has come down to His garden means He

¹Deuteronomy 10:17

²Deuteronomy 10:14, quoted in Midrash Shir haShirim

³Continuing as the voice of the nations

⁴Zephaniah 3:9

⁵Isaiah 54:15

⁶Zechariah 8:23

intends to come down to His world and see the affliction of His people, for all that God intends to do is as if He had done it already, as in: *These are the promises - I will keep them without fail*⁷. These promises were destined to be fulfilled, thus *My beloved has come down*, means *He will come down to His garden*, which is Israel, since they are called a garden locked.

TO THE BEDS OF SPICES, when He sees their pleasing actions. And so it says: *So the Lord of Hosts will descend to make war against the mount and hill of Zion*⁸.

TO SHEPHERD IN THE GARDENS to cause His *shehina* to dwell among them. *TO GATHER LILIES*. He will gather His righteous⁹ to His holy city, Jerusalem and you will be gathered to be one after the people of Israel.

3.) *I AM MY BELOVED'S*. These are the righteous who hold themselves fast to the Unity of the *shehina*, as it is said: *While you who held fast to the Lord your God are alive today*¹⁰. Despite all the troubles and the evil that have come upon me, *I am my Beloved's*, I will not forget nor abandon Him, as it is said: *For I am in the midst of*

⁷Isaiah 42:16, with the use of the prophetic perfect

⁸Isaiah 31:4, also quoted in *Midrash Zuta*

⁹cf. *Midrash Shir haShirim*

¹⁰Deuteronomy 4:4

Israel¹¹ and it says: *Be my people, and I will be your God*¹².

HE SHEPHERDS AMONG THE LILIES, from old He is our shepherd, as it is said: *Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel*¹³, and so He will shepherd us, as it is said: *I myself will shepherd my flock*¹⁴. Among the lilies is Israel who are as delicate as lilies, as attractive as lilies.

4.) *YOU ARE BEAUTIFUL, MY DARLING, AS TIRZAH*. We have not learned of the fame of Tirzah anywhere in the Bible, so Israel is likened to Tirzah only for exposition. The Holy One said: "As you appeared being perfect before Me, when you went up from Egypt on foot I sent an angel before you and I drove out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites"¹⁵ and it says: *And the Lord sent out a plague against them*¹⁶.

¹¹ Joel 2:27

¹² cf. Jeremiah 24:7, Toviah ben Eliezer is reading this verse in the second person, as part of a conversation

¹³ Psalms 80:2

¹⁴ Ezekiel 34:15

¹⁵ Exodus 33:2

¹⁶ Deuteronomy 7:20

5.) *TURN YOUR EYES AWAY FROM ME.* After the Community of Israel recounts God's praise before the nations, Scripture returns to speak about the praise of the Community of Israel: "*YOU ARE BEAUTIFUL, MY DARLING, TURN YOUR EYES AWAY FROM ME*". The Holy One said, "If it is your desire to understand Me, concerning what I have promised you for the future, I intend to do it for you. Turn your eyes over to the first concerns, the favors which I did for you, and guide yourselves by them, and know that which is yet to be, for you *overwhelm me*."¹⁷ From these you learn of the many favors which are yet to be. This is comparable to a king who invited guests and embroidered all kinds of festive dishes on the tablecloth. When the guests saw them they were reassured. Thus, God started by exhibiting a model of the future to come, and showed it to the righteous. God said: *I [bring] death and give life*¹⁸. He had done this already through Elijah, Elisha, and Ezekiel. It is said: *Kings shall tend your children...they shall bow to you, face to the ground*¹⁹. This He has already done through Nebuchadnezzar, as it is said: *[Then the King Nebuchadnezzar] fell on his face and paid homage to Daniel*²⁰, then the king elevated Daniel and

¹⁷ *Shir haShirim Rabbah*

¹⁸ *Deuteronomy 32:39*

¹⁹ *Isaiah 49:23*

²⁰ *Daniel 2:46*

gave him many great gifts and made him governor of the whole province of Babylon and the chief prefect of all the wise men of Babylon²¹. It is said: When you pass through water, I will be with you²², and He already split the Sea²³ and cut off the waters of the Jordan in front of Israel²⁴. It is said: When you walk through fire you will not be scorched²⁵ and this has already been done by Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah²⁶. Thus, *THEY OVERWHELM ME*, these are the matters [where] I have seen Him. *They overwhelm me*²⁷, they cause my heart to delight because of your promise.

Another interpretation of: *Turn your eyes away from me*, as an expression of yearning, like a man who has a greatly beloved wife. As long as he is favorably disposed toward her, he is likely to be filled with compassion for her, and anything that she requests, he grants her out of his great love for her. So when the Holy One says to the community of Israel, *Turn your eyes away from me*, [He is saying:] Bear

²¹ibid, 2:48

²²Isaiah 43:2, The author has substituted 'im for ki.

²³Exodus 14:26ff. and Nehemiah 9:11

²⁴Joshua 3:13ff.

²⁵Isaiah 43:2

²⁶Daniel 3:19ff, the preceding midrashim are also in *Midrash Shir haShirim*

²⁷reading *hirhivuni* as *imv*, mp.

the yoke of the exile and do not extend the end, for there is a time for everything²⁸.

For they overwhelm me, I am filled with great compassion for you, but, since the decision has already been reached until the end of time, do not extend the end.

Another interpretation of Turn your eyes away to me, written with a *mem* instead of the lamed, similar to upon the flock of Laban²⁹, for with the flock of Laban³⁰; on the kidneys³¹, for with the kidneys; and likewise from Lebanon³², for to Lebanon, as if to say: Turn your eyes to me, and return in repentance, for they overwhelmed me, for if you will return in repentance I will raise my banner with you.

YOUR HAIR IS LIKE A FLOCK OF GOATS, the hair which you have sustained to every wind like passing chaff, like goats which are scattered since it is the way of goats to be scattered in following their pasture on the mountains, thus we have been scattered among the nations like the goats streaming down from Gilead, since you were sent out from the land of

²⁸Ecclesiastes 8:6

²⁹Genesis 30:40

³⁰This same midrash appears in Midrash Leqah Tov to Shir haShirim 4:8.

³¹Leviticus 3:4

³²Song of Songs 4:8

Gilead. Jerusalem is called Gilead on account of [this] Gilead.

Another interpretation of *Streaming down from Gilead*: God intends to cause Israel to inherit the land of Gilead as at first, as it is said: *Gilead is mine, and Manasseh is mine. Ephraim my chief standard, Judah my scepter*³³.

6.) *YOUR TEETH ARE LIKE A FLOCK OF EWES*, whereas above it says like a "flock of shorn ones"³⁴, here, the explanation of "shorn ones", that is that they are ewes, since ewes gather on their pasture. So the teachers³⁵ gather themselves at the places of study.

CLIMBING UP FROM THE WASHING POOL. Since they credit His illiterate ones with the right matter, and wash away the sins of Israel.

ALL OF THEM ARE PAIRED, sitting in pairs and busying themselves in Torah.

AND NOT ONE LOSES HER YOUNG, [none are] perpetrators of transgression.

7.) *YOUR TEMPLES ARE LIKE A SECTION OF POMEGRANATE*, their words are ordered as the order of the seeds of the pomegranate, even

³³ Psalms 60:9 and 108:9

³⁴ Song of Songs 4:2

³⁵ the pun here is *shinim*, teeth or teachers

the ignorant³⁶ that are among them are full of commandments like a pomegranate³⁷.

FROM BEHIND YOUR VEIL, with the coming of the enemies the chastisements have increased, as it is said: Your terrors destroy me³⁸. But, God grants them a plentiful reward.

8.) *THERE ARE SIXTY QUEENS*, they are the nations which have sovereignty. The expression there are sixty implies that they are the descendants of Esau³⁹ and the princes of Esau and all of Esau's descendants who have descended from Milcah⁴⁰ and Rebecca.

EIGHTY CONCUBINES. These are the children of Hagar and Qeturah⁴¹, which are in scores⁴², all of which are eighty similar to the previous three [which are sixty]⁴³. Three things are beyond me, four I cannot fathom⁴⁴, and this is the fourth.

