The Whole Megillah

Journeys through Passion, Kindness, and Existentialism

An Invitation to Celebrate the Three Major Festivals through their Scrolls: Song of Songs, Ruth, and Ecclesiastes

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2002/5762

We dedicate this book to our teachers at Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles

Rise up and go forth!
Kumi lach
קוּמִי לָךְ
(Song of Songs 2:10)

We dedicate this book to our teachers
for encouraging us to reach new heights and for instilling within us the confidence to bring what you have taught us into the world.

Blessed is one of Adonai, who has not failed in kindness
Baruch hu l'Adonai asher lo azav chasdo
בָּרוּךְ הוּא לַיהוָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא־עָזַב חַסְדּוֹ
(Ruth 2:20)

We dedicate this book to our teachers
for teaching us the true meaning of kindness by inviting us to your homes,
by spending countless hours counseling us about the future, and
by genuinely caring about our well being, each and every day.

Two are better than one
Tovim ha-sh'naim min ha-echad
טוֹבִים הַשְּׁנַיִם מִן־הָאֶחָד
(Ecclesiastes 4:9)

We dedicate this book to our teachers
for teaching us the value of working in partnership, and
for having the vision and pioneering spirit
to experiment with a new kind of collaboration.

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Acknowledgments

We would like to thank…

Wendy Cannon
Stephanie Fogel
Kathy Guccione
Josh Stempel
Dale Strok

For your thoughtful comments, your editing skill,
and your willingness to give of yourselves to this project.

Dr. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi
Dr. William Cutter

For investing yourselves in our intellectual and personal growth.

Daniel Burg
Jason Buyer
Ellen Lefkowitz
Josh Strok
Our parents and siblings

For supporting us, for loving us, and for being with us every step of the way.

And each other

For yummy lunches, late nights, lively discussions,
total respect, and true friendship.

…and baby Micah
for his keen sense of timing
and for helping us
keep our whole project
in perspective.

Preface

"How do four people write one thesis?" Throughout our work, this was by far the most common question posed to us by classmates, professors, friends, and family. Indeed, what does it mean to write a collaborative thesis? How does one divide the work? What gets done together? What makes more sense to complete alone? And how do decisions get made in the first place?

Neither we nor our advisors knew any of the answers to these questions when we began. But with sufficient trust in each other, our advisors and the process in general, a five week cycle eventually emerged out of experimenting with Ruth, the first *megillah* מגילה that we studied. This first trial involved not only research and writing, but the mapping out of how such a process might work. Each week consisted of working together, four days, five hours each day. We found this cycle to be exciting and effective, and applied it successfully to both Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs. These were the five stages in each cycle:

Week 1:

Collectively, we engaged in readings of the *megillah* מגילה that included both analysis of the Hebrew text as well as comparisons of various translations. This initial reading (sometimes taking days) of the text led to many fascinating and heated debates, rendering our passion for the text anew.

Using our notes from this reading, we were able to create a list of themes that we felt emerged organically from the scroll. Now with a list of at least twenty themes, we employed an exercise called "affinity grouping": a process of arranging items that helps to identify relationships among them, e.g. which are similar, complementary, contradictory, etc. Ultimately, the process allowed us to select four distinct topics, on which each of us would write. Our advisors helped focus, expand, and ultimately approve our themes.

Week 2:

We surveyed and studied traditional rabbinic sources on the scroll in groups of two, or *chevruta* חברותא, although at the same location. Each group recorded any material relevant to the four chosen themes. We then distributed bibliographical secondary sources amongst the four of us, in preparation for week 3.

Week 3:

Each person individually researched and compiled an extensive collection of notes and references, and insights about each of the four themes. Towards the end of this week we ensured that each person was given all materials pertaining to her theme. Finally, each person created an outline for an essay using both primary and secondary research materials.

Week 4:

On the first day of the week, each person presented her outline to the group, and was collectively offered supportive and critical feedback that helped to focus and organize the direction of the work. The remainder of week was spent individually writing themed essays.

Week 5:

We conceived of, planned and created the "Learning Application pages" — both collectively and in *chevruta* חברותא.

From our experience with the first cycle, it became clear which tasks were best carried out individually, and which benefited the most from our collective creativity and talents. It became clear after the fact, for example, that later stages of editing and revisions could have been more meaningfully done in *chevruta* חברותא, rather than individually.

