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The Song of Songs as Artistic Muse for

Modern Hebrew Poetry and Song

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"כִּצְלוֹ חֲמַדְתִּי וַיִּשְׂבַּחַנִי"

שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים כְּהַשְׂרָאָה לַשִּׁירָה עֲקָרִית חֲדָשָׁה

"I Sat in its Shadow with Great Delight"

The Song of Songs as Artistic Muse

For Modern Hebrew Poetry and Song

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for Rabbinic Ordination

By

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction	page 4
2. Some Literary Features of the Song of Songs	page 9
3. The Use of Song of Songs in Israeli Poetry and Song	page 22
4. Conclusion	page 60
5. Bibliography	page 62

Introduction

One warm summer night, barely a decade after the founding of the State of Israel, my parents took me to an outdoor concert in suburban Chicago. The reason they attended the concert was to hear one of their favorite artists, Theodore Bikel. As it happened, Bikel had invited some young Israeli performers to join him on his tour that summer. The *Oranim Tzabar Troupe* began to play and I was transfixed. Their melodies, earthy rhythms and exotic voices stirred something within me I did not know was there. I knew no Hebrew and had no idea what they were singing about, but it mattered not. When the performance ended, I begged my parents to buy the recording of their music that was offered for sale, and insisted they bring me forward to meet the performers.

That experience set me on a course that changed my life. Somehow this young American Jew felt an organic connection to the language and the culture of Israel. It was almost as if I had an “internal homing device” that once turned-on, led me to a lifelong love-affair. I listened to the record of the *Oranim Tzabar* so often that it became scratched. Soon I could sing every song in its entirety, mimicking the sound of the words, not yet understanding them. As I began to learn Israeli folkdance, I discovered many of these same songs had dances choreographed to them.

My path to uncovering the inspiration behind many of the Hebrew songs and poems I came to know and love went in the reverse. First I came to understand the expressions, ideas and imagery in the poems and songs I learned. Only years later, after

studying the Tanakh in-depth, did I identify the biblical source of many of these expressions and images. I have been struck by how many are inspired by the Song of Songs, as was feminist scholar Athalya Brenner:

"...אל גינת אגוז ירדתי." "I went down to the nut orchard..." (SoS 6:11). "This passage was known to most, not only as a song but also as a dance, an Israeli folk dance—that is, a dance for Saturday night gatherings, for dancing in the street on the Israeli State's Independence Day, for any joyous occasion. So was the case with other SoS passages...I still remember the dance steps, the atmosphere, the accordion playing the music, the worry whether I would be invited to dance by a boy or dare ask a boy to dance with me. The provenance of these dances in the SoS was discovered relatively late. To begin with, they were just 'our' dances, originally Israeli and native."¹

Given the depth of my passion for Israeli poetry and song, it was only natural, that having the opportunity to explore a subject through the writing of a thesis, I would choose to focus on the obvious and the implied associations between that one aspect of modern Israeli culture and the SoS, that has historically been a key cultural referent. The SoS has been an "artistic muse" for generations of Hebrew poets and lyricists. In my rabbinic thesis, I propose to examine more closely the nexus between this enigmatic biblical text and Modern Hebrew poetry and song.

The people of Israel have had a long-standing love affair with the Tanakh. We find multiple expressions of its colorful imagery: in the idioms of the Modern Hebrew

¹ Brenner, Athalya, "My Song of Songs", in The Feminist Companion to the Bible, Brenner and Fontaine, Editors, copyright 2000, Sheffield Academic Press, p.158.

Language, in dance choreography, in literature and in song. This has certainly been the case from the time of the Emancipation in Europe through the first decades of the modern State. Ya'akov Steinberg, a Hebrew poet from the generation of the "Tehiyah", "Revival", of Hebrew literature (the first half of the twentieth century), has described Modern Hebrew literature as, "גלגול בן-גלגולים מן התנ"ך".²

In the introduction to her anthology, "לנצח אנגנך" author Malka Shaked expresses concern that those growing up in modern Israel have become distanced from the intimate connection with the Tanakh so organic to previous generations. Shaked maintains that this distancing will irrevocably change the people's connection to the source of their culture:

"נראה שההתרפקות על התנ"ך...שאפיינה את הספרות העברית החדשה מאז ראשיתה בתקופת ההשכלה, שהתחזקה אצל סופריה ובוניה של תנועת התחייה ושהעמיקה בתקופת ההתיישבות החלוצית בארץ ובערב הקמת המדינה עד שהפכה להתקשרות נפשית אינטימית של חברה שלמה, כבר אינה תופעה מובנת מאליה בחברה הישראלית של תחילת האלף השלישי".³

The above observation would make it unlikely to encounter multiple references to the SoS in the poetry and song lyrics of the last few generations. However, while we need to be aware of the impact of cultural change to which Shaked makes reference, we need not necessarily view this change as a distancing from our roots. We have come to understand that each generation will leave its own unique imprint upon Jewish culture

² Shaked, Malka, Lanetzach Anagnech, vol. 2, copyright 2005, Yediot Acharonot, p. 17.

³ Ibid., p. 17.

for the generations that follow. What I believe differs today from earlier poetic expression, is that the influence of the Tanakh upon poets and lyricists has been internalized, and may be less recognizable if we seek it by means of previous manifestations.

The process is akin to the way in which individuals learn language. If a person learns a foreign language as an adult, he or she will seek to accommodate it in a more structured, formal manner; learning constructs, patterns and vocabulary. This learning is a conscious process. By contrast the process by which a baby learns to speak is a much more intuitive and organic one. Language is being absorbed without our even realizing it. An individual may achieve remarkable language fluency and facility without ever having tried to do so. This, I believe, is the process that has been at work with younger generations of Hebrew poets and lyricists. I suggest that a close examination of some of their work will reveal that almost without being aware, these authors have internalized the influence of growing up in a cultural milieu where the Tanakh has been such a strong presence, thus proving the exact opposite of Shaked's statement. Over the generations since the founding of the State, the SoS has enjoyed a favored place in the corpus of poetry and song. This reality poses the question: what characteristics does this book of the Tanakh possess that can account for its unique popularity among Israeli authors and artists?

For this work, I have selected poems and song lyrics that represent a broad cross-section of poets and lyricists from the time of the establishment of the State through the present. I will examine how subject matter, language, style and characters from the SoS

are reflected in these poems and song lyrics; and, in turn, how these modern literary expressions may also inform the Biblical texts that have been their inspiration.

Some Literary Features of the Song of Songs

Genre

One would suppose that the literary classification of the Song of Songs would be easier to pinpoint than its historical setting or authorship. If, however, we examine the history of the Song's interpretation we discover that it has been variously interpreted as,

1. An allegory of love between God and the people of Israel, (or between Christ and the church, in Christian theology).
2. A drama, with two main characters, Solomon and the Shulamite, or three main characters, Solomon and two lovers.
3. A liturgy whose source was an ancient fertility cult.
4. A cycle of wedding songs that bear resemblance to Syrian marriage songs.
5. A structurally unified love poem.
6. A collection or anthology of love poems.⁴

Pope⁵ and Falk survey the extant scholarship on the first four of these interpretations, ruling them out as plausible. An allegory implies narrative structure that would have to be artificially imposed upon the text. As a drama, the Song would have to have a plot and a unified portrayal of characters. Falk points out that the views of the text as liturgy from an ancient fertility cult, and as a cycle of wedding songs, come from theories by nineteenth and twentieth century scholars, based upon elaborate postulations about its usage. She goes on to point out, however, that the main objection to the first four interpretations is,

⁴ Falk, Marcia, *Love Lyrics from the Bible: A Translation and Literary Study of The Song of Songs*, The Almond Press, Sheffield, 1982, pp.62,63.

⁵ Pope, Marvin H., *Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible, Doubleday & Company, New York, 1977, pp.34-37.

“...their imposition of fixed personae and either plot or contextual unity on a text which seems instead to present a variety of voices speaking in a range of settings and in no particular sequence.”⁶

So, what, indeed is the genre of the Song of Songs? Alter, Fox, Exum, Falk and Ariel and Chana Bloch, among others, conclude that the Song is most naturally lyrical love poetry, whether as a single, unified composition, or as a series of connected, shorter poems. As such, it is both unique in the Bible, and yet, shares in common certain characteristics with other Biblical poetry.

Alter emphasizes poetic parallelism as a strong feature common to poetry of the Bible. This parallelism serves the purpose of enhancing the feelings, images or actions being expressed, by means of a re-statement of a phrase employing synonyms:

(6:1) "אנה הלך דודך היפה בנשים \ אנה פנה דודך ונבקשנו עמך" (6:1). *"Where has your beloved gone, o fairest among women? Which way did your beloved turn, that we may help you seek him?"*

Verses 10-13 of chapter two of the Song, preserve the form of parallelism, and are also a beautiful example of a chiastic dialogue. Opening and closing with a call to his beloved to come out and join him within the lushness of the fresh spring landscape, the male lover calls, "קומי לך רעיתי יפתי ולכי-לך:", *"Arise my companion, my beautiful one, and come away."* In between is a lush, multi-sensory description of the landscape, which contains within it an implicit metaphorical understanding of the description as

⁶ Falk, Marcia, *Ibid.* p.64.

applicable to the lovers and their ripeness for love, as well. The text operates on both levels.