³⁶literally "empty"

³⁷*Midrash Shir haShirim*

³⁸*Psalms 88:17*

³⁹*Targum*

⁴⁰*Genesis 22:20*

⁴¹*Genesis 25:1, I Chronicles 1:33*

⁴²that is, in units of twenty

⁴³literally 3

⁴⁴*Proverbs 30:18*

MAIDENS WITHOUT NUMBER, these are the rest of the nations⁴⁵.

9.) SHE IS THE ONLY ONE, the Community of Israel. MY FAULTLESS ONE, the children of Jacob, a faultless man⁴⁶. The explanation of concubines is that until now they do not have queens. These are nations such as the Arabs, and the Kumans⁴⁷, the Pechenegs.

Another thought: Everything is eighty⁴⁸. But, the languages were divided into 70 at first, and later the languages became mixed and their number increased, thus they became 80 like Celtic which is a Frankish (European Christian) language, a Canaanite language, an independent language. Maidens without number, these are the clans and the languages which are divided into 70 nations. God did not choose any nation or tongue but Israel, the offspring of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

A midrash: There are 60 queens⁴⁹, these are the 24 books [of the Bible] and the 36 [Talmudic] tractates.

⁴⁵ Targum

⁴⁶ Genesis 25:27

⁴⁷ These latter two were rival Turkic peoples in Byzantium during the late 11th century.

⁴⁸ This series of midrashim uses the numerical value of the first letter of the words.

⁴⁹ Song of Songs 6:8

Still, there are twenty tractates for which there is no Talmud, making a total of 80. *Maidens without number*⁵⁰, these are the *midrashot*, the *Tosephtot*, and the *baraitot* and all of these are based on the Torah of Moses, the man of God, as it is said: *She is the only one, my dove. My dove is my faultless one* and it says: *You will have one Torah*⁵¹ and it says: *Be mindful of the Torah of My servant Moses*⁵².

SHE IS THE ONLY ONE OF HER MOTHER, for Israel has not exchanged it for another Law.

*SHE IS THE CHOICE OF THE ONE WHO BORE*⁵³ *HER*. Anyone who expounds a verse from his companion as if he had received it at Mount Sinai.

MAIDENS WATCH HER AND CALL HER HAPPY, all of the nations acknowledge that the Torah of Moses was given at Mount Sinai from the mouth of God and it says: *Happy are those whose way is blameless, who follow the teaching of the Lord*⁵⁴.

QUEENS AND CONCUBINES PRAISE HER. All the nations praise the Torah of Moses, the man of God.

Another interpretation of: *She is My only one, my dove* this is the Community of Israel, the only one of her mother,

⁵⁰ *ibid*

⁵¹ Numbers 15:29

⁵² Malachi 3:22

⁵³ The Greenup text has a *mem* in place of the *lamed* in *l'yolahdeta*

⁵⁴ Psalms 119:1

as it is said: *And who is like your people Israel, a unique nation on earth?*⁵⁵. For a nation which He chose, for they are a nation, as it is said: *"You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation"*⁵⁶. She is the choice of the one who conceived her, as in: *I have begotten you this day*⁵⁷, *Israel My first born son*⁵⁸ and it says: *Ephraim is a dear son to me*⁵⁹. Maidens watch her. When Israel is gathered from [among] the nations, the nations will watch and be ashamed. *AND ACCLAIM HER*, as it is said: *All the nations will shall acclaim you happy, for you shall be the most desired of lands*⁶⁰. Queens and concubines, these are the nations of the world who have queens, and those who do not have⁶¹ queens. Let them praise her, as it is said: *Then they shall say among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them!"*⁶². An aggadic Midrash: *There are sixty queens and eighty concubines, and twenty-four books and a thirteen fold covenant which was made over*

⁵⁵ II Samuel 7:23

⁵⁶ Exodus 19:6

⁵⁷ Psalms 2:7

⁵⁸ Exodus 4:22

⁵⁹ Jeremiah 31:19, 31:20 in JPS

⁶⁰ Malachi 3:12

⁶¹ there is a typographical error, rendering a waw as a yod

⁶² Psalms 126:2

circumcision, and circumcision itself⁶³ and declaring the Unity of God. The *Peh* [80] of *philagshim* [concubines], corresponds to the initial letters of the orders of the *Mishnah*. *Mem* [40]-*mei'eimatai*⁶⁴, *yod* [10]-*yetsiut*⁶⁵, *het* [8]-*hameish esreih*⁶⁶, *aleph* [1]-*arba' avot*⁶⁷, *kaf* [20]-*kal haz'vahim*⁶⁸, *aleph* [1]-*avot hatemei'ot*⁶⁹, which correspond to the six orders of the *Mishnah*. In addition to this, the *mishnah* begins with a *mem*, *mei'eimatai*⁷⁰ and closes with a *mem*, *be'shalom*⁷¹. And maidens without number, these are *Siphra*, *Siphrei* and *Tosephta* and all *midrash*. She is the only one, My dove. This is the Torah, since everything depends on it.

10.) WHO IS SHE THAT SHINES LIKE THE DAWN⁷²? Just as everyone waits for the dawn, so all Israel waits for the King

⁶³ *Nedarim* 3:11

⁶⁴ *Zeraim, Berakhot* 1:1

⁶⁵ *Moed, Shabbat* 1:1

⁶⁶ *Nashim, Yevamot* 1:1

⁶⁷ *Nezikin, Baba Kamma* 1:1

⁶⁸ *Kedoshim, Zevachim* 1:1

⁶⁹ *Toharot, Ke'ilim* 1:1

⁷⁰ *Berakhot* 1:1

⁷¹ *Uqtsin* 3:12

⁷² The text has *k'levanon* in place of *k'levanah*

Messiah. And just as the dawn comes after the darkness, so for Israel's deliverance, which comes after the troubles of exile, and so it says: *For the leader, on ayelleth hashahar*⁷³. This is Israel's redemption.

BEAUTIFUL AS THE MOON, CHOICE AS THE SUN. Just as the moon and the sun come to the world for all to see, so the Kingdom of the House of David will be revealed, it will come to the world for all to see. *WHO IS SHE THAT SHINES LIKE THE DAWN?* This is Israel's deliverance, when God exacts punishment from their enemies it is like the shining of the dawn as you find with Pharoah, as it is said: *At the morning watch the Lord looked down upon the Egyptian army*⁷⁴. He mentions here the dawn, the moon and the sun to teach you that just as their luminescence is not equal, so the righteous are not equally fit for the world to come⁷⁵, but each one of them will receive a reward according to his actions.

FEARSOME AS THE BANNERED HOSTS, teaching that the fear of Israel will be over every nation and language, as the day when they were walking en masse, when they went out from Egypt, as in: *The people hear, they tremble*⁷⁶.

⁷³ Psalms 22:1

⁷⁴ Exodus 14:24, Greenup has noted the insertion of *yisrael* in place of *mitzraim*

⁷⁵ Midrash Zuta contains the exposition of this section of the verse

⁷⁶ Exodus 15:14

In reference to the past, the clouds of Glory surrounded Israel.

In reference to the future, the Lord will create over the whole shrine and meeting place of Mount Zion a cloud⁷⁷ and it is written: which shall serve as a pavilion for shade from heat by day and as a shelter for protection against drenching rain⁷⁸.

In the past, Israel had a well⁷⁹ while for the future, it is written: For He who loves them will guide them, He will guide them to springs of water⁸⁰. In the past, the manna came down for Israel, while for the future: You will spread a table for me in full view of my enemies⁸¹:

Therefore it is said: Fearsome as the bannered hosts. Fearsome as the bannered hosts, the fear of Israel will be over the nations as the banners of Israel, as it is said: Kings shall tend your children, their queens shall serve you as nurses. They shall bow to you, face to the ground⁸², and

⁷⁷ Isaiah 4:5

⁷⁸ *ibid*, 4:6

⁷⁹ Possibly Numbers 21:16

⁸⁰ Isaiah 49:10

⁸¹ Psalms 23:5

⁸² Isaiah 49:23

it says: *For the nation or kingdom that does not serve you shall perish*⁸³.