So the answer to how these four people wrote one thesis is: with an appetite for experiment and a tolerance for uncertainty. Upon reflection, we have realized a number of vital ingredients that enabled our process not only to survive, but thrive. As in any good relationship, our process was not without its tensions. The key to creatively maintaining a collaborative culture was to have the tools to respond to anxiety in healthy

ways. The following are what we found to be some of the most critical components in creating and maintaining our collaborative culture:

- Flexibility and what we call a "willingness to redirect". There were many moments when it became clear that we needed to change course, both individually and collectively. This called upon each of us to have patience and trust in our unfolding process.

- Willingness and ability to live with creative disagreement, or *machloket* מחלוקת. We are four different people, destined to disagree, and to disagree passionately. In our safe and respectful learning environment, we were always free to challenge one another. This was particularly important in guarding against losing one's unique sense of self amidst a collaborative process.

- Investment beyond the product itself, to the welfare and support of each other as whole people, with concerns beyond our project. Our sensitivity to one another strengthened our relationships, and in turn, we believe, enhanced the depth and passion of our project.

- Equal commitment to both our goals of collaborative process and responsible scholarship.

- Recognizing our own limitations, celebrating each other's strengths.

- Trust of each other's scholarship, work ethic, and commitment to the project.

This process has enhanced our professional and personal growth beyond a thesis. The whole of our project is more important than any parts. We feel genuinely that our learning, both in content and process, has already extended into many other areas of our life.

When we began, our greatest aim was to engage in a meaningful thesis experience. Indeed, rather than a potentially isolating, or at least private and individual endeavor, the learning and reflection were made more public, open, collective. The four of us launched ourselves into an intense little learning community that studied and ate together almost daily (complete with a weekly schedule for cooking lunch for each

other!). By working collaboratively, we gained some of the most exciting, dynamic and profoundly integrative and deep learning that we have done at Hebrew Union College. There was also a tremendous sense of discovery -shared discovery- in our research, as we put to work many of our tools and much of our training. The result was a synergy of minds and spirits. Although it sounds unlikely, there was not one study session to which any of us did not look forward. Our meetings were efficient, productive, enjoyable, enriching, and often, exciting. This seemed like a process that could lead to a new kind of authentic assessment for rabbinical training (and in our case, for educational training, as well).

We know why we feel so fortunate. We are grateful to the Rabbinical School at Hebrew Union College for providing us with our cherished tools of textual analysis and for introducing us to vast worlds of Jewish tradition. We are indebted to the Rhea Hirsch School of Education for the educational training necessary for learning how to dream up such a process, and for the training to dream in the first place. And to our beloved advisors, Dr. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Dr. William Cutter, who dared venture into uncharted thesis territory, we would like to extend our heartfelt appreciation for sharing their phenomenal expertise and brilliance. Your willingness and openness to experiment with this thesis model made this possible. The healthy power differential between faculty and student reflected its most fruitful potential; it was ethical, nurturing, and academically guiding. We thank you both for believing in us, for committing your time to the project, for all your generosity and patience, and for the respectful learning atmosphere you helped us to create.

A Note on Translation, Transliteration, and Sources

In general, we use the New Jewish Publication Society's translation of the Hebrew Bible. However, we do make two changes consistently. First, we change God's proper name from "Lord" to the Hebrew word "Adonai" or "YHVH" since YHVH is God's "proper name."[1] Second, we alter the translation to make it gender neutral in all appropriate places. Also, because of the poetic nature of Song of Songs, we include instead Chanah and Ariel Bloch's translation. It seems to capture best the eloquence, rhythm, and style of the Hebrew. We indicate any other variations in translation by using footnotes.

The transliteration of the Hebrew is phonetic.[2] Whenever we use a Hebrew word for the first time in an essay, the word appears first in translation, then transliteration, then Hebrew. Additional occurrences of the same word in the same essay appear in transliteration and Hebrew only. It is our hope that by deliberately using Hebrew in this way, our readers will increase their vocabulary in an organic way.

Our professors recommended many of the sources that we use in this book, and we consulted with them on other sources we discovered while researching. All of the sources used in this book that were originally written in Hebrew are also available in translation so that readers have the opportunity for further study, regardless of their

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[1] YHVH is a particular name for God and, because it is important to differentiate it from other Hebrew names of God, we have changed the NJPS translation.

[2] Note also that the Hebrew for "Ecclesiastes" can be spelled either Kohelet or Qohelet. In our writing, we use the former spelling. However, when we quote scholars who spell it differently, we preserve their spelling. In addition, throughout this book, we refer to the Book of Ecclesiastes by its Hebrew name, Kohelet.