The above comparison illustrates how the Song can be clearly identified as within the genre of Biblical poetry. Simultaneously, it illustrates for us the uniqueness of the poetry of Song of Songs and its many characteristics that are not shared by any other book in the Canon.

Imagery

The SoS employs rich imagery to bring the lovers' experience to life for the reader. According to Ariel and Chana Bloch,

“Similes and metaphors from nature alternate with images from art and architecture ⁷...The poet's metaphors keep shifting between the actual landscape, infused with erotic associations, and the landscape of the body...The use of metaphor that both reveals and conceals has the effect of enhancing the Song's eroticism, while the suggestive play of double entendre suffuses the whole landscape with Eros...How can a poem so voluptuous be so full of innocent delight? For one thing, since it relies on metaphor rather than explicit statement, the language of the Song is restrained and delicate even where it is most sensuous.”⁸

Images from nature figure prominently in the SoS, as do animals and stately trees from the physical landscape and the landscape of the imagination. Lush gardens,

⁷ Bloch, Ariel and Chana , *ibid.*, p15.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 9, 14,4.

growing and ripening plants and fruits are used very effectively to heighten the reader's identification with the lovers. Carey Ellen Walsh describes this use of imagery,

"One point that still needs to be made is that when the language of aesthetic appreciation of the beloved gives way to the lover's own expressed want in the Song, the primary metaphors change. They had been zoological, agricultural and architectural, but now shift primarily to horticulture, that is, the cultivation of fruit...the descriptions of felt want and of physical enjoyment entail movement—burgeoning, reaching, aching, leaning, ripening—and so require lively metaphors to match. In this respect fruit cultivation is a particularly astute metaphoric field for depicting the slow movement and swelling of desire."⁹

Water and moisture are also key to understanding the imagery of growth and ripening. Walsh points out that in the land of Israel there is no natural surplus of water. Whatever exists is the result of human efforts on the land. She says,

"And this is the case here with the description of the woman as a lush garden, *"מעין גנים באר מיים חיים נוזלים מן-לבנון"* *'You are a fountain in a garden, a well of living waters streaming down from Lebanon'* (4:15). The multi-faceted irrigation has been generated by human means, namely a male lover who has elicited considerable female arousal. For this woman is sexually excited to the point that she unleashes 'waters of life' in her arousal, and, in the process betters her garden—herself—with these waters."¹⁰

⁹ Walsh, Carey Ellen, *Exquisite Desire*, copyright 2000, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN, pp. 81-82.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.108.

The word דוּדִי is used in the SoS twenty-seven times to refer to the male lover, and variations of the word דוּדִים are used multiple times to refer specifically to sexual love. Here, in the Song, we see the most frequent use of this term in the entirety of the Hebrew Bible.¹¹ In addition, the use of the word דוּדִיָּא (mandrake) in 7:14 is an obvious play on the word דוּדִים. The female lover also refers to her beloved as אֶת שֶׁאֶהְבֶּה נַפְשִׁי “*the one whom my soul loves.*”

It is interesting that in 2:8-14, while there is only one term by which the woman calls her male lover—דוּדִי-- he uses three different terms when calling to her. Two of the three, יִפְתִּי, רַעִיְתִי appear together twice (2:10, 2:13b). These are rendered in the BDB, as “my companion, or friend; and my beautiful one, or fair one.”¹² These two terms used together, connote the same intimacy of relationship expressed through the use of the term דוּדִי. The third term used by the male lover appears in 2:14. When he calls her to come out of the “hidden places”, the male lover refers to his beloved as יוֹנָתִי my dove. Exum says that the imagery of this term calls upon “the dove’s reputation as gentle and affectionate...and perhaps, shy and hesitant...reticent to venture forth from its secure, secluded nest.”¹³ The use of יוֹנָתִי by the male lover to call to his beloved underscores the erotic tension between them. At times in the Song, she is overwhelmed by desire for him; at times she is reticent. At times he comes to call her out to him; at times she goes searching for him.

¹¹ BDB, *Ibid.*, p.187.

¹² BDB, *Ibid.*, pp. 946, 421.

¹³ Exum, J.Cheryl, Song of Songs: a Commentary, copyright 2005 Westminster John Knox Press, pp.127,128.

Another term by which the male lover refers to his beloved is אחותי כלה “my sister, my bride”. This term also carries with it a sense of deep intimacy.

Adjectival and verbal forms of the root ד, מ, ה (דמית, דמית) *to be like, to be compared to*--appear five times in the Song (1:9, 2:9, 2:17, 7:8 and 8:14). In three of the five times, the woman compares her male lover to a gazelle or a wild stag, who possesses much strength and agility. The fourth time she compares him to a mare in Pharaoh's chariots. The fifth reference is employed by the male to compare the stateliness of his beloved to a date palm. Ariel and Chana Bloch make the point that these comparisons are not to be taken literally,

“In celebrating love and lovers the Song proclaims the power of the imagination. The verb דמה (to be like) occurs with particular frequency; in one of its conjugations דמה it means ‘to liken, to compare’ but also ‘to conjure up a mental image, to imagine to fantasize.’ ...We have already noticed the role of fantasy in the Song. It is often hard to tell what is real and what is imagined; for that reason many readers have found the poem to be dreamlike, with a freedom of movement, a dizzying fluidity that conveys the intoxication of the senses.”¹⁴

Carey Ellen Walsh further elaborates on this point when she suggests that scholars may search for clarity, “...when the heated murkiness of desire may just be the point...In a song about desire, then, the emotion quite rightly hijacks sequence and literary plausibility.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Bloch, Ariel and Chana, *Ibid.*, pp.14, 15.

¹⁵ Walsh, Carey Ellen, *Ibid.*, p.28

Literary Devices

Liminality is an ever-present sub-text in the entirety of the Song. Thresholds abound between realms—between the private and the public, between the security and predictability of the home and the potentially exhilarating but dangerous outside world. They exist between the changing of times and seasons. They exist between the erotically-charged tension of the two lovers imagining what could be, and the consummation of their mutual desire. It seems as though the text spends a majority of its time deliciously dancing upon that threshold—that boundary between what “almost is” and what it becomes; between expressed desire and frustrated expectation. The lovers, too, balance upon this boundary—constantly testing its limits one-way or the other. Illustrations exist throughout the entire text of the Song. Here is a representative sampling :

”יונתי בחגוי הסלע, בסתר המדרגה, הראיני את-מראיך, השמיעני את-קולך :“

“My dove in the clefts of the rock...show me your views, let me hear your voice.”
(2:14)

”אקומה נא ואסובבה בעיר, בשוקים וברחובות--אבקשה, את שאהבה נפשי ;“

“I will rise and go about the city, the squares and the streets; until I find he who my soul loves.”(3:2)

”השבעתי אתכם בנות ירושלים, בצבאות, או, באילות השדה : אם-תעירו

ואם-תעוררו את-האהבה, עד שתחפץ.”

“Daughters of Jerusalem swear to me that you will never awaken love...until it is ripe.”(2:7, 3:5, 8:4)

"עורי צפון ובואי תימן, הפיחי גני יזלו בשמיו ; יבוא דודי לגנו, ויאכל פרי
מגדיו."

*"Awake north wind, o south wind come! Breathe upon my garden, let its spices
stream out. Let my lover come into his garden and taste its delicious fruit."
(4:16)*

"דודי, שלח ידו מן-החור... קמתי אני, לפתוח לדודי ; וידי נטפו-מור,
ואצבעותי מור עובר, על, כפות המנעול."

*"My love passed his hand through the opening...I rose to open for my love, my
fingers wet with sweet-flowing myrrh on the door bolt."(5:4-5)*

"אל-גנת אגוז ירדתי, לראות באפי הנחל ; לראות הפרחה הגפן, הנצו
חרמונים."

*"I went down to the walnut garden...to see if the vines have budded, the
pomegranates have blossomed." (6:11)*

"לכה דודי נצא השדה, נלינה בפפרים. נשכימה, לפרמים... שם אתן את-דודי,
לך."

*"Come my beloved—let us go out to the field. We will lie all night among the
flowering henna...There I will give you my love." (7:12-14)*

A device related to liminality but not identical to it, is the author's use of
boundaries as demarcation. Boundaries define the lovers' space--together and as
individuals. There is the boundary between the seasons (winter and spring);

and the boundary between the countryside and the village; the boundary between private and public venues, with their societal dictates for behavior; there is the gated and locked home where the female lover resides that can be both a barrier to her lover and can provide a protective enclosure for them both when they come together.

"הביאני אל-בית היין, ודגלו עלי אהבה"

"He brought me to the house of wine and his flag over me is love." (2:4)

"אחזתינו, ולא ארפנו--עד-שהביאתיו אל-בית אמי..."

"I held him I would not let him go until I brought him to my mother's house. (3:4b)

"...קול דודי דופק, פתחי-לי אחותי..."

"Listen, my lover is knocking. 'Open up, my sister, my bride'." (5:2)

Another device employed by the author of the SoS is the use of what is called a *wasf*. Marcia Falk describes it as follows,

*"Wasf, an Arabic word meaning 'description,' has come to refer to a kind of poem or poetic fragment that describes through a series of images parts of the male and female body. While wasfs are not uncommon in Arabic poetry, in ancient Hebrew literature they appear only in the Song of Songs...it is formally stricter and more predictable than any other material in the collection."*¹⁶

Robert Alter offers a similar view,

¹⁶ Falk, Marcia, *Ibid.*, pp.67,68.