11.) *I WENT DOWN TO THE WALNUT GROVE.* Just as such a grove, if trimmed it grows again, so for Israel, if trimmed by the kingdoms, they come back and grew anew⁸⁴.

Just as a walnut, even when soaked in muddy water, if someone were to wash it, can be cleansed, so are Israel destined to be washed and cleansed, as it is said: *I will sprinkle clean water on you and you shall be clean*⁸⁵.

Just as when a walnut is beaten it uncovers its roots and thrives, so with Israel when they are beaten, they confess their transgressions and they thrive, as it is said: *Let us search and examine our ways and turn back to the Lord*⁸⁶, *But he who covers up his faults will not succeed*⁸⁷.

Just as a walnut is composed of four compartments, so Israel has been divided to the four corners of the world and when one compartment is removed, those near it are effected.

⁸³ *ibid*, 60:12

⁸⁴ *Shir haShirim Rabbah*, which has "walnut" in place of "grove", also included in *Pesikta Rabbati* 11:2

⁸⁵ *Ezekiel* 36:25

⁸⁶ *Lamentations* 3:40

⁸⁷ *Proverbs* 28:13

so when one man sins, You will be wrathful with the entire community⁸⁸.

Just as a walnut comes in three varieties, soft-shelled, in between and tough to crack, so among Israel are those who readily give to *tsedakah*, and there are those who need the community representative⁸⁹ to demand it from them and there the tough ones who have no desire to give *tsedakah* to the poor⁹⁰.

TO SEE THE BUDDING OF THE VALE. Every year, during the month of *Aviv*⁹¹, the Holy One goes around the world to see if there is a righteous person in the world on account of whose merit He can redeem Israel.

TO SEE IF THE VINES HAD BLOSSOMED, if they have *mitzvot*. If its blossoms have opened, [if] a generation which is blind in the exile has opened its eyes to the *mitzvot*.

IF THE POMEGRANATES WERE IN BLOOM, if they have increased the *pomegranates*, that is their merits, for redemption is delayed only by transgressions, as it is said: No, the Lord's arm is not too short to save, nor His ear too dull to hear⁹², but your transgressions have been a barrier between

⁸⁸Numbers 16:22

⁸⁹literally "gabbai"

⁹⁰*Shir haShirim Rabbah*

⁹¹In the spring

⁹²Isaiah 59:1

you and your God⁹³. Why during the month of Aviv? For they are sure that during the month of Aviv they will be redeemed, as it is said: In the first [month] for Zion, behold, here they are⁹⁴.

12.) *BEFORE I WAS AWARE, MY SOUL PLACED ME*, to teach that no creature will feel anything when the Holy One will try to redeem Israel, as it is said: [The Lord] will come suddenly to His Temple⁹⁵ and it says: Before she labors, she will be delivered; before her pangs come, she will bear a son⁹⁶, this is the King Messiah. My soul placed me, my prayer placed me.

MID THE CHARIOTS OF AMMI-NADIV, to be ascending to Jerusalem in chariots, as in: Out of all of the nations, they shall bring all your brothers for an offering to the Lord, on horses, on chariots ...to My holy mountain Jerusalem⁹⁷. Ammi-nadiv, as in: The nobles of the peoples are gathered together, the peoples of the God of Abraham⁹⁸. Abraham our patriarch is called a noble, as it is said: How

⁹³ *ibid*, 59:2

⁹⁴ *ibid*, 41:2

⁹⁵ Malachi 3:1

⁹⁶ Isaiah 66:7

⁹⁷ *ibid*, 66:20

⁹⁸ Psalms 47:10

lovely are your feet in sandals, O daughter of nobles⁹⁹, and Israel is called noble according to their name, as it is said: *The nobles of the peoples are gathered together, the peoples of the God of Abraham*¹⁰⁰, therefore they were called here *Ammi-nadiv*, and it says: *I will heal their affliction, nobly will I take them back in love; for my anger has turned away from them*¹⁰¹.

⁹⁹Song of Songs 7:2, cited in *Sukkah* 49b.

¹⁰⁰Psalms 47:10

¹⁰¹Hosea 14:5

Chapter 7

1.) *RETURN, RETURN, O MAID OF SHULEM.* Why [is return said] four times? It corresponds to the four kingdoms, because the nations of the world¹ say to Israel²: "Since [God] has reproved and forgotten you, [it is] as if [they were saying], join us and be like us, *O MAID OF SHULEM*, since you have already been consummated and are finished, as in: *The land of your enemies shall consume you*³."

"*RETURN, RETURN, THAT WE MAY LOOK UPON YOUR FACE*, we will promote you commanders and generals⁴ as in: *You shall be seen from among the people as capable men*⁵" But Israel answers them: "*WHY WILL YOU GAZE AT THE MAID OF SHULEM?* What can you bestow on us?⁶ *AS IN THE DANCE OF THE TWO CAMPS.* Can you make us⁷, as when we were four camps in the wilderness, traveling by banners, on a sign from the Lord the Israelites broke camp, and on a sign from the Lord the Israelites made camp?⁸". Or, as the dance of Miriam when they struck [the

¹ *Shir haShirim Rabbah, Midrash Shir haShirim*

² This exhortation continues into the next paragraph

³ *Leviticus 26:38*

⁴ *Shir haShirim Rabbah*

⁵ *Exodus 18:21*

⁶ *Targum*

⁷ *Shir haShirim Rabbah*

⁸ *Midrash Tanhuma, Numbers 9:18*

Egyptians] at the sea⁹ or as the dance of David when he returned from the slaughter of the Philistines¹⁰? Return, return O Maid of Shulem. Return, return that we may look upon you. This is Israel's assurance that they will be gathered from the four corners of the world. And thus she asks the prophets: "What do you see regarding fulfillment? What favors will you bestow upon Israel?" They answer: As the dance of the two camps, as it is said: Go forth to the rhythm of the dancers¹¹ and it says: Then shall maidens dance gaily¹². And why is she called Maid of Shulem? On account of what is said: I will send peace to her like a river¹³.

2.) *HOW LOVELY ARE YOUR FOOTSTEPS IN SANDALS, O DAUGHTER OF NOBLES.* In the past Israel would ascend on pilgrimage three times a year, at Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot¹⁴. This matter was so loved by God that although "Lord" is never written out [explicitly] in any of the [other] commandments, here it is

⁹Exodus 15:20-21

¹⁰I Samuel 17:57

¹¹Jeremiah 31:3, 31:4 in JPS

¹²Jeremiah 31:12, 31:13 in JPS

¹³Isaiah 66:12

¹⁴reading *paama'ikh* as your times, Sukkah 49b

written before the Lord God¹⁵ because Israel would come to worship Him in His Temple.

And thus for the future to come it is written: *New moon after new moon, and Sabbath after Sabbath all flesh shall come to worship Me*¹⁶ and then the footsteps of Israel will be beautiful in sandals as in: *It will be broken into seven wadis so that it can be trodden dry-shod*¹⁷.

Abba Mari, of blessed memory, expounded how lovely are your footsteps as referring to a bell, as if to say Israel is attractive when they sound their voices like bells when they study Torah and in prayer.

And about Samson it says: ...to move him in the encampment of Dan¹⁸, because it was the spirit of holiness that had stirred him. When closed up, when they close themselves up in places of study and sit and busy themselves in Torah. When closed up, when they seal themselves off from every prohibition, as in: *A garden closed is my own, my*

¹⁵Exodus 23:17, where the command appears to make pilgrimage as part of observing the three festivals

¹⁶Isaiah 66:23

¹⁷ibid, 11:15

¹⁸Judges 13:25

bride¹⁹. *O daughter of nobles, the daughter of Abraham our patriarch, who is called a noble*²⁰.

YOUR ROUNDED THIGHS, these are the words of Torah which require modesty like the thighs of a woman, which are covered²¹. *Your rounded thighs*, the roundness of the thighs are like ornaments displayed together like: *an ornament of gold*²². These are the well reasoned commentaries which derive from the Torah like *the ornaments of the thighs*.

THE WORK OF A MASTER'S HAND. The words of Torah are the work of the Holy One's craftsmanship²³, as it is said: *From His right hand was a fiery law for them*²⁴.