Hebrew fluency. Our work is grounded in two genres of source material, traditional and modern. We use traditional sources because, in order to participate in the Jewish conversation of the ages, we must first listen to the voices of our predecessors, and we use modern sources because Judaism can benefit from exposure to contemporary ideas and postmodern methods of analysis.

Introduction

Why Read this Book?

We knew *that* we wanted to write something together before we knew *what* we wanted to write. So what did we do? As four graduates of the Rhea Hirsch School of Education, we began by articulating our goals for our rabbinic thesis, which later developed into this book. Our main goal for this project was this:

To create a practical guide, grounded in scholarship, that

- focuses on classical Jewish texts,
- is helpful to both the lay and the professional Jewish community,
- provides a new paradigm for thinking about a particular subject,
- has both intellectual integrity and educational application, and
- reflects our synergetic, creative, interactive process.

As the subject of this book, we chose the three so called "scrolls," or *megillot* מגילות, that connect with each of the three festivals of the Jewish year: Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot. Song of Songs, or *Shir HaShirim* שיר שירים, is read on Pesach; the Book of Ruth, or *Rut* רות, is read on Shavuot; and the Book of Ecclesiastes, or *Kohelet* קהלת, is read on Sukkot.[1] The following introduction reflects upon the three main reasons we selected this material:

1. They are missing from the curriculum of modern Jewish life.
2. They speak to concerns of our day.
3. They are exceptional in their aesthetic nature and their daring spirit.

Missing from Modern Curricula

We asked rabbis and educators, publishers and professors, classmates, families, and friends: what is missing from your bookshelves? What did you always want to learn,

but never had the tools? Then we looked at our own bookshelves and at our own religious education outside of rabbinical school, and asked: what did we learn in rabbinical school that we had not learned earlier or elsewhere? What is missing from the curriculum of modern Jewish life?

These three *megillot* מגילות are part of the traditional Jewish canon[2] — the Hebrew Bible, also called the *Tanakh* תנך.[3] Though the Talmud contains debates that question the sacred character of Song of Songs and Kohelet their inclusion in the Bible has not been questioned in our time. However, though they are part of the Jewish Bible and thus are considered central to Judaism, they are in practice peripheral to the lives of most modern, liberal Jews — they are, as it were, outside the "canon" of modern Jewish life. They are seldom taught in religious schools or in adult education classes, they are not always read in synagogue on their appropriate festivals, and few books have been written on them for the general public.

Why this neglect if the *megillot* מגילות are important enough to be part of our Bible? On this, we can only speculate. Instead, we would like to offer and respond to a different question: why should the *megillot* מגילות be restored to modern Jewish life?

Traditionally, as noted before, each of these *megillot* מגילות is connected with one of the three biblical pilgrimage festivals, the three *regalim* רגלים. Song of Songs is read on Pesach; the Book of Ruth is read on Shavuot; and the Book of Kohelet is read on

[1] Note that the book is organized in this order to follow the calendar year that begins with the first month of Nissan. This order also reflects the order in which they are found in the Hebrew Bible.
[2] "Canon" describes the adoption of specific works into the "official" body of literature, art, or music. Criteria for selection of canon include the following: preservation of culture, fostering aesthetic value, political or social goals, the subsuming nature of the work, personal taste, fostering memory, identifying with certain elements of society, and familiarity with the work.

Sukkot. There is no scholarly consensus as to why previous generations attached each book to its festival. In fact, Hayyim Shauss audaciously wrote in 1938, "Of these five books [the five Megillot], three [the Song of Songs, Ruth, and Kohelet] have no real relation to the festivals on which they are read."[4] We beg to differ with Schauss, believing that the connections between the *regalim* רגלים and the *megillot* מגילות are significant. Throughout this book, we articulate some of our own thoughts about the possible connections between the *megillot* מגילות and the *regalim* רגלים, as well as some ideas expressed by those who came before us. Regardless of why these connections exist, the fact remains that they do. Thus, these three *megillot* מגילות comprise a unit, and, given the status traditionally ascribed to the *regalim* רגלים, a significant one at that.

It is also noteworthy that the traditional status of the *regalim* רגלים differs markedly from the status ascribed to them today by many liberal Jews. In the Torah and in rabbinic tradition, all three festivals were central to the rhythm of Jewish life and to the practice of Judaism. Today, neither Sukkot nor Shavuot is widely celebrated and, though Pesach is celebrated by a large majority of North American Jews, it is not generally celebrated in synagogue. The festivals have, in effect, been somewhat lost (to synagogue life at least) in the modern world of liberal Jews.