"The Song of Songs is the great love poem of commingling—of different realms, different senses, and of the male and female bodies...In all these ways, the figurative language of the Song creates an intricate root system that firmly anchors love in the experience of the body...In more explicit erotic literature, the body in the act of love often seems to displace the rest of the world. In the Song, by contrast, the world is constantly embraced in the very process of imagining the body."¹⁷

An example of a *wasf* in the Song can be seen in 4:1-5,

"הנך יפה רעיתי, הנך יפה--עיניך יונים,
מבעד לצמתך ; שערך כעדר העזים,
שגלשו מהר גלעד.
שניך כעדר הקצובות, שעלו מן-הרחצה :
שכולם, מתאימות, ושכולה, אין בהם.
כחוט השני שפתותיך, ומדברך נאווה ;
כפלח הרמון רקתך, מבעד לצמתך.
כמגדל דויד צוארך, בנוי ;
אלף המגן תלוי עליו, כל שלטי הגבורים.
שני שדיך כשני עפרים, תאומי צביה, הרועים, בשושנים."

"Behold you are fair, my love,

Behold, you are fair with your eyes as doves

Behind your veil.

¹⁷ Alter, Robert, in Bloch, Ariel, Bloch, Chana, The Song of Songs: a New Translation, copyright 1995, Random House Publishers., pp.122, 130.

Your hair is like a flock of goats,
 Trailing down Mount Gilead.
 Your teeth are like a flock of ewes just shorn
 Come up from the washing,
 All paired alike,
 None missing among them.
 Your lips are like a thread of scarlet,
 And your mouth is lovely.
 Your temples behind your veil
 Are like a pomegranate split open.
 Your neck is like the tower of David,
 Turreted as a fortress,
 A thousand shields hanging upon it,
 All the armor of mighty men.
 Your breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle,
 Which feed among the lilies.”

Soulen offers a particularly apt description of the goal of a *wasf*, in Athalya Brenner’s

A Feminist Companion to the Song of Songs.

“...the imagery of the *wasf* [is] a means of arousing emotions consonant with those experienced by the suitor as he beholds the fullness of his beloved's attributes.”¹⁸

The descriptions of physical attributes found in the above *wasf* are not meant for literal visualization. Rather, they draw upon the emotions of the reader, and in so doing bring a sense of the text and its characters' experiences to life.

Finally, we must point out the lovers' use of all five senses in their experience of one another and their surroundings. Alter describes it this way,

“The primary sense for the experience of physical love is, of course, touch, but in keeping with the delicacy of expression of the Song, touch is never mentioned directly...never made the explicit object of figurative elaboration. It is, however, constantly and powerfully implied...The other four senses are characteristically grouped in two pairs in the poem: sight and sound, taste and smell, although sight also appears by itself. Sight and sound have their place, but it is definitely a secondary place, because they are the senses experienced at a distance, and this is a poem of physical closeness that repeatedly creates an illusion of immediacy of sensory experience...Again and again, however, it is taste and smell that predominate.”¹⁹

The use of these literary devices is what makes the message of the Song timeless, and is a key to its greatness as a work of Biblical literature. I believe that it is these features of the Song, more than any others, which have allowed it to remain so fresh and alive over the years. This is also what has contributed to making the SoS such a rich

¹⁸ Soulen, in Brenner, Athalya, *A Feminist Companion to the Song of Songs*, copyright 1993, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, England.

¹⁹ Alter, Robert, afterword, in Bloch *Song of Songs: a New Translation*, pp.122,123.

source of inspiration for poets and lyricists to this day.

The Use of Song of Songs in Israeli Poetry and Song

Scholars of Hebrew poetry count at least three generations of poets since the founding of the state. The nature and form of Hebrew poetry has changed alongside the generations. Hillel Barzel describes the nature of this shift:

"העיון בשירה העברית הנכתבת לאחר שלונסקי ואלתרמן, מעמיד אותנו מיד על תמורות מופלגות באמצעים הפרוסודיים, שבהם משתמש המשורר: שינוי באוצר המלים, הזדקקות מסוג חדש לחמרי רקע מן התנ"ך וממקורות אחרים. שינויים בולטים מתגלים לנגד עיניו של הקורא, כבר בהופעתו החיצונית של השיר. אמצעי החתימה המקובלים: סימני הפיסוק, חרוז, משקל, מחזוריות, סימטריה, גלוייה ונמדדת, כאילו נעלמים ואינם. הסתכלות קרובה יותר מגלה כי השיר החדש אינו מוותר על מחזוריות וסימטריה, אלא משנה את צביון.²⁰

Despite the external changes referred to by Barzel, the impact of the canonical literature of the Bible upon modern-day poetry is still felt. While Malka Shaked voices her concern about the dwindling intimacy of the Israeli population at-large with the Tanakh, her concern does not extend to the relationship poets and songwriters have with it:

"...כלומר, שהשירה בעצם לשונה משמרת יותר מכל מבע ספרותי ואמנותי אחר את הרוח הלאומית המסוימת...בהמשך לרעיון זה אפשר לטעון, כי הקשר עם העבר, שהוא הבסיס לכל תרבות ולכל התפתחות של תרבות, שנעשה במיטבו באמצעות הקשר של השירה עם ספרות-העבר, מקבל משנה תוקף ככל שספרות-העבר כשלעצמה היא יצירה פיוטית שמיטיבה לשמר את הרוח הלאומית, שעל-כן גם הפכה

²⁰ Barzel, Hillel, *Ha-Shir He-Chadash*, copyright 1976, Aked Press, Tel Aviv, p. 132.

ליצירה קאנונית. ואכן, כזה הוא המקרה באותה שירה עברית מאוחרת המתקשרת
עם ספרות-העבר העברית הקאנונית המקראית.²¹

When exploring the nexus between the SoS and a selection of Hebrew poetry and song lyrics written since 1948, one can find a rich corpus of material available to draw upon. One characteristic aspect of Israeli society is the intimate connection of the people to its music and songs. Many poems have had one or more musical settings created to showcase them; others have been written as song lyrics. Whatever their source, these songs are “fresh” in the minds and hearts of the people, as they are sung frequently at musical gatherings and heard repeatedly on the radio.

The poetic voices presented below for analysis represent a broad spectrum of poets and lyricists. The pieces were written over several decades, beginning with the 1950's. Some are poems that were written as poetry, and are remembered as such; some of these were later set to music--often as much as twenty or thirty years after being written. Some are poems that were written specifically as popular song lyrics. Each author of these poems reflects a connection with the Song of Songs in his/her own unique manner. Some are light-hearted aiming to amuse; some are profound expressions of love or desire; and some use the Song as a foil against which to create an altogether different impression. Some quote from the SoS directly, others capture its stylized language; still others allude to it in a more subtle fashion. What is true of all of them is that it is easy to recognize their artistic “muse”.

²¹ Shaked, Malka, Lanetzach Anagnech, vol. 1, copyright 2005, Yediot Acharonot, p. 10.

The song "ערב של שושנים" was popularized in the 1960's as an entry in the Israel Song Festival. Written by Moshe Dor (b.1932) the lyrics, while not taken directly from the SoS, are entirely evocative of it:

ערב של שושנים

מלים : משה דור
לחן : יוסף הדר

ערב של שושנים
נצא נא אל הבוסתן
מור בשמים ולבונה
לרגלך מפתן.

לילה יורד לאט
ורוח שושן נושבה
הבה אלחש לך שיר בלאט
זמר של אהבה.

שחר הומה יונה
ראשך מלא טללים
פיך אל הבוקר, שושנה.
אקטפנו לי...

An earnest expression of affection, the poem describes an imagined or real invitation of a male lover to his beloved to join him for a night of romance. The writing style is deliberately archaic, and this fact coupled with imprecise rhyming, create a sense of nostalgia in the reader, and an immediate association with the imagery of the SoS. The use of verb forms such as, "נצאנה", "אקטפנו" and "הבה" are examples of archaic styling. The imagery of the garden, the fragrance of flowers wafting in the air; the

settings of evening ערב, then night לילה, and then dawn שחר, so prevalent in the SoS can be seen here as well. As in the Song, the lover invites his beloved to go out to the garden fragrant with lilies,

"נצאנה אל הבוסתן מור בשמים ולבונה לרגלך מפתן"
 "לילה יורד לאט ורוח שושן נושבה".

The use of the term "threshold , "מפתן" is evocative of the liminal boundary so often referenced in the Song. Once the lovers cross this threshold, they will be in their own private garden.

Compare the following lines from ערב של שושנים to those they resemble in SoS:

"נצאנה אל הבוסתן" : "נצא השדה" (7: 12), "אל- גינת אגוז ירדתי..."
 (6: 11)²²

"Let us go forth into the field." "I went down into the nut garden..."

"מור בשמים ולבונה לרגלך מפתן" : מקושרת מור ולבונה... (3: 6)
 "...like pillars of smoke) from burning myrrh and frankincense..."

"שחר הומה יונה..." : "יונתי בחגוי הסלע..." (2: 14)
 "My dove, hiding in the clefts of the rock..."

"ראשך מלא טללים" : "שראשי נמלא-טל" (5: 2)
 "For my head is drenched with dew."

"פיך אל הבוקר שושנה..." : "שפתותיו שושנים" (5: 13)
 "His lips are as lilies."

²² Hebrew lyrics in italics are quotes from the SoS; those in plain font are from the selected poems and song lyrics.