3.) *YOUR NAVEL IS LIKE A FULL MOON/A ROUND GOBLET*. This is the Temple since it is in the center of the land of Israel. Why is it compared to a navel? Just as the navel is the life-source of an embryo, so is the Temple the life-source of the land of Israel, to walk before God in the land of the living²⁵. *A round goblet/a full moon, a circle, a shield,*

¹⁹ Song of Songs 4:12

²⁰ Psalms 47:10, this passage is also in *Sukkah* 49b and *Shir haShirim Rabbah*

²¹ *Sukkah* 49b

²² Proverbs 25:12

²³ *Sukkah* 49a

²⁴ Deuteronomy 33:2

²⁵ cf. Psalms 56:14

with a *het*²⁶, implying the roundness of the earth. Rounded - the moon²⁷.

Another interpretation of *hassahar* is the market, for it is a place in every inhabited land, it connotes roundness.

LET MIXED WINE NOT BE LACKING, let Israel never be lacking like this, as when they became [a] mixed [multitude] during their departure from Egypt.

YOUR BELLY LIKE A HEAP OF WHEAT, these are Israel, for [although] every other nation has many kinds of people, Israel has just one kind. Just as wheat [grows] above all [other] produce, so is Israel above all the nations, as it is said: *He will set you high above all the nations*²⁸.

HEDGED ABOUT WITH LILIES, these are the righteous who carry the trailing ones of Israel.

Another interpretation of *hedged about with lilies*, they are like a *hedge of lilies* which have no breach²⁹. Know that if a husband is alone with his menstruant wife, he is not a sinner.

²⁶The text has *het.gimel.nun* in place of *aleph.gimel.nun*

²⁷*Targum*

²⁸Deuteronomy 26:19, the text has *goyyei ha'aretz* instead of *ha-goyim*

²⁹*Midrash Tehilim*

4.) *YOUR BREASTS ARE LIKE TWO FAWNS*, these are the King Messiah and the righteous priest, since they love each other. Just as the twins of a gazelle³⁰, each sucking at his own nipple, so one will receive the kingship and other will receive the priesthood.

5.) *YOUR NECK IS LIKE A TOWER OF IVORY*, this is the Temple, since it stood out like a neck. Like a tower of ivory, there was one [tower of] ivory in the steppes of Moab which faced the Temple and anyone who ascended it would look out and see the entire land of Israel³¹.

YOUR EYES LIKE POOLS IN HESHBON, for just as a pool [of water] purifies a person, so do the eyes of the community purify Israel when they are seen involved in *heshbon* [nefesh], since they ponder about the loss of a mitzvah as opposed to its reward, and consider the Day of Judgement³².

BY THE GATE OF BATH-RABBIM. What is Bath-Rabbim? The forest of Lebanon where Israel had been gathered and lodged.

³⁰ Song of Songs 4:5

³¹ possibly a reference to Numbers 23:9, a place from which Balaam looks out over the land of Israel.

³² Avot 2:1

It describes the untillable cuts in the valley³³, while [in the Bible] there is *bath-'ur*³⁴ and *bath-ha-nashim*³⁵.

YOUR NOSE LIKE THE TOWER OF LEBANON, this is Elijah, since just as the nose is becoming to the face, so is Elijah becoming to Israel when he announces the coming of the King Messiah, and through him the glory of *Lebanon*³⁶ that faces toward *Damascus* will be exalted, for God said to this prophet: *Go back by the way you came, on to the wilderness of Damascus*³⁷.

Abba Mari of blessed memory expounded your neck like a tower of ivory; these are the prominent ones in Israel. Your eyes, these are the sages. *Pools of Heshbon*, those who think to do the will of their Creator. *Bereikhot* has the same root as making a blessing³⁸. By the gate of *Bath-Rabbim*, by the synagogues and houses of study. Your nose like the tower of *Lebanon*, these are the ordinary people of Israel, who in the future will be like King David, who made

³³There is no tet in *batvatah*, see Jastrow p. 200.

³⁴Psalms 17:8, "the apple of 'your eye", the text reads *bat ha-ir*, "a woman of the city"

³⁵Daniel 11:17, "one of the women"

³⁶*Lebanon*, understood to be the Temple.

³⁷I Kings 19:15

³⁸literally "the blessing over wine"

the Temple³⁹ great as it is said: *The feeblest among them shall be in that day like David*⁴⁰. That faces toward *Damascus* when the prophet comes, as it is said: *Get up, go back to the way you came, on to the wilderness of Damascus*⁴¹ and this was [spoken to] *Elijah*.

6.) *YOUR HEAD UPON YOU LIKE CARMEL*, this teaches that Israel is destined to have the spirit of holiness dwell upon them just as it dwelt upon *Elijah* at *Mount Carmel*, when God answered him at *Mount Carmel*. Thus, Israel will petition from God and they will be answered, as it is said: *Before they call, I will answer*⁴².

THE LOCKS OF YOUR HEAD ARE LIKE PURPLE. When will Israel lift its head like the tendrils of a vine? When Israel's visions will be fulfilled, as it is said in *Daniel*: *He shall be robed in purple*⁴³ for it is said: *Happy is the one who waits and reaches one thousand three hundred and thirty-five*

³⁹literally "Lebanon"

⁴⁰*Zechariah* 12:8

⁴¹*I Kings* 19:15

⁴²*Isaiah* 65:24

⁴³*Daniel* 5:7

days⁴⁴ then the holy ones of the Most High will receive the kingdom, and will possess the kingdom forever⁴⁵.

A KING HELD CAPTIVE IN THE TRESSES/GUTTERS. By the merit of Jacob our patriarch who peeled twigs and put them in the gutters, the water troughs⁴⁶, who was the father of Joseph who went out from prison⁴⁷ to rule and so it says: May the name of Jacob's God keep you safe⁴⁸.

Another interpretation of: Your head upon you like Carmel, as in: Your sons and daughters shall prophesy⁴⁹ and even the young ones amongst Israel will be like Elijah when he was answered at Mount Carmel. The locks of your head, the needy and the poor amongst Israel will be dressed in purple, as the garment of kings, and thus it says: Kings shall tend your children⁵⁰, you shall enjoy the wealth of nations and revel in their riches⁵¹. A king held captive in the tresses/gutters, this king is the Holy One, and His oath to Jacob, who had set up the twigs/rods in the gutters,

⁴⁴ibid, 12:12, 12:11 in JPS

⁴⁵Daniel 7:18

⁴⁶Targum, Genesis 30:37ff.

⁴⁷Targum, literally the "house of the captives"

⁴⁸Psalms 20:2

⁴⁹Joel 3:1

⁵⁰Isaiah 49:23

⁵¹Isaiah 61:5

is hinged on faith, as it is said: *You will keep faith with Jacob, loyalty with Abraham, as you promised on oath to our patriarchs in days of old*⁵².

7.) *HOW FAIR YOU ARE, HOW PLEASANT!* Fair with commandments⁵³ and pleasant in accepting chastisements⁵⁴.

O LOVE, WITH ALL ITS PLEASURES! The love with which Israel loves their Creator. God intends to invigorate them with delights, as it is said: *Then shall you delight in the Lord. I will make you to ride the high places of the earth and let you enjoy the heritage of your father Jacob*⁵⁵ and it says: *Delight in the abundance of peace*⁵⁶.

8.) *YOUR STATELY FORM IS LIKE THE PALM*, this is Israel, who direct their hearts to their Father in the heavens like a palm.

Your breasts, these are the sages who teach Torah to Israel, who nurture Israel with wisdom, just as the breasts nurse a baby with milk, and are called clusters, as in:

⁵² Micah 7:20

⁵³ *Shir haShirim Rabbah*

⁵⁴ cf. Targum

⁵⁵ Isaiah 58:14

⁵⁶ Psalms 37:11

There is not a cluster for feeding, nor first ripe fig for my soul⁵⁷.

9.) I SAID: LET ME CLIMB/GO UP THE PALM. In the future, God will say: "LET ME LIFT UP the degradation of my people Israel, since they have descended to the dust, Let me lift them up."