We hope that by emphasizing the relationship between the *regalim* רגלים and the *megillot* מגילות throughout this book we inspire a simultaneous revival of both. Our dual intention is first to draw inspiration from the *megillot* מגילות in order to revitalize the

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[3] The *Tanakh* תנך is comprised of three collections: Torah, Prophets and Writings. The *megillot* מגילות are found in the Writings section. Throughout this book, the use of the word "Bible" refers to the Hebrew Bible, or *Tanakh* תנך.

[4] Hayyim Shauss, The Jewish Festivals, transl. Samel Jaffe (Cincinnati: UAHC Press, 1938)

regalim רגלים, and second, to draw on the importance of the *regalim* רגלים to return the *megillot* מגילות to modern Jews. We see this as a dynamic and dialectical process.

Speak to Concerns of Our Day

Each of these three *megillot* מגילות speaks to central spiritual issues of our day. Song of Songs speaks of love and sexuality; the Book of Ruth speaks to core questions of belonging and community; the Book of Kohelet speaks to core questions of life's meaning and to what is really valuable in this world;. All of these issues are part of the discourse of modern life and the search of modern religious seekers. These *megillot* מגילות allow a Jewish voice to be heard in those conversations and on those journeys.

Alongside the relevance of the content of this material, there is another concern of the modern era to which this book responds: the desire for significant adult learning opportunities. Judaism is in the midst of a religious revival of sorts, with many adults looking for ways to expand and deepen their Jewish knowledge and Jewish practice. The structure of this book, with its essays and application pages, is designed to respond to those needs by providing an accessible yet sophisticated way to increase Jewish knowledge and deepen Jewish practice.

Furthermore, we hope this book promotes a process of learning Torah[5] that can be applied to other books of the Bible and other Jewish holidays. In many ways, this book is about empowerment — empowering Jews with the confidence and the tools to learn Torah, and by learning it, to live it.

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[5] The word "Torah" is used to describe two things: 1) the first five books of the *Tanakh* תנך and, as in this case, 2) any part of the Jewish textual tradition.

Exceptional Character

Song of Songs, the Book of Ruth, and the Book of Kohelet are exceptional in their character. One of the reasons we chose to write about them is because these three *megillot* מגילות — a love poem, a novella, and a philosophical reflection — represent three genres of literature at their best. They are, quite simply, in their language, content, and depth, a pleasure to read.

Moreover, all three are, in their own way, daring. Song of Songs defies the rest of the Bible in its theme and its language, in the way it waltzes with eroticism and love. The Book of Ruth challenges us to think about "the other" with fresh eyes. The Book of Kohelet makes us think about questions of meaning in a unique way. Together, then, these three *megillot* מגילות form an exceptional trio worthy of extended study.

How to Use This Book

Disciples increase the teacher's wisdom and broaden his mind. The sages said, 'Much wisdom I learned from my teachers, more from my colleagues; from my pupils, most of all.' Even as a small piece of wood kindles a large log, so a pupil of small attainments sharpens the mind of his teacher, so that by his questions, he elicits glorious wisdom." (Maimonides, Mishneh Torah)[1]

As Maimonides notes, the fruitful combination of teaching and learning encourage important depth and growth in the course of study. Thus, in order to kindle the flame of both teacher and learner, we provide what we call "application pages" for the learner and teacher. In each unit, after a themed essay, you will find four "application pages". These pages serve as a pedagogic complement to the essays. The four pages are an opportunity for the reader to engage interactively in the traditional texts and the themed essays. Recognizing that people learn in many different ways, we provide four distinct ways to participate in this learning. Each page stimulates emotional, spiritual, and intellectual connections to the text as well as the festival or *chag* חג. We hope that the application pages provide a space for readers to apply his or her learning in various ways. In these pages one can read a collection of voices from the past, complement the tradition with one's own distinctive insights into the text, and expand understanding of the text through a variety of connections (i.e. Modern Hebrew poetry, Jewish literature, art and photography). Finally, we provide a page that we hope will enhance your celebration of the *chag* חג with new insights from the Song of Songs, Ruth, and Kohelet.

[1] Isadore Twersky. A Maimonides Reader. USA: Behrman house, Inc, 1972 (p. 70).