Additionally, the song plays with the boundary between daydream and reality that we observe in the SoS as well. We do not really know whether the male lover speaks directly to his beloved, or is imagining this scenario in his head. It does not matter which is the case; for the lyrics effectively communicate the poet's intent—which is to call to mind an immediate connection with SoS—for the reader.

"חפציבה" was written by poet and lyricist Ya'akov Orland (1914-2002), who has contributed a great many lyrics to songs that have enjoyed ongoing popularity in Israel. This one is no exception. Even before reading the poem we are clued-in to its tenor from the title, "חפציבה" (my desire is with her):

חפציבה

מלים: יעקב אורלנד
לחן: מרדכי אולרי נוזיק

מי זאת עולה
וצעיף אהבים רעולה
מור מעוטרת, בדרכים?
מי זאת, מי זאת,
שעיניה בוהות וחוזות,
שמעוטרת בפרחים?
- הד הד קרוע,
הד קולה קורא ברוח.

אני חפציבה, חפציבה בת תימן
אני לא משי, לא שני, לא ארגמן
אני איילת בר, אני הרוח במידבר
באר זכה אני - שתה, חתני!
אייה, אייך דוד? אייה הרחקת לנדוד?
בוא, חפציבה לך שוקקה;
כוכב דולק בליל, ותן בוואדי מילל -

בוא, חפציבה לך מחכה.

מי זאת יורדה
מיתרפקת על דודה
תחת התומר שבגיא?
מי זאת, מי זאת
שפניה חלום אחוזות
עד בלי אומר, עד בלי די?
- הד, הד קרוע,
הד קולה קורא ברוח.

אני חפציבה...

The poem's title conveys a double entendre and more. חפציבה (Cheftzi-bah bat Teiman--daughter of Yemen) is the name of the speaker, and is descriptive of what one who beholds her desires. Moreover, it is the name of a character in the book of II Kings²³.

The lyrics of "חפציבה" resemble those of "ערב של שושנים" in that Orland invokes imagery and occasional phrases from the SoS to create a particular atmosphere for the reader. This imagery also works to seamlessly meld the poem's current setting (circa 1960s) with the setting of the SoS. What sets it apart from "ערב של שושנים" is its decidedly light-hearted tenor. חפציבה, the main character and speaker in the poem, comes across to the reader as very self-assured. In her self-assurance, she resembles the female lover of the SoS,

"אני חפציבה, חפציבה בת תימן

²³ II Kings 21:1-15. חפציבה was the name of the mother of King Manasseh of Judah. During his reign, the King was responsible for re-embracing the idolatry that was decried so strongly by his predecessors. Because the scope of this work deals with the SoS only, the possible association between this Biblical character and the song's heroine will have to be dealt with elsewhere.

אני לא משי, לא שני, לא ארגמן
 אני איילת בר, אני הרוח במדבר
 באר זכה אני—שתה חתני!"

The following are illustrations of direct quotes and allusions from the SoS that appear in the lyrics of this song:

"מי זאת עולה...מי זאת, מי זאת...אני הרוח במדבר \ 'מי זאת עולה מן-

המדבר" (3: 6)

"Who is this, coming up from the desert?"

"מור מעוטרת...שמעוטרת בפרחים" \ 'מקוטרת מור ולבונה מכל אבקת

רוכל": (3: 6)

"Like pillars of smoke from burning myrrh and frankincense, with all the powders of the merchant?"

"באר זכה אני—שתה חתני!" \ "באר מיים חיים ונוזלים מלבנון" (4: 15) "שתו

ושכרו דודים" (5: 1)

"A well of living waters, streaming from Lebanon." "Drink, drink deep, lovers."

"אייה, אייך דוד? אייה הרחקת לנדוד?" \ "אנה הלך דודך, היפה בנשים, אנה

פנה דודך ונבקשנו עמך": (6: 1)

"Where has your beloved gone, o fairest among the women? Which way did your beloved turn, that we may help you seek him?"

"מי זאת יורדה מתרפקת על דודה..." \ "מי זאת עולה מן המדבר מתרפקת על

דודה..." (8: 5)

"Who is that, coming up from the wilderness, leaning upon her lover?"

The allusions to a dreamlike fantasy so well-expressed in the SoS are echoed here as well,

"מי זאת מי זאת, שענייה בזהות וחוזות... מי זאת מי זאת, שפניה חלום אחוזות..."

"Who is that, who is that, whose eyes gaze, daydreaming? Who is that, who is that, whose face is lost in a dream?"

A second poem by Ya'akov Orland is entitled "עץ הרימון" "The Pomegranate Tree." The pomegranate is native to the Middle East. Full of dark-red luscious seeds, the fruit when ripe is an apt metaphor for the ripening love between the lovers in the SoS.

עץ הרימון

מלים : יעקב אורלנד
לחן : ידידיה אדמון

עץ הרימון נתן ריחו
בין ים המלח ליריחו,
שב, חומתי, גדודך מנדוד,
שב, תמתי, דודך מדוד.

אוצרות אופיר וצרי גלעד,
רכב מצריים שללתי לך, בת.
אלף הזמר אתלה לך מגן
מן היאור עד הירדן.

את כלולה מכל כלות,
את דגולה כנדגלות.

שתיים עינייך כשתיים יונים
וקול קולך פעמונים.

לך התרועות, לך הזרים,
לך כל שלטי הגיבורים,
מה לי חיל אלף ומה רבבה?
לבבי מת מאהבה.

שב אל הקשת, שב החץ,
שב הרימון אל ראש העץ,
לך ואלייך החיל יוחל,
בואי כלה, כי רד הליל.

This poem set to a rhythmic melody by Yedidyah Admon, has enjoyed great popularity over many years. It belongs to that body of song that I term nostalgia—which, by invoking imagery from the SoS, creates a timelessness, weaving the present reality neatly into the past. The result is an elevation of the song from the mundane to something with an epic-like sensibility.

Here, Orland calls upon a secondary theme in the SoS—that of military might. It is used in the SoS to convey an image of strength possessed by the male lover, and the stateliness of his beloved. Solomon's armies are referenced, as are the chariots of Pharaoh.

The speaker in the poem is undoubtedly a soldier, and appears to be a member of an army engaged in battle, for which the female character provides inspiration, and gives the soldiers a reason to fight. Their affection for her carries them through difficult times. They return home, at least for the time being, and praise her with superlatives:

”את כלולה מכל כלות, את דגולה כנדגלות,

שתיים עינייך כשתיים יונים, וקול קולך פעמונים.
 לך התרועות, לך הזרים, לך כל שלטי הגבורים,
 מה-לי חיל-אלף ומה רבבה, לבבי מת מאהבה."

As in the previous two poems, "עץ הרימון" is full of direct quotes and references from the SoS:

"עץ הרימון נתן ריחור" \ "הנצו הרימונים" (6: 11)

"...whether the pomegranates are in bloom..."

This next example patterns itself after phrasing from the SoS, and then ends with a direct quote:

"שב, חומתי, גדודך מנדוד, שב, תמתי, דודך מדוד" \ "מה דודך מדוד, היפה
 בנשים..." (5: 9)

"What is your beloved, more than any other, o fairest among women?"

"אלף הזמר אתלה לך מגן" \ "כמגדל דוד צוארך, אלף המגן תלוי
 עליו..." (4: 4)

"Your neck is like the tower of David, turreted as a fortress, a thousand shields hanging upon it..."

"את דגולה כנדגלות,..." \ "דגול מרבבה" (5: 10); מי זאת הנשקפה כמו
 שחר...איומה כנדגלות" (6: 10)

"...a paragon among ten thousand." "Who is she, gazing forth like the dawn...awe-inspiring as bannered armies?"

"שתיים עינייך כשתיים יונים..." \ "הנך יפה עינייך יונים" (1: 15)

"Behold you are fair with your eyes like doves."

"לך כל שלטי הגבורים,..." \ "אלף המגן תלוי עליו, כל שלטי הגבורים" (4: 4)

"A thousand shields hanging upon it; all the armor of the mighty men."

"מה לי חיל-אלף ומה רבה...\" \ "דודי צח ואדום, דגול מרבבה: (5: 10)"

"My beloved is fair and ruddy; a paragon among ten thousand."

"לבבי מת מאהבה" \ "כי עזה כמוות אהבה" (8: 6); "רפדוני בתפוחים כי

חולת אהבה אני: (2: 5)"

"...for love is strong as death." "Comfort me with apples, for I am faint with love."

The following two poems are by Leah Goldberg (1911-1970). A prolific author, poet and literary critic, Goldberg considered herself a part of the circle of "modernist" authors whose literary inspiration was Avraham Shlonsky (1900-1973), himself a "rebel" against the generation of Hebrew poets best represented by Hayim Nachman Bialik.

Dr. Ezra Spicehandler says about Goldberg's poetry,

"...she used traditional verse forms, expressing her modernism through a conversational style which eschewed the ornate rhetoric of many of her predecessors and the bombastic expressionism of her contemporaries. Her language, though symbolic is simple and familiar, in which ordinary words, images, rhythms, and rhymes have an astonishing freshness."²⁴

The poem entitled *"שלושה ימים"* takes the reader on a "journey" through the intense feelings and emotions of a woman who struggles to come to terms with a lover that is lost to her. In the course of the poem, she goes through despair, mourning and

²⁴ Spicehandler, Ezra, in *Encyclopedia Judaica*. Vol. 7 2nd edition, copyright 2007 McMillan Reference, p.693.

the beginning of healing. Goldberg leaves the reader to guess as to the specific circumstances of why the relationship does not come to fruition (death? separation? a lack of reciprocal feelings?). The lack of detail frees up the reader to relate to the affect of the emotions experienced by the speaker more directly.