LET ME TAKE HOLD OF ITS BRANCHES, like a person who climbs [a tree] taking hold of its trunk as he climbs, except that a palm-tree has thorny branches that prick! Just as God revealed Himself to Moses in the bush because His people were in affliction in the slavery of Egypt, so God sees the affliction of His people, since they, like a palm, are full of thorns. God will take hold of them and destroy all the enemies of His people, and finish off the wicked, as it is said: Taking hold of the ends of the earth, the wicked shall be shaken from it⁵⁸.

YOUR BREASTS WILL BE LIKE CLUSTERS OF GRAPES, He will choose for Himself the righteous. After they are made clear and white and purified, they will be like clusters of grapes. Thus it says: His boughs shall spread out far, His beauty

⁵⁷Micah 7:1

⁵⁸Job 38:13

like the olive tree's⁵⁹, His scent like the wine of Lebanon⁶⁰.

YOUR BREATH LIKE THE FRAGRANCE OF APPLES, their good name will waft from one end of the world to the other, like the eternal stars.

10.) AND YOUR MOUTH LIKE CHOICEST WINE, referring to the beauty of their actions, since they will all be righteous. God delights in them, as in: Let the Lord delight in their works!⁶¹ and they will delight in Him, as it is said: Let Israel rejoice in their Maker⁶².

LET IT FLOW TO MY BELOVED AS NEW WINE, their good actions flow before God, describing the upright things⁶³ that they have done.

GLIDING OVER THE LIPS OF SLEEPERS at that very moment when God will revive the dead, as it is said: Awake and shout for joy, you who dwell in the dust⁶⁴ and it says: May they

⁵⁹Hosea 14:7, The first word in the verse is yeil'khu, masculine plural imperfect, rather than lekhu, plural imperative.

⁶⁰ibid, 14:8

⁶¹Psalms 104:31

⁶²Psalms 149:2

⁶³cf. Targum

⁶⁴Isaiah 26:19

blossom out of the city like the grass of the earth⁶⁵ and:
But you, go on to the end, you shall rest and arise to your
destiny at the end of days⁶⁶.

11.) I AM MY BELOVED'S, I am waiting for His deliverance, as
in: O Israel, wait for the Lord⁶⁷ and it says: I have been
waiting patiently for the Lord⁶⁸ and: Therefore wait for Me
- says the Lord⁶⁹.

AND HIS DESIRE IS FOR ME, He intends to grant me all the
desirable and pleasurable things that are in the world:
Because your shame was double - you shall have a double
share in your land⁷⁰. Instead of copper, I will bring gold,
instead of iron, I will bring silver⁷¹.

12.) "COME MY BELOVED, LET US GO FORTH TO THE FIELD", the
Community of Israel said before God, Master of the world,

⁶⁵ Psalms 72:16

⁶⁶ Daniel 12:13

⁶⁷ Psalms 130:7

⁶⁸ *ibid*, 40:2

⁶⁹ Zephaniah 3:8

⁷⁰ Isaiah 61:7, literally "they will inherit"

⁷¹ *ibid*, 60:17

"Rise up, Judge of the earth!"⁷² How long shall the wicked exult?"⁷³

The field. The entire world is called a field, as in: And when they were in the field, Cain rose up [against Abel his brother and killed him]⁷⁴.

LET US LODGE AMONG THE HENNA SHRUBS, [these are the] deliberations about the disbelievers⁷⁵, about the nations of the world to whom You gave governance and security. In what manner did the nations of the world find favor in your eyes?⁷⁶

13.) "LET US GO EARLY TO THE VINEYARDS", the Community of Israel says: "Master of the world, You have seen the abuse and the blasphemy with which the nations of the world continue to abuse [us] and blaspheme [You]! What kind of satisfaction do You get from them?" Let us go early to the vineyards, for the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is Israel⁷⁷, since they have become many vineyards, many congregations.

⁷² Psalms 94:2

⁷³ *ibid*, 94:3

⁷⁴ Genesis 4:8

⁷⁵ Eruvin 21b

⁷⁶ *Shir haShirim Rabbah*

⁷⁷ Isaiah 5:7, also quoted in *Shir haShirim Rabbah*

LET US SEE IF THE VINE HAS FLOWERED, if there are righteous ones among them.

IF ITS BLOSSOMS HAVE OPENED, if they have begun to return in repentance.

IF THE POMEGRANATES ARE IN BLOOM, these are the children of school age⁷⁸.

THERE WILL I GIVE MY LOVE TO YOU, there will I show you the many righteous men and women I have raised⁷⁹ amongst you each year.

14.) THE MANDRAKES YIELD THEIR FRAGRANCE, a generation which is destined to be redeemed is destined to yield a good fragrance with their actions, as the fragrance of the mandrakes.

AT OUR DOORS ARE ALL CHOICE FRUITS, because Israel will open the gate of repentance. And there are gates for every good action of Torah, of prayer, of righteousness, of fair judgement and of the love of peace⁸⁰.

BOTH THE NEW THINGS AND THE OLD, which they received from their ancestors or the new interpretations they have made based on their knowledge, in order to perform good actions.

⁷⁸cf. Midrash Shir haShirim

⁷⁹cf. Shir haShirim Rabbah, "when I place righteous men and women"

⁸⁰cf. Midrash Zuta

WHICH I HAVE STORED UP FOR YOU. This is the Torah, as in:
My commandments are stored up for you⁸¹ and it says: He
reserves sound wisdom for the upright⁸².

⁸¹Proverbs 2:1, 7:1

⁸²ibid, 2:7

Chapter 8

1.) *IF ONLY YOU COULD LET ME BE AS A BROTHER.* The Community of Israel said: "Master of the world, let me merit your compassion, and may you love me as a brother. Not like Cain who killed his brother¹, not like Ishmael who hated Isaac, not like Esau who bore a grudge against Jacob², not like the tribes [of Israel] who sold Joseph³, but rather like Joseph about whom it is written: *He comforted them and spoke kindly to them*⁴. Just as he did good to his brothers instead of their evil, so You provide us with good instead of our evil, and just as Joseph was filled with compassion for his brother Benjamin, as it is said: *He was overcome with compassion for his brother*⁵."

NURSING AT MY MOTHER'S BREAST, as Joseph nursed at the breast of Benjamin's mother.

I WOULD FIND YOU OUTSIDE, I WOULD KISS YOU, when one [member] of Israel is found in exile the nations of the world tell him to stop declaring the Unity of God, he *kisses* his hand with his mouth out of his great love for God.

¹Genesis 4:8

²Genesis 27:41

³Genesis 37:27

⁴Genesis 50:21

⁵Genesis 43:30

AND NO ONE WOULD SCORN ME, he does not consider himself scorned by any scorn that they scorn him about this, as it is said: *I will speak of your testimonies before kings and not be ashamed*⁶. Another interpretation of: *No one would scorn me*, no matter what the nations of the world say, they cannot cause me to scorn Your unity and Your Torah.

2.) *I WOULD LEAD/ACCUSTOM YOU, I WOULD BRING YOU.* We are holding on to our ancestor's customs and we are being slaughtered for professing Your unity. *I WOULD BRING YOU INTO MY MOTHER'S HOUSE,* I would bring you to Your people Israel to profess Your unity, into my mother's house, into synagogues and into places of study, I will make your Torah heard.

THAT YOU MIGHT TEACH ME, just as You *TAUGHT ME* at Mount Sinai.

I WOULD LET YOU DRINK OF SPICED WINE, I would let your children drink of the wine of Torah, which is spiced with all kinds of spices.

*OF MY POMEGRANATE JUICE*⁷, the well reasoned commentaries which are sweet like the wine made from pomegranate juice. Our sages of blessed memory said that there is a pomegranate in the garden of Eden whose wine God intends to serve to the righteous.

⁶ Psalms 119:46

⁷ This text contains an emendation, so that it reads *rimoni*-"pomegranates" instead of *rimoni*-"my pomegranate"

3.) *HIS LEFT HAND WAS UNDER MY HEAD AND HIS RIGHT HAND EMBRACED ME*, He pushed me away with His left hand but He embraced me with His right hand, as it is said: *For His anger is but for a moment, His favor for a lifetime*⁸ and it says: *In slight anger, for a moment, I hid My face from You, but with kindness everlasting I will take you back with compassion*⁹, *with great compassion I will gather you*¹⁰ and for a short moment I forsook you¹¹. His left hand under my head and His right hand embraced me, this is the embrace of the shekhina, a love without interruption, as it is said: *My people shall never be shamed*¹².