Each page focuses on a specific and important skill of Jewish learning. The goal then, is for you to expand your learning of the theme while simultaneously learning various skills necessary for Torah study. As readers study each page, we hope they will inspire a growing relationship with the text, and the tradition. It is our aim to show how one can *learn* Torah as well as *live* Torah. With this in mind, we hope to deepen your appreciation and observance of the festivals or, *chagim* חגים. We are certain that the textual skills and creative exercises theses pages fashion should enhance the quality of a person's Jewish life as well as enrich experiences in the Jewish community.

What's the Question? מה קשה לי? *Mah Kasheh Li?*

What's the Conversation? מה קשה לנו? *Mah Kasheh Lanu?*

These two application pages are based upon a uniquely Jewish process of text study. Namely, how do Jews read the Torah? By "how", we don't mean "quickly or slowly", "as bed-side reading or with a highlighter". When we ask "how", we seek to uncover what might be the Jewish way to get into our text and its meanings. So, how *do* Jews read the Torah? One way has been through "midrash."

The word *midrash*[1] is based on the Hebrew root *d-r-sh*, or ד-ר-ש, which, in Biblical times, meant the kind of asking and inquiring that one addressed to God when in pain. However, once the Jewish bible was canonized, and it was understood that "God no longer spoke to human beings directly," this *d-r-sh*, or ד-ר-ש, root became the basis for the act of *deep spiritual investigation, probing, seeking.* Midrash literally means, "searching, inquiring, or demanding". The process of inquiry became one of *study* — but it was a special kind of study, which included that *emotional* aspect of searching, of probing. Judaism requires us to bring our whole selves to the text, and to respond. At its best, midrash is a rich, often grueling and even heart-wrenching process. It is a living and exciting process adding not only to our understanding of and connection to Torah (in the broadest sense), but as the text reflects back on the reader, also to ourselves, to our Jewishness, and to our humanity. For two millennia, Jewish commentators like Rashi have engaged in this "midrashic" process to shed light on the text through their personal lenses, the lenses of their time and place, and through the lenses of their theological assumptions. They relied on the text to shed light on the burning questions of the day.

[1] Midrash and commentaries are their own genre of Jewish literature. Both of these genres engage in the same process; a process we call "midrashic." It is this process to which we are referring.

In contrast to modern western literature where inconsistencies, gaps, and dilemmas may be considered a weakness, the midrashic process is often based precisely upon these creative differences, upon "sacred argument," or *machloket* מחלוקת. The midrashic process addresses one over-arching reality of life: tension. Here, tension alludes to more than conflict. It refers far more broadly to wonderful worlds saturated with question marks. Life pushes and pulls in various directions, inspiring these sometimes difficult, sometimes exciting but always important tensions. Religious tensions. Cultural tensions. Linguistic tensions. Social tensions. All tensions in which one quality actually heightens a contrary quality. Midrash translates these tensions into a process of questioning. It will always gravitate to the question, contradiction, problem, inconsistency, curiosity. This is what gives midrash its pulse. The two-word Hebrew phrase that captures all of this is, simply, what is the 'problem'? *Ma Hakoshi?* מה הקושי? in Hebrew (plural, *kushiot* קושיות). "Problem" is also taken in the broadest, most fruitful and inspirational senses of the term. In everyday life we ask *Ma Hakoshi?* מה הקושי? all the time: when we walk down the street and see a crowd gathered, we ask *Ma Hakoshi?* מה הקושי?. When we are in the midst of a conversation that just doesn't feel right, we ask *Ma Hakoshi?* מה הקושי?. Whenever things in our life- be they objects or emotions, concrete or abstract- appear, disappear, or suddenly reappear, we invariably ask: what's going on here? *Ma Hakoshi?* מה הקושי?.

In classical rabbinic midrash this vital question is inspired by textual versions of these phenomena- inconsistencies (disappearances), curious repetitions (reappearances), gaps in time or logic, etc. Here, we ask: what are the *kushiot* קושיות that have struck us collectively, as a people, in different places and times? or, *Ma kasheh lanu*?

?מה קשה לנו.[2] In fact, we are about to see how classical midrashic *kushiot* קושיות can be organized into categories, which helps to identify and understand them. However, prior to probing the *kushiot* קושיות that our tradition has been asking long before our time, we must first orient *ourselves* to the text by asking: what is/are the *koshi/kushiot* קושי/קושיות that strike/s me in this text? or simply, *Ma Kasheh Li?* ?מה קשה לי. We submit that in order to make a text personally relevant, in order for it to have deep and lasting meaning, we must first name and appropriate our own questions, our own *kushiot* קושיות. It is of utmost significance that a Jewish reading of text embraces a certain process of *questioning*, rather