שלושה ימים

מלים : לאה גולדברג
לחן : אחינעם ניני וגיל דור

אני עומדת בלב המדבר
אין לי אפילו כוכב אחד
והרוח אינו מדבר אלי
והחול לא ישמור את עקבות צעדי.

קראתי : ענני - לא ענני.
דפקתי : פתח לי - לא פתח
בחוץ היה ערב לוחט וחיוור
הלכתי לדפוק על שער אחר.

קראתי : ענני - לא ענני
דפקתי : פתח לי - לא פתח
בחוץ היה ערב לוחט ועיוור
הלכתי לדפוק על שער אחר.

לחשתי : ענני - לא ענני
ביקשתי : פתח לי - לא פתח
בבוקר אין טל, עלתה החמה
וכך מצאוני שומרי החומה.

שלושה ימים לא מש זכרו ממני
וברביעי פרסתי את הלחם
וברביעי פתחתי את הצוהר

וברביעי ראיתי את הים.

וברביעי ידעתי שהים יפה מאוד
ומרחבו כחול
ובמשב הרוח המלוח
ריח הים לא טנם דמעותיי.

The experience of the speaker in the poem is uniquely hers, yet unmistakable references to the SoS permeate its entirety. The use of themes and imagery from the SoS serves to heighten the emotional impact of the narrative upon the reader. Without realizing it we associate the thoughts and feelings of the female lover from the SoS with the experience of the woman in Goldberg's poem. As a result, the reader finds his/her own adrenaline rising in identification with the woman!

The woman describes her feelings over a four-day period. The first three days are as one, and she is utterly alone in the intensity of her experience,

"אני עומדת בלב המדבר \ אין לי אפילו כוכב אחד

והרוח אינו מדבר אלי \ והחול לא ישמור את עקבות צעדי."

The landscape is a hot, dry desert that does not even record her presence. She is in the middle (בלב) of this desert with its radiant heat and absence of color,

"בחוץ היה ערב לוהט וחיוור \ לוהט ועיוור..."

"בבוקר אין טל עלתה החמה..."

The setting of desert, dry wind, radiant heat and pale sands stands in stark contrast to the moisture-rich colorful landscape described by the lovers in the SoS as the backdrop to their relationship. As mentioned above, the lovers in the SoS embrace their natural

landscape.²⁵ For the woman in Goldberg's poem, the landscape is neither natural nor hers. Even the wind, which the female lover in the SoS calls upon to cause the "spices of her garden to flow" (4:16), does not speak to her, "והרוח אינו מדבר אלי..." .

I would posit that the use of the terms, "לב" "heart", or in this case "the middle of" or "the heart of", and "מדבר" , "to speak to", which is spelled the same way as the word for "desert", is not coincidental, but a deliberate choice by the poet.

The literary device of "boundaries" that is employed in the SoS, alluded to earlier, is also reflected in "שלושה ימים". First there is the physical barrier of gates and doors keeping the woman out of where she thinks she might find her lover,

" דפקתי : פתח לי- לא פתח...בחוץ היה ערב לוהט ועיוור, והלכתי לדפוק על שער אחר".

There is also a clear boundary in the experience of the woman between the first three days and the fourth. In the first three days, she longs for her lover; thoughts of him never leave her, and during this time she is alone in a hot, dry, colorless desert.

On the fourth day, the woman begins her journey toward healing. It is reflected in her actions and in the landscape. The landscape is moist and full of life-sustaining water. On the fourth day she eats, "פרסתי את הלחם", she opens the window, "פתחתי את הצוהר" and she takes note of her new landscape—the sea, "ראיתי את הים". On day four she interacts with her environment, which is much more life-sustaining and colorful. She takes in the intense, beautiful blue of the sea and the

²⁵ Alter, Robert, in Bloch, Ariel, Bloch, Chana, The Song of Songs: a New Translation, copyright 1995, Random House Publishers., pp.122, 130.

salty smell of the sea-breeze. The boundary between the two realms is upheld in the closing line of the poem, "ריח הים לא טעם דמעותי".

As in the previous poems, here, too, there are direct references to phrases in the SoS:

"קראתי : ענני- לא ענני. דפקתי : פתח לי- לא פתח \ "קול דודי דופק פתחי-לי אחותי"

(5: 2). "בקשתיהו ולא מצאתיהו, קראתיו ולא ענני" (5: 6).

"Hark, my beloved knocks: 'Open to me my sister'". "I sought him but I found him not; I called him but he answered me not."

"וכך מצאוני שומרי החומה" \ "מצאוני השומרים הסובבים בעיר...שומרי

החומות. (5: 7)

"The watchmen that went about the city found me,...the keepers of the walls."

The second poem by Leah Goldberg is entitled simply "היא", "She" or "Her". It is one of a pair poems; the other entitled, "הוא", "Him". As the titles imply, the poems are narrated in first person, "הוא", by a man in relation to his lover, and "היא", by a woman.

היא

מלים : לאה גולדברג

לחן : גיל דור

שלחת אלי את האוח

להעירני משינה.

לימדת אותנו לצווח

מילות אהבה ותחינה

אבל אני לא אבוא,
לא אבוא, לא אבוא!

שילחת בי את ריח
האצות ואת הלבנה,
ציות על היס להיאנח
בקול אהבה ותחינה
אבל אני לא אבוא,
לא אבוא, לא אבוא!

נשקו הגלים את רגלי,
את שולי שמלתי הלבנה.
בקולך אמרו לי "בואי אלי"
בקול אהבה ותחינה.
ואני חזרתי אל ביתי,
סגרתי את דלתי,
חלוני מוגף
ליבי ישן ואני ישנה.

There is only one direct reference to the SoS in the entire poem; yet the speaker's thoughts of the SoS as she expresses her experience are conveyed to the reader with clarity. The man who is the subject of the speaker's description has sent her a "winged bird" to awaken her. The "אור", is understood to be either an eagle or an owl, both of which are known for their loud call. The harshness of this call is underscored by Goldberg's use of the term, "לצווח", to "scream". There is irony in combining the use of "לצווח", with "מילות אהבה ותחינה". The irony lends an affect of harshness in the awakening the אור is sent to accomplish.

By contrast, in the SoS animals and birds from the landscape are referenced frequently to further underscore the lovers' integration into their surroundings. We find

the male lover using the nightingale, "עת הזמיר הגיע", and the turtledove, "וקול"
 "התור נשמע בארצנו", as signs the spring has come to entice the female lover to join him
 in the garden (7: 13) "שם אתן את דודי לדך". In the poem, the male lover also sends
 the אור, to entice the object of his affections to awaken and come to him. However, it
 creates quite the opposite effect!

As stated earlier, the use of the five senses is a device employed by the author of
 the SoS to further enhance its erotic sensibility, and to make the lovers experiences
 come alive for the reader. In her poem, Goldberg masterfully employs four of the five
 senses as a means for the man to entice the woman to come to him. In the first stanza,
 we find the cry of the owl (hearing); in the second, the scent of seaweed (smell) and the
 moon (sight); and in the third, the "kiss" of the waves on her ankles and the hem of her
 dress (touch). His "messengers" plead with her, but to no avail. She remains firm,
 "אבל אני לא אבוא, לא אבוא, לא אבוא!".

What does she do? She creates a physical and emotional boundary between them,
 "ואני חזרתי אל ביתי, סגרתי את דלתי, חלוני מוגף...". In a final, ironic stroke of
 genius, Goldberg closes the poem with the most direct reference to the SoS, by stating its
 complete opposite,

"ליבי ישן, אני ישנה" \ "אני ישנה וליבי ער... (5: 2).

"I am asleep but my heart is awake."

Upon concluding the reading of the poem, the reader realizes that its first line,
 "שלחת אלי את האור להעירני משינה", coupled with the closing line, form a chiasm
 which opens and closes the poem with a direct reference to the oft-quoted line from the
 SoS to produce the exact opposite effect.

Another poet makes similar use of the SoS to that of Leah Goldberg in the previous poem. In her poem "רק אותך", Ronit Chen-Tzion employs terminology and imagery from the SoS as a foil against which to express her feelings toward the person she longs to be with, who does not reciprocate her feelings. The imagery and its intensity are so palpable to the reader, that without realizing it, the reader expects to find the same journey for the lovers of the poem that the lovers in the SoS enjoy. That journey is a joyful one, blossoming with love and desire. We are startled to find that this is not the case. In Chen-Tzion's poem the relationship is decidedly one-sided; even a bit dark.

רק אותך
רונית חן-ציון

רק אותך בלבי שמרתי,
וזהא חתום בתוכי,
כשנכנסת נעלתי השער
לא רציתי כי יבואו אחרים,
וכשבאו הם ודפקו על השער
לא נעניתי, כי אתה בתוכי,
ועליך חשבתי יומם וליל
ועם דמותך התרועעתי,
חיוך, קולך, צעדך
הכל בקרבי.
חי ונושם ולובש דמות,
ויש ודמותך עולה לפני.
ואתא לא ידעת,
או ידעת והתכחשת
אך אני אוסיף לנצור אותך
מאחורי דלת ובריח
כי הרי שלי אתה, ואני לא שלך.