4.) *I ADJURE YOU, O MAIDENS OF JERUSALEM*, these are the nations of the world which are in the villages in contrast to Jerusalem.

Do not stir or rouse it says in all of them¹³, *do not stir or rouse love*, while here it says, *Why stir or rouse?* However once the wicked kingdom did decree to build the

⁸ Psalms 30:6

⁹ Isaiah 54:8

¹⁰ *ibid*, 54:7

¹¹ *ibid*

¹² Joel 2:26, 2:27

¹³ *cf.* Song of Songs 2:7, 3:5

Temple, and Israel ascended as a great multitude¹⁴ since they had become a numerous people, lessened by Herod¹⁵ who in the end turned on them. They tried to raise up against them but he prevented them. Rabbi Joshua said to them [of that generation], it is not enough that we live among the nations, but that we transgress¹⁶ that which our Creator has commanded us.

UNTIL IT PLEASES, the redemption from the Heavens.

5.) *WHO IS SHE THAT COMES UP FROM THE WILDERNESS?* Just as in the Egyptian redemption they went out to the wilderness, as it is said: *They went out to the wilderness of Shur*¹⁷, they were raised from the wilderness, so, in the future Israel is destined to go out to the wilderness because of the troubles which exist in the land of Israel, and there He will reveal Elijah to them who will lead them up from the land.

LEANING UPON HER BELOVED, since they will be troubled about the coming of the Messiah, not knowing when he would be revealed to them.

"UNDER THE APPLE TREE I ROUSED YOU", and God says [to them], "Why are you leaning so? Was it not under the apple tree

¹⁴Joel 4:14

¹⁵literally "Antipatris", a city founded by Herod in the name of his father

¹⁶reading 'ovrim instead of 'ovdim

¹⁷Exodus 15:22

that I roused you when your ancestors were in Egypt, when the women of Israel went out and gave birth in the field under the apple trees?¹⁸ *THERE YOUR MOTHER HAD PANGS AT YOUR CONCEPTION, AND THERE SHE LABORED AND BROUGHT YOU FORTH.* Just as in Egypt, when you were under the yoke of slavery, and I made them a mighty host, and brought you up from their midst, so will I deliver you from among the nations.

6.) *LET ME SET A SEAL UPON YOUR HEART,* this is a warning to Israel not to scrutinize God's attributes, but to love Him with all their hearts.

LIKE THE SEAL UPON YOUR ARM, which is always visible, so do you remember your Creator.

FOR LOVE IS STRONG AS DEATH, when you are killed for Me, I place My love on you.

JEALOUSY IS CRUEL AS SHEOL, since the nations of the world envy Israel.

THE DARTS of love ARE DARTS OF FIRE, like the burning coals¹⁹ of a fire.

¹⁸ *Sota 11b*

¹⁹ *cf. Targum*

A *BLAZING FLAME*²⁰, similar to [the word] thick darkness²¹, it is not a holy name, but is a noun [denoting] a strong flame.

Another interpretation of: *Let me be a seal*. The Community of Israel says to God: "*Let me be a seal upon your heart*", as in: *My eyes and My heart will ever be there*²², so that You will always remember us like the seal on Your arm, as in: *I have engraved you on the palms of My hands*. Your walls are ever before Me²³. For love is strong as death, since we love You, as it is said: *You shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart*²⁴, even if He takes your life²⁵. Jealousy is cruel as Sheol. The jealousy of the nations of the world who envy us because we declare the unity of Your holy name and so they hate us. The darts of jealousy are darts of fire which consume to the depths of Sheol, to the foundations of the world. Who of us can dwell with the consuming fire?²⁶ A blazing flame is one word.

²⁰In the text it appears as "the blazing flame of God", though later in the text the author states that it is in fact one word and not two.

²¹Jeremiah 2:31

²²I Kings 9:3

²³Isaiah 49:16

²⁴Deuteronomy 6:5

²⁵Berakhot 54a, 61b

²⁶The order of the words from Isaiah 33:14 has been changed. Additionally, the correct phrase is not "mosdei

7.) *VAST FLOODS CANNOT QUENCH LOVE.* The Holy One says to Israel, "[Even] if all the nations, which are compared to vast floods²⁷ were to rally, they could not quench the love that is between you and Me.

NOR RIVERS DROWN IT, because all the families of the nations would not drown it²⁸. Above it says darts of fire and again it says vast floods, as in: *When you walk through fire you will not be scorched, when you pass through water I am with you*²⁹, and it says: *We have endured fire and water and you have brought us through to prosperity*³⁰. Instead of this: *The light of Israel will be fire, and its Holy One flame*³¹, and it says: *IF A MAN OFFERED ALL THE WEALTH OF HIS HOUSE FOR LOVE, HE WOULD BE UTTERLY SCORNE*D. The Holy One is not returning the wealth of the nations which had been appropriated in order to destroy Israel, as it is said: *Sin is a reproach to any people*³². Similar to all the profusion which Haman gave to Ahaseurus, he would be utterly scorned.

'olam'-the foundations of the world, but *"moqdei 'olam"*-the never dying blaze. Both work in this midrash.

²⁷ *Shir haShirim Rabbah*

²⁸ cf. *Shir haShirim Rabbah*

²⁹ *Isaiah 43:2*

³⁰ *Psalms 66:12*

³¹ *Isaiah 10:17*

³² *Proverbs 14:34*

Another interpretation of: *Vast floods cannot quench love*, [which is what] Israel said to God, *vast floods*. If all the nations of the world would rally against us, they could not quench the love with which Israel loves You³³. The nations are called *mayim* - water, as it is said: *The waters overwhelmed us, the torrent had gone over our soul*³⁴. Nor rivers drown it, and even though they kill and drown in water and burn with fire, Israel does not listen to them to refute their Maker. If a man offered all the wealth of his house for love, for if one of the princes were to give much wealth to an Israelite to leave the Torah of his God, they would utterly scorn him, that is the same person who would offer all the wealth of his home, because of Israel's love for God.

8.) *WE HAVE A LITTLE SISTER*, this is the Torah, as in: Say to wisdom "You are my sister"³⁵. Small; because she is small in appearance, but large in actions.

SHE HAS NO BREASTS. She does not have breasts like a woman, but she nurses all people³⁶, as it is said: *A lovely*

³³ cf. Targum, where God's love for Israel is expressed in similar terms.

³⁴ Psalms 124:4

³⁵ Proverbs 7:4

³⁶ Midrash Shir haShirim

hind, a graceful mountain goat. Let her breasts satisfy you at all times³⁷.

WHAT SHALL WE DO FOR OUR SISTER? With this approach, we welcome God, and the Torah's commandments and the Holy One says to them:

9.) IF SHE BE A WALL, WE WILL BUILD UPON HER A TURRET OF SILVER. If Israel exposes herself to arrows on a wall, we will build upon her a turret of silver, for just as silver when exposed to light, does not diminish, so you, too, do not become deficient while among the kingdoms³⁸.

IF SHE BE A DOOR. If you weaken yourselves by detaching yourselves from words of Torah, we will enclose it in boards of cedar³⁹. Just as a board eventually ends in decay, so God's covenant softens you. And Israel replies:

10.) I AM A WALL, MY BREASTS ARE LIKE TOWERS. I have withstood chastisements like a wall, and I have not spurned them.

SO I BECAME IN HIS EYES AS ONE WHO FOUND FAVOR. The Holy One will call us "Shalom", as it is said: I will reach out to her as a river of peace⁴⁰.