The poem opens innocently enough with the speaker expressing her feelings to her beloved,

"רק אותך בלבי שמרתי, ויתהא חתום בתוכי".

It calls to mind the phrase in SoS 8:6 where the female lover says to her beloved,

"שימיני כחותם על-לבך כחותם על זרועך..."

"Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm..."

The end of SoS 8:6 contains the potential for "darkness". The female lover continues,

"כי עזה כמוות אהבה, קשה כשאול קנאה."

"For love is strong as death, jealousy is cruel as hell."

This statement is neither positive nor negative. It does, however effectively illustrate that in the intensity of emotion; love has the ability to invoke jealousy and bitterness. It is this "spin" on SoS 8:6 that Chen-Tzion has chosen as the focus of her brief poem.

As in the SoS, the speaker fantasizes that she is speaking to the object of her affections. She is obsessed with him. He fills her every waking moment; she conjures up his form at night. She gets to know his "likeness" intimately,

"ועליך חשבתי יומם וליל ועם דמותך התרועעתי,

חיוכך, קולך, צעדך הכל בקרבי

חי ונושם ולובש דמות..."

Once again the theme of boundaries, both physical and emotional, so prevalent in the SoS, figures prominently in Chen-Tzion's poem'

"ותהא חתום בתוכי,

כשנכנסת נעלתי את השער לא רציתי כי יבואו אחרים,

וכשבאו הם ודפקו על השער, לא נעניתי, כי אתה בתוכי..."

In the first line above, the word "חתום" functions as a double entendre. "חתום" can be understood as "sealed in", "enclosed", and also carries with it a sense of her lover "being imprinted", "etched" in the woman's heart.

As in the SoS 3:4, the speaker of the poem expresses her desire to hold onto her lover and keep him enclosed within her grasp,

"...אך אני אוסיף לנצור אותך מאחורי דלת ובריח כי הרי שלי אתה..."
 "עד שמצאתי את שאהבה נפשי אחזתיו ולא ארפנו עד שהביאתיו אל בית
 אמי..." (3: 4).

"When I found my true love I held him and I would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house..."

Just as in the Goldberg poem, "היא", the concluding phrase of Chen Tzion's poem packs an ironic punch,

"...אך אני אוסיף לנצור אותך מאחורי דלת ובריח
 כי הרי שלי אתה, ואני לא שלך."

Until the poem's final stanza, it is possible to understand the relationship between the woman and the man as a reciprocal one, but upon reading the final lines, the poem's effect upon the reader is chilling: "...but I will continue to keep you locked up, enclosed behind a door, for you are mine, after all, **but I am not yours.**"

"האם האם" was written as a song by lyricist Hayim Chefer (b.1925) and composer (Alexander) Sasha Argov (1914-1995), who often collaborated, writing over one hundred songs together. Among the poems and song lyrics being presented here,

this one best reflects the form of the *wasf*, or description of physical attributes highlighted among the literary devices found in the SoS. Each stanza opens with the same refrain. The stanzas are rhythmic, with a regular rhyming pattern: ABCB.

האם, האם

ביצוע: התרנגולים
מילים: חיים חפר
לחן: סשה ארגוב

האם האם האם אמרו לך פעם,
שיש לך שתי עיניים בוערות כלהבה,
שאם את בי במבטך נוגעת--
אני מרגיש כיצד אני נשרף מאהבה.

האם האם האם אמרו לך פעם,
שכף רגלך תופפת שיר ופסיעתך קלה,
שאם תתרחקי ממני צעד--
ארדוף אחריך כמו צייד אחר האיילה.

האם האם האם אמרו לך פעם,
שבלחייך גומת החן כל כך כל כך תמימה,
שאת את בי תקוות חיוך נוטעת--
אני מרגיש כיצד בי נעצרת הנשימה.

האם האם האם אמרו לך פעם,
שעור פנייך משי משי וידך חמה,
שאם את בי באצבעך נוגעת--
מייד מרגיש גופי את רעידת האדמה.

האם האם האם אמרו לך פעם,
שקול צחוקך צלול כאגל טל על שושנה,
שאם עם ליל אוזני אותו שומעת--

אני חולם עד בוקר על משק כנפי יונה.

האם האם האם אמרו לך פעם,
שעל גבך תלויה צמה כל כך יפהפיה,
שאם ארצה לאבד עצמי לדעת--
אז רק בצמתך אבחר כחבל התליה

The poem is a light-hearted declaration of love from the male speaker to the woman who is the object of his affections. He compliments her profusely, highlighting many features from head to toe. Her eyes, her feet, her dimpled cheeks, her skin, the sound of her voice and her hair—all are praised.

The allusions to the SoS operate on two levels. As a whole, the poem works well as a sort-of modern version of a *wasf*, and in this stylistic sense it is reminiscent of the *wasfs* in the SoS²⁶. The second level is that of specific allusions to themes, ideas and phrases in the Song. There are many of these and, though their connection to specific phrases in the SoS are clear, they are allusions and not literal quotes.

In the first stanza we find,

"(האם, האם, האם אמרו לך פעם)

שיש לך שתי עיניים בוערות כלהבה,..." \ "הנך יפה עיניך יונים" (1: 15),

"לבבתי באחת מעיניך" (4: 9), "רשפיה רשפי אש שלהבתי" (8: 6).

"Behold you are fair with your eyes as doves." "You have ravished my heart with one glance of your eyes." "Its flashes are a blazing flame of God."

"(שאם את בי מבט שלך קולעת--)

אני מרגיש כיצד אני נשרף מאהבה..." \ "הסבי עיניך מגדי שהם הרהיבוני" (6: 5)

²⁶ For an example of a *wasf* in the SoS see page 18.

"Turn your eyes away from me for they have overcome me."

In the second stanza we find,

"...שכף רגלך תופפת שיר ופסיעתך קלה, " \ "מה יפו פעמיך בנעלים, בת הנדיב" (7: 2)

"How beautiful are your steps in sandals, daughter of nobles."

"(שאם תתרחקי ממני צעד--)

ארדוף אחריך כמו ציד אחר האילה... " \ "אם לא תדעי לך היפה בנשים צאי—לך

בעקבי הצאן " (1: 8)

"O fairest of women, go, follow the footprints of the sheep..."

In the third stanza we find,

"...שבלחיד גומת החן כל-כך, כל-כך תמימה... " \ "נאוו לחיך בתורים צוארך

בחרוזים " (1: 10)

"Your cheeks are lovely with rows of ringlets, your neck with a string of pearls."

In the fifth stanza,

"שקול צחוקך צלול כאגלי-טל על שושנה, " \ "השמיעני את קולך כי קולך

ערב... " (2: 14), "שראשי נמלא-טל קוצותי רסיסי לילה " (5: 2)

"...let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet..." "For my head is drenched with dew, my locks with drops of the night."

In the sixth and final stanza we find,

"...שעל גבך תלויה צמה כל-כך יפהפיה," "הנך יפה עינייך יונים, מבעד לצמתך

שיערך כעדר העזים שגלשו מהר גלעד: " (4: 1)

"Behold, you are fair with your eyes as doves behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats trailing down Mt. Gilead."

Among the best-known of the second generation of Israeli poets is Dalia Ravikovich (1936-2005). In her poem "שיר של הסברים", Ravikovich shares her inner thoughts about herself:

שיר של הסברים

דליה רביקוביץ

יש אנשים שיודיעם לאהוב
ויש אנשים שזה לא מתאים להם.
יש אנשים שמתנשקים ברחוב
ויש אחרים שזה לא נעים להם,
ולא רק ברחוב.

אני חושבת שזה כשרון כמו כל הכשרונות,
אולי זה יתרון.
כמו חבצלת השרון
שiodעת לפרוח,
כמו שושנה בעמקים
שבחרת לעצמה את צבעיה.

אתה יודע
שושן וחבצלת כשהם פורחים
מכים אותך בסנוורים.
אינני אומרת זאת כדי לביש,

ידוע לי שיש גם אחרים.
יונקי הדבש הן היפות בצפרים
לטעמי,
אך מי שנוח לו ילך אל הזרזיר.

עם זאת אני חוזרת ומספרת לעצמי,
זרזיר מתנים,
איל משולש,
תפוח שאיננו מאדים,
זה לא אני.

The person whom Ravikovich addresses is a male, as we see from the opening phrase in the poem's middle section, "אתה יודע...". The poet employs the technique of moving from the general to the specific. She begins with general observations about people's comfort with expressing love, and moves from there, via a reference from the SoS (2:1), to a description of her own tastes and behaviors. Interestingly enough, when she expresses her own most personal characteristics, the author tells the reader and the gentleman whom she addresses, what she is **not**, rather than what she is.

Though the poem is written in straight-forward, informal language, there is nothing about it that is simple. An element of surprise pervades it:

"יש אנשים שיודעים לאהוב
ויש אנשים שזה לא מתאים להם.
יש אנשים שמתנשקים ברחוב
ויש אחרים שזה לא נעים להם,
ולא רק ברחוב."

Before the reader has had a chance to take in the intent of one phrase, he/she is bombarded with a clever twist on that same phrase, often employing humor or irony, or

sing-song rhyme. The first two lines of the above stanza seem to be taking us on a contemplative journey about the nature of love. They are followed by two lines that convey a “lighter” message about kissing in public. Just as the reader is adjusting to the “lighter” tone, the poet throws in an afterthought, *“(ויש אחרים שזה לא נעים להם)”* “Suddenly the reader is pulled into another “deep” thought: what does it mean to be someone who doesn’t even like to kiss?

In the poem’s next stanza Ravikovich narrows the focus of her observation to a description the reader will come to understand that she is passionate about. Her frame of reference is the SoS, but she takes the familiar phrase and uses it to make a point that is all her own,

“אני חושבת שזה כשרון כמו כל הכישרונות,

אולי זה יתרון.

כמו חבצלת השרון

שיודעת לפרוח,

כמו שושנה בעמקים

שבוחרת לעצמה את צבעיה.” \ “אני חבצלת השרון, שושנת העמקים:” (2: 1)

“I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys.”

With this last phrase the poet begins to clue the reader into what it is about these flowers that draws her to identify with them. According to Ravikovich, the lily “knows how to bloom”, and the rose “chooses its own colors.”

In the stanza that begins with the words, *“אתה יודע”* the author narrows her field of reference to herself and her personal preferences, which she communicates to the gentleman she addresses in the poem. Once again she refers back to the description

of the two flowers from SoS 2:1. This time she expresses with what characteristics of the lily and the rose she so identifies, the blinding brightness of their color:

"אתה יודע

שושן וחבצלת כשהם פורחים

מכים אותך בסנוורים."

Despite the fact that the rose and the lily are her favorite with the stunning beauty they represent, Ravikovich acknowledges that there are indeed other flowers,

"אינני אומרת זאת כדי לביש,

ידוע לי שיש גם אחרים."

In her further elaboration of her likes and dislikes, however, the poet makes it very clear through her choice of language, that she has a particular bias,

"יונקי הדבש הן היפות בצפרים

לטעמי,

אך מי שנוח לו ילך אל הזרזיר."

Again to the surprise of the reader, Ravikovich jumps from talking about those flowers for which she has a fondness, to talking about birds. Although less direct than in the case of the flowers, the allusion to fauna from the SoS echoes in the background.

Here, she compares the hummingbird, "יונק הדבש", to the "simple" starling, "זרזיר".

In her flight of fancy, the poet, upon speaking of the "זרזיר", recalls yet another reference containing the word "זרזיר", but having a very different meaning.

The closing stanza of the poem contains phrases from two other places in the Tanakh—the book of Genesis and the book of Proverbs,

"אם זאת אני חוזרת ומספרת לעצמי,

זרזיר מתנים,
 איל משולש,
 תפוח שאיננו מאדים,
 זה לא אני."

In describing to herself and to her intended audience what she is **not**, Ravikovich uses the phrase "זרזיר מתנים". This phrase is found in Proverbs 30:31 where it speaks of four creatures who are "stately of stride". One of the four is the greyhound, "זרזיר" מתנים. The term refers to a canine that is of slight build; particularly in the region of the hip. This slight build allows for ease and speed in movement.²⁷

Another phrase borrowed from the Tanakh is, "איל משולש". It is one of the list of animals for sacrifice God tells Abram to bring to cut the "Covenant of the Pieces", "ברית בין הבתרים", toward the end of Parashat "לך-לך" (Genesis 15:9). "משולש" refers to the age of the ram—three years, and indicates it is fully-grown. As there is a vast body of Modern Hebrew poetry that draws its inspiration and imagery from other books of the Tanakh, this poem is among those including other books in addition to the SoS. (See footnote on page 27). The third phrase, "תפוח שאיננו מאדים", returns us to imagery from the SoS. In 2:5 it says, "רפדוני בתפוחים כי חולת אהבה אני", "*comfort me with apples, for I am faint with love.*"

Naomi Shemer (1930-2004), was undoubtedly one of Israel's most beloved songwriters and lyricists. She was probably best-known for her song "ירושלים של זהב", popularized following the Six Day War. Shemer wrote many songs for the comedic trio

²⁷ Mandelkern, Solomon, הנהגות נציה לתנ"ך, Copyright 1971, Schocken Press, p. 362.

who enjoyed iconic status in Israel over several decades beginning in the 1960s. Anything that was sung by them was assured of a wide reception and the song, "אחותי רוחמה" is one of these.

אחותי רוחמה

ביצוע: הגשש החיוור
מילים ולחן: נעמי שמר

כבר מזמן רציתי, אחותי רוחמה
לאמר לך מילים חמות
לא היה לי כח רוח בי לא קמה
לשיר לך כמו שלמה.

מור וקינמון
כל מיני בשמים
אוי לי בלילות ואבוי לי בימים.

לך הייתי שר, הראיני את מראיך
יפה את כמו פרדס
קומתך תמר אחז בסנסניך
הניחי ואטפס.

למה את שותקת, אחותי רוחמה
הנה קול התור הומה
מעיין גלים באר אשר נחתמה
עצוב לי אני צמא.

באביב אגיע מאוהב פי כמה
אליך עם הזמיר
ואני והוא ואחותי רוחמה
את שיר השירים נשיר.

מור וקינמון כל מיני בשמים
 אוי לי בלילות ואבוי לי בימים
 מור וקינמון כל מיני בשמים
 אור לי בלילות וחג לי בימים.

As in several of the above-referenced poems, "אחותי רוחמה" is a light-hearted salute to a woman whose name is רוחמה. The lyrics have a sing-song quality, adding to that sense. The song has regular rhythm and rhyme (ABAB) and the stanzas are punctuated by a refrain. One of Shemer's many gifts was the ability to create songs that were eminently sing-able by the population-at-large. This song is no exception.

Peppered throughout the song are multiple references to and quotes from the SoS. It is obvious to the reader that the wellspring from which Shemer drew in creating "אחותי רוחמה" is the SoS. Both the choice of material and casting the material in a very light-hearted setting are deliberate.

The imagery Shemer chose to include is representative of some of the key elements so characteristic of the SoS. These include the variegated imagery of spring time, plants, trees, birds, a garden, a well or spring and the rich aroma of spices and perfumes. Once again, we find reference to nighttime and daytime, and, for the first time in any of the lyrics being examined, we find reference to King Solomon, whose image is invoked in a number of places throughout the SoS.

In the opening stanza, we find the speaker referring to רוחמה as "אחותי", and it is clear that he is **not** speaking about his sister. Rather, just as in the SoS, he uses the term as an affectionate epithet for one whom he loves,

"כבר מזמן רציתי אחותי רוחמה..." \ "באתי לגני אחותי כלה..." (5: 1)

"I have come into my garden, my sister, my bride."

(*"לא היה לי כח רוח בי לא קמה"*)

"לשיר לך כמו שלמה..." \ "שיר השירים אשר לשלמה": (1: 1)

"The Song of Songs which is Solomon's."

(*"לך הייתי שר*) הראיני נא מראיך... " \ "הראיני את מראיך... (2: 14)

"Let me see your looks..."

"יפה את כמו פרדס" \ "שלחך פרדס רימונים..." (4: 13)

"Your limbs are an orchard of pomegranates."

"קומתך תמר אחז בסנסניך הניחי ואטפס..." \ "זאת קומתך דמתה לתמר..."

אמרתי אעלה בתמר אוחזה בסנסניו... (7: 8, 9)

"You are as stately as a palm tree...I said, 'I will climb up into the palm tree; I will take hold of its branches."

"באביב אגיע מאוהב פי כמה, אלייך עם הזמיר..." \ "כי הנה הסתיו עבר הגשם חלף

הלך לו...עת הזמיר הגיע": (2: 11)

"For lo, the winter has passed, the rains are over and gone...the time of singing²⁸ is come."

In the final stanza of the poem Shemer incorporates a suggestion from the speaker that all three (the speaker, the woman he desires and the זמיר) will sing together when he returns to her, more in love than ever.

²⁸ The word, "זמיר" is alternately translated as "song", "songbird", and "pruning".

In the last line of the final refrain the words; "אוי לי בלילות ואבוי לי בימים" are replaced with, "אור לי בלילות וחג לי בימים". This leads the reader to the conclusion that there is a "happy ending" to our song: "boy meets girl, boy courts girl, boy wins the heart of girl". Even here we have a parallel message in the SoS, where it says in 1:4, "הביאני המלך חדריו נגילה ונשמחה בך", *"The king has brought me to his chambers, we will be glad and rejoice in you."*

"מי יצילני נא" is a collaboration between Alon Hillel, lyricist, and the very popular singer/songwriter Rami Kleinstein(b.1962). It is an example of a song in which there is very little direct reference to the SoS. Upon close observation one can detect that the Song of Songs provided inspiration for the lyricist in his writing. The allusions to the SoS are subtle, but they are there, nonetheless.

מי יצילני נא

ביצוע: רמי קלינשטיין
מילים: אלון הלל
לחן: רמי קלינשטיין

אני מצייר סביבך מעגלים ובלי להתחשב בכללים
את יוצאת ממני והולכת לרעות בשדות זרים.
כשאת חוזרת מלאה עקבות
איך אפשר שלא לראות.
שאת מספרת לי מעשיות
אותי את לא צריכה לרמות

אני סומך עלייך שתשגעי אותי מתוקתי
לא תשאירי לי רגע להיות שפוי תמתי.
מי יצילני נא מי יעזרני נא.

אני מצייר סביבך מעגלים ובלי להתחשב בכללים

את יוצאת ממני והולכת לרעות בשדות זרים
 כי אני מקנא לך ואני נמשך
 בלי כל זה אני לא נפתח
 זה לא מרוע זה ההרגל
 תני לי דקה להתרגל.