³⁷Proverbs 5:19

³⁸Midrash Shir haShirim

³⁹cf. Genesis Rabbah, Chapter 39

⁴⁰Isaiah 66:12

Another interpretation of *We have a little sister*. It is said about the generation at the end of time that it will be the smallest among generations⁴¹, that the number of sages, righteous people and the amount of fortunes will be reduced, as in: *I will leave in your midst an afflicted and poor people: And they shall take refuge in the name of the Lord*⁴². She lacks the many good actions [needed] to accompany her in the days of terror. What shall we do for our sister on the day that she shall be spoken for? As if to say, "What shall we do for Israel at the end of days, on the day that she shall be spoken for?, since the enemies will be plotting to destroy them, and to wrest them from words of Torah, as it is said: *They plot craftily against Your people*⁴³. They say "Let us wipe them out as a nation"⁴⁴. If she be a wall, if they⁴⁵ continue to declare the unity of God's name, as [firmly] as a wall, and [continue] to hand themselves over for the sanctification of God's name, we will build silver turrets upon them, over

⁴¹literally "among the daughters"

⁴²Zephaniah 3:12

⁴³Psalms 83:4

⁴⁴Psalms 83:5

⁴⁵the text changes from 2fs (as in *Shir haShirim*) to 3mp, which fits exegetically, where Israel is the object of these verses.

which the decay can not prevail⁴⁶, so that the enemies will not be able to slaughter them, with God providing for them a savior. *If she be a door*, for just as a door swings open and closed, so will they be in exile among the nations, for they will not be able to stand firmly by their laws⁴⁷. *We will enclose her in boards of cedar*, just as fire prevails over boards of cedar, so is its eventual end in decay and fire. "I am a wall, and my breasts are like towers", answers Israel⁴⁸: "I am a wall - I intend to stand [firm] like a wall, against the nations, as it is said in Jeremiah: *I make you this day a fortified city, and an iron pillar, and bronze walls*⁴⁹", thus Israel will be like a firm wall in declaring the unity of God. *My breasts are like towers*, the sages of a generation are like breasts⁵⁰ which nurse an infant, thus teaching Israel ways of life like these towers which stand before the enemies. Thus the the sages of Israel defend their generation.

Then I became in His eyes as one who found peace, then God will look down compassionately upon Israel, as in, *The*

⁴⁶Yoma 9b-10a

⁴⁷"law", dat-dalet, thav as opposed to "door", dalet-dalet, lamed, thav, quoted in *Shir haShirim Rabbah*.

⁴⁸Targum

⁴⁹Jeremiah 1:18, Toviah ben Eliezer precedes the verse with the word "see" - masculine imperative.

⁵⁰Pesachim 67a

Lord has seen my affliction⁵¹, and so God has called them "Peace", as in: *How beautiful on the mountains are the footsteps of the herald, announcing Peace, heralding good fortune, announcing deliverance*⁵².

11.) SOLOMON HAD A VINEYARD IN BAAL-HAMON, these are Israel who were gathered with the voice of joy and praise, the festive throng⁵³.

HE HAD TO PUT GUARDS IN THE VINEYARDS, God had to put His Temple⁵⁴ under the power of the nations⁵⁵.

A MAN WOULD GIVE FOR ITS FRUIT A THOUSAND PIECES OF SILVER, this refers to Nebuchadnezzar⁵⁶ who exiled with Jehoiachin a thousand righteous ones, as in: a thousand craftsmen and smiths⁵⁷ who strengthened with Torah the power of Israel in the exile.

⁵¹cf. Genesis 29:32, rephrased here in the first person singular.

⁵²Isaiah 52:7

⁵³Psalms 42:5, quoted in *Midrash Shir haShirim*

⁵⁴*Midrash Shir haShirim*

⁵⁵*ibid*

⁵⁶*Midrash Zuta*

⁵⁷II Kings 24:16

12.) "I HAVE MY VERY OWN VINEYARD"/"MY VINEYARD WHICH IS MINE, IS BEFORE ME", God said, "It is my obligation to rebuild My vineyard as it was originally".

YOU MAY HAVE THE THOUSAND, O SOLOMON, AND THE GUARDS OF THE FRUIT TWO HUNDRED, these are their students. From here they have said that the student receives one portion, while the teacher is entitled to five⁵⁸, just as two hundred is one tenth of one thousand.

13.) YOU WHO LINGER IN THE GARDENS, this is the Community of Israel who lingers in the exile among the kingdoms.

YOUR FRIENDS/COMPANIONS LISTEN FOR YOUR VOICE, LET ME HEAR YOU! This teaches that the ministering angels recite their praises only after Israel opens up in song, as it is written: When the morning stars sang together, and all the divine beings shouted for joy⁵⁹.

14.) HURRY MY BELOVED, BE LIKE A GAZELLE, these are the words of Israel vis-a-vis the shekhina since they have been detained in the exile, and they say: Hurry my Beloved from the nations, so that You will remove Your help from them. BE LIKE A GAZELLE OR A YOUNG HART, for just as a gazelle travels to the end of the world, and yet it remembers its abode and

⁵⁸ cf. Shir haShirim Rabbah

⁵⁹ Job 38:7, also included in Midrash Shir haShirim

returns home⁶⁰, so too for Israel, for even though Israel is among the nations, they remember their home, as it is said: *If I forget thee O Jerusalem*⁶¹.

UPON THE MOUNT OF SPICES, these are the mountains of the land of Israel, whose fragrance wafts as spices⁶². Another interpretation: *Solomon had a vineyard*. This vineyard is Israel, as it is said: *For the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is Israel*⁶³. In *Baal-hamon*, among the nations which are more profuse than abundant waters. He had to put guards in the vineyard. Under the power of the nations who led them [Israel] into idol worship. God said, "I placed Israel under the power of the kings of Israel and they led them into idol worship. I placed them under [the power of] Nebuchadnezzar and they led them] into idol worship".

This is comparable to a king who gave his son to a tutor⁶⁴ to teach him Torah, but instead taught him the evil(s) of secular culture. The king said to him: "I handed my son over to you in order that he become better. It would be preferable that I take my son, I have my own vineyard, I will gather my children to my house.

⁶⁰literally "place"

⁶¹Psalms 137:5, quoted in *Midrash Shir haShirim*, T. Yerushalmi: Shevi'it 9:2

⁶²*kivasamim* rather than *bevesamim*

⁶³Isaiah 5:7

⁶⁴literally "pedagogue"

You may have the thousand, O Solomon. The Community of Israel says: "Master of all the worlds, were there not one thousand righteous ones when you exiled us to Babylonia? Now we have added many more to those first ones". And the guards of the fruit two hundred. The student receives one portion while the teacher receives five portions. He will surely give us the reward of the Torah, in which we have labored in the exile under hardship. "You who linger in the gardens", the spirit of holiness says to Israel, who is amongst the nations: "Your friends listen for Your voice, busy yourselves in Torah and study out of love, gathering by groups of friends to listen to the Torah. Your voice⁶⁵, I desire to hear your voice⁶⁶ when you are busying yourself in Torah, Let Me hear you! Hurry, my beloved!". The Community of Israel says: "Even though you fled from me, still, be like a gazelle, quick on its feet, or a young hart and return to Your Temple as at first, on the Mount of Spices.

Abba Mari, of blessed memory, explained Solomon had a vineyard as a proverb and as a metaphor. Solomon had a vineyard in Baal-hamon, this is a place, its name is Baal-hermon⁶⁷. He gave the vineyard to the guards, and they gave him a compensation for eating the fruit, a thousand pieces

⁶⁵cf. Midrash Zuta

⁶⁶God is now the subject rather than the object of this passage

⁶⁷Judges 3:3, I Chronicles 5:23

of silver. Now inside the vineyard a young woman lingered. [When] the owner came to take the young woman, the guards said to him: "Everything that is in the vineyard is ours", as it is said: *My own vineyard is before me*, for thus have I agreed. You may have the thousand, O Solomon, as your compensation, while the two hundred, for if the vineyard now changes/grows two hundred times one thousand, all of it is ours, and the young woman as well, who lingers in the garden. The owner of the vineyard says: "Let us ask her. If it is her wish to be with you, she will be with you; and if it is not her wish to be with you, I am taking her for myself. Your friends listen for your voice, to hear what you desire. Let me hear you! And if she changes [her mind], if my Beloved flees, what will I do, for You have handed me over into the power of the guards, I cannot escape from here, but you make yourself like someone who flees and goes away for only a short moment. Be like a gazelle or a young hart, and return and take me from here on to the Mount of Spices, to my land and to my birthplace. This is a metaphor for Israel, since they are called "the vineyard of His Peace, the One to whom peace belongs". In Baal-hamon, amidst the nations, He placed His people under their power. A man would give for its fruit a thousand pieces of silver, a man of Seir, who is called Esau, in order to consume Ephraim, [explained as] the fruits of Israel. The desire of this world is this eleph, for just as the aleph is first

letter [of the alphabet], so he yearns to kill this world, disregarding the retribution of the world to come, as it is said: *And Esau said, "I am at the point of death, so of what use is my birthright to me?"*⁶⁸. A thousand pieces of silver, silver is "A", first among the desires, as in *I long, I yearn for*⁶⁹. "My vineyard is before me", Esau said to himself, Israel has already been handed over into our power, they will [also] believe in our religion. You may have the thousand, O Solomon, this world You gave it to us, it is Yours, but You handed it over to the kings of the nations. And the guards of the fruit two hundred. Even if Israel were two hundred times more numerous than what they are, everything is ours, and they will have to believe in our religion! God says to them, "I did not hand them over into your power, nor for your preference, nor to bring them out from the care of the *shekhina*, but let us ask them if they want to leave me to chase after vanity or not". You who linger in the gardens, this is Israel who lives among the nations, friends listening for your voice, i.e. nations of the world who ascribe to me associates, namely strange gods. Listening for Your voice, to hear Your decision. Let me please hear Your will. The Community of Israel responds,

⁶⁸Genesis 25:32

⁶⁹Psalms 84:3

"Already you have put me in the nethermost pit⁷⁰, [and put me] under the power of the nations, and have adjured me not to rebel against them. Hurry, my Beloved to the time of the end, the redemption, and then be like a gazelle or a young hart. Send your help, redeem me, bring me to the Mountains of Spices, Mount Zion and the Temple, which is Mount Moriah, the mount where the Lord is seen⁷¹, the place of fragrant incense, the place of pleasing scent. Thus it says: With your pleasing scent I will accept you⁷².

Another interpretation similar to the first midrash: Solomon had a vineyard, this vineyard is Israel. To "Shlomo", the King to whom peace belongs. In Baal-hamon, which is in them, i.e. by the merit of the father of a great multitude⁷³. He had to put guards in the vineyard, to have the nations of the world be the rulers over them. A man would give for its fruit a thousand pieces of silver, this refers to Nebuchadnezzar who brought one thousand righteous ones to his kingdom with the exile of Jehoiakhin, as it is said: A thousand craftsmen and smiths⁷⁴. Because they

⁷⁰ Psalms 88:7

⁷¹ Genesis 22:14

⁷² Ezekiel 20:41, note: b'rei'ah rather than k'rei'ah.

⁷³ cf. Genesis 17:4, referring to Abraham

⁷⁴ II Kings 24:14, a verse where the words heireish and masgeir occur

opened their mouths to speak, all of them were silenced⁷⁵ from hearing their own words, as Job said: *Be silent, I will have my say*⁷⁶. *Masgeir*⁷⁷, because they were closed off, no one opened their mouth again to speak out of their great wisdom, and how many were they? *A thousand*, and they enforced the laws of the Torah in the Babylonian exile, and through them the Torah during the second Temple kept growing until this day. *"My vineyard is before me"*, these are the words of the spirit of holiness with which God tries to redeem Israel and to gather them from the four corners of the world⁷⁸. He says to the nations of the world: *My vineyard is before me*, for even though I have sent them into exile and handed them over into your power I have not given up on them, even if you have dominion over My people, due to a change of the authority of the masters, as it is said: *Masters other than You*⁷⁹, I have never given up on them, nor have I at all passed final judgement as to your authority. Already they are calling Israel a desirable land and a property that was stolen from her. *"I have my vineyard"*,

⁷⁵The root is *het.reish.shin*. the same root as in "smiths"

⁷⁶Job 13:13

⁷⁷the root of both craftsmen and closed is *samekh.gimel.reish*.

⁷⁸literally "land"

⁷⁹Isaiah 26:13

they answer, "You may have the thousand, O Shlomo". All you have to gather is the first one thousand who were exiled to Babylonia, while the remaining⁸⁰ ones are ours. Similarly, as if to say if they are now a thousand times more than them⁸¹. The nations of the world say two hundred [times more]⁸². But Moses, the man of God, said: The Lord your God has multiplied you until today you are as numerous as the stars of the sky⁸³. You who linger in the gardens, this is the Community of Israel. Whether her desire is to be in the gardens which are like law to the nations, worshipping trees and rocks, or to return to the fear of the Lord. Friends, these are the sages, as in tractate Shevuot⁸⁴.

Our rabbis of blessed memory explained You may have the thousand, O Solomon, and the guards of the fruit two hundred as the kingdom which is killing one in five, and not as punishment. Another interpretation of Shlomo had a vineyard, this is Israel, for they were God's vineyard in Baal-hamon, as in: the multitude of festiveness⁸⁵, for the

⁸⁰using the homonym "noterim", with either a tet or a tav

⁸¹those who originally went into exile, Deuteronomy 1:15

⁸²cf. Shir haShirim Rabbah - "We were a thousand, we have become two hundred"

⁸³Deuteronomy 1:10

⁸⁴Shevuot 35b-36a

⁸⁵Psalms 42:5, quoted in Midrash Shir haShirim

Temple was the place for the multitude of Israel. He had to put guards in the vineyard, he gave His people over to kings who would keep them as a person keeps a vineyard. A man would give for its fruit a thousand pieces of silver. This man is Jeroboam the son of Nebat, as in: This Jeroboam was an able man⁸⁶. Would give for its fruit, would bring for his sovereignty a thousand pieces of silver, as if to say ten hundreds, for they are the ten tribes [of Israel], and each tribe is considered to be one hundred because of the one hundred blessings with which our patriarch Jacob was blessed by Isaac in the verse: May God give you⁸⁷, in which there are one hundred letters, excluding cursed be they who curse you. Another thought. This man is Ahijah of Shiloh, a man of God, who brought for Jeroboam's fruit a thousand pieces of silver, ten times one hundred, which is the ten tribes, and so it says: During that time Jeroboam went out from Jerusalem and [the prophet] Ahijah of Shiloh met him on the way. He had put on a new robe. Ahijah of Shiloh took hold of the new robe he was wearing and tore it into twelve pieces. "Take ten pieces", he said to Jeroboam, "For thus said the Lord, the God of Israel: I am about to tear the kingdom out of Solomon's hands, and I will give you ten

⁸⁶I Kings 11:28

⁸⁷Genesis 27:29

tribes."⁸⁸ When he heard Ahijah's prophecy, Solomon sought to put Jeroboam to death. Ahijah promptly fled to King Shishak of Egypt, and he remained in Egypt until Solomon's death. *My vineyard is before Me*, God said to Solomon. "*My vineyard is before Me*, [This is] Israel who is under my⁸⁹ power. Whom do I wish to be king over them? You may have the thousand, O Solomon, the ten tribes, which are ten hundreds, have been yours, O Solomon, son of David. I never took them out of your power during your lifetime⁹⁰, but [only] after you die will I take them from you and give them to Jeroboam. While the two hundred, the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin will be Jeroboam's, since they are the guards of the fruit, they will be in Jerusalem until [the time of] the exile. But after the exile He remembered their sojourn among the nations, since the nations considered transplanting Israel among themselves, taking them out from under the *shekhina's* care. Then God said to them: You who linger in the gardens, the Community of Israel which lingers in the gardens among the nations, friends, the nations of the world which ascribe to Me associates, are listening to Your voice, to which religion do they wish to adhere? And how can I wreak your vengeance upon them? She answers:

⁸⁸I Kings 11:29 ff.

⁸⁹the suffix should be *cs* instead of *3ms*

⁹⁰literally "your days"

*Hurry to the time of redemption and then be like a gazelle,
quick on its feet, or a young hart, and wreak my vengeance!
To the hills of spices, to the hills of Israel, for they are
hills of spices.*

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