In the song, a gentleman expresses his frustration with his beloved to her and to the reader. It appears that the two have different understandings of what it means to be in a mutually-committed relationship. The song opens in the following manner,

"אני מצייר סביבך מעגלים ובלי להתחשב בכללים
 את יוצאת ממני והולכת לרעות בשדות זרים."

From the outset we are dealing with the subject of boundaries, literal and figurative, a theme that permeates the SoS. The lyricist's choice of words adds another layer to the imagery. Not only does "drawing circles around his lover" create boundaries for her in relation to the speaker; it is also reminiscent of the Jewish wedding ceremony, wherein the bride circles the groom seven times, demarcating a "boundary" between the couple and other available individuals. Despite the clear meaning of this action, the woman disregards the rules and ventures outside the boundaries "to pasture in unfamiliar fields." The use of this phrase evokes imagery of agriculture and rural landscape from the SoS. Compare the following two phrases,

"...את יוצאת ממני והולכת לרעות בשדות זרים." \ "צאי-לך בעקבי הצאן וראי את

גדיותיך על משכנות הרועים: " (1: 8)

"Go follow the footprints of the sheep and feed your kids near the tents of the shepherds."

The use of this imagery to express the idea of sexual exploration is very effective, in that it continues the idea of embracing the natural world around them that is characteristic of the lovers in the SoS.

In the song, the woman exhibits a kind of *daring*. She is undaunted in her desire to explore connections with others, and feels empowered to do so. The male lover, who desires to stay in the relationship, struggles to keep up with her. The female lover in the SoS also exhibits a certain sense of empowerment, in the way she interacts with her environment, without regard for social convention.

In addition to the contemporary word, "מתוקתי", "my sweet one", the lyricist uses the word, "תמתי" "my beauty, my innocent one" to refer to his beloved. This word is, of course, used multiple times to refer to the beloved in the SoS.

The phrase from which the song takes its title closes out the refrain of the song, "מי יצילני נא? מי יעזרני נא?", is a deliberate use of archaic styling by the lyricist. This is yet another technique which is a "nod" to SoS without quoting directly from the text.

In the song's final stanza the use of the dialectic, "כי אני מקנא לך ואני נמשך..." also echoes the sentiment expressed by the female lover in the SoS,

"...כי עזה כמוות אהבה, קשה כשאול קנאה: (8: 6)"

"For love is strong as death; jealousy as cruel as hell."

Avraham Chalfi's (1904-1980) poetry was relatively unknown in his day. He was better-known for his involvement in the theater community of Tel Aviv. In the journal, *"Moznayim"*, Yair Stavi wrote of Chalfi,

"המשורר אברהם חלפי כתב כמה מהשירים היותר יפים שזכו להיות מולחנים.

שירים ופזמונים אלה השתמשו עמוק בתודעת הזמר הישראלי והפכו לקלאסיקה.²⁹

One of his poems, "עטור מצחך זהב שחור", was set to music by Yoni Rechter some twenty years after it was written. The song, sung by several of Israel's pop royalty became an instant hit and has long been beloved by the population-at-large.

עטור מצחך

ביצוע: אריק איינשטיין
מילים: אברהם חלפי
לחן: יוני רכטר

עטור מצחך זהב שחור
(אינני זוכר אם כתבו כך בשיר)
מצחך מתחרז עם עיניים ואור,
(אינני זוכר אם חרזו כך בשיר)
אך למי שתהיי
חיו מלאי שיר.

חלוקך הורוד צמרירי ורך.
את בו מתעטפת תמיד לעת ליל.
לא הייתי רוצה להיות לך אח,
לא נזיר מתפלל לדמותו של מלאך
ורואה חלומות עגומים של קדושה
ולמולו את אישה...

את אוהבת להיות
עצובה ושותקת
להקשיב לסיפור על קרוב על רחוק
ואני, שלא פעם אביט בך בשקט
אין קול ודברים

²⁹ Stavi, Yair, "שיר של א"חלפי שהיה לפזמון", in *Moznayim*, an Israeli literary journal, p.52.

שוכח הכל על אודות אחרים.
 שוכנת נפשי בין כתלי ביתך
 ושבוייה בין כתלייך
 ממני נפרדת
 עת אני בגופי נפרד ממך.

פרוש חלומי כמרבד לרגליך
 צעדי אהובה על פרחיו פסיעותיך
 לבשי חלוקך הורוד לעת ליל
 עוד מעט ואבוא אליך.

ומצחך העטור זהב שחור
 יקרב אל שפתי כחרוז אל שיר
 אז אלחש באוזנייך עד בוקר עד אור
 כשיכור...
 עטור מצחך זהב שחור.

The song is a simple yet profound declaration of a man's love for a woman. In it he speaks to her directly, describing her daily actions and intimate habits that have become etched in his heart.

Of all the poems included here, this has the most contemporary feel to it. This, despite the fact that the speaker, when conjuring up the image of his beloved whom he will visit shortly, is moved to use majestic imagery and language from the SoS. Upon reflection as to why this is so, one cannot help but notice the very personal nature of the speaker's description. The poet shares his most intimate thoughts with the reader. He describes his beloved's daily habits and demeanor in great detail, lingering on her soft, pink ethereal robe. The description is multi-sensory, which, both echoes devices in the SoS and effectively conveys the intimacy of the lovers' relationship.

In the second stanza the poet describes his beloved's pink robe, and, upon reflecting upon it, he is moved to a contrast between himself—lover—relating to the

sensual object of his desire, and a sibling, who while close, cannot partake of the erotic ecstasy he experiences. The poet also contrasts his situation with that of a monk who, while praying to the statue of a saint sees only "gloomy images of holiness", "ורואה חלומות עגומים של קדושה..."

As in the SoS, daydream and fantasy play a large part in this poem. The lover, who addresses his beloved, is fantasizing about an imminent meeting between them, even inviting his beloved to enter into his dream, "פרוש חלומי כמרבד לרגליך" צעדי אהובה, על פרחיו פסיעותיך". The setting is nighttime, and the lover intends to spend all night with his beloved.

Chalfi frames the entire poem with the phrase, "עטור מצחך זהב שחור", "your forehead is crowned with black gold." This phrase is what starts him on the journey of his daydream. Upon thinking of his beloved, this phrase comes up, but the poet cannot recall where, exactly he knows it from. "Might it have come from a poem?" He is not certain. Given the framing of this poem with allusions to the SoS, the word, "שיר" might have the added connotation of, "שיר השירים".

Additional imagery from the SoS includes the following,

"לא הייתי רוצה להיות לך אח, "מי יתנך כאח לי, יונק שדי אמי

אמצאך בחוץ אשקך גם לא יבוזו לי": (8: 1).

"Would that you were as my brother, who sucked the breasts of my mother. I could kiss you, then, when I met you outside, and would not be despised by anyone."

"שוכנת נפשי בין כתלי ביתך. ושבויה בין כתליך ממני נפרדת, עת אני בגופי נפרד ממך." "צרור המור דודי לי, בין שדי ילין" (1: 13). "קורות כתינו ארזים" (1: 17).

"For me, my beloved is as a bag of myrrh, lying between my breasts." "The beams of our house are cedar".

"אז אלחש באזניך עד בוקר עד אור כשכור..." \ "אכלו רעים, שתו ושכרו דודים."
(5: 1) "Drink, be drunk on love."

This poem, along with a few others encountered here, includes both direct quotes from and indirect allusions to the SoS.

Conclusion

Israeli culture has always associated itself with the Tanakh. Over the years it has been the classical literary lens through which contemporary culture has been reflected. The Song of Songs has been a particularly rich biblical source of inspiration. By examining its reflection in Modern Hebrew poems and songs, we have been able to observe that many an Israeli poet and lyricist have felt the power of its words.

Rabbi Akiva has said that, “Had the whole Torah not been given, we could live our lives by the Song of Songs”³⁰. I have been living my life with this rich and powerful text as a backdrop for many years. I have “sat in its shadow with great delight.” Its phrases come to mind when experiencing a rush of strong feelings; when I witness the poignancy of a wedding; when my feet trace the long-familiar steps of a dance; when I hear one of the many songs that have been composed to its lyrics. It was a natural choice, then, for me to examine the nexus between these two bodies of literature; the classical and the contemporary.

Malka Shaked has voiced the concern that those growing up in Israeli society today have become distanced from what was once an intimate cultural connection to Tanakh.³¹ In fact, an examination of the poetry and song lyrics in this thesis has illustrated that the opposite is true. One might say that for the current generation there has been a fusion between the cultural connection rooted in the Tanakh, and contemporary cultural expression. When earlier generations were re-establishing a Jewish presence in Eretz Yisrael, there was, no doubt, a need to consciously and

³⁰ Midrash, Zuta, Shir HaShirim.

³¹ See footnote #2.

repeatedly invoke the Tanakh as the story of our people in its land. As the poetry in this thesis reflects, this self-consciousness is no longer necessary. The long winter is past and the “springtime” of contemporary culture has arrived.

”קומי לך רעיתי יפתי ולכי-לך : כי הנה הסתיו עבר, הגשם חלף הלך לו :

הנצנים נראו בארץ עת הזמיר הגיע, וקול התור נשמע בארצנו : ” (2: 10-12)

“Rise up my love, my fair one, and come away. For lo, the winter is past, the rains are over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come and the voice of the turtle dove is heard in our land.”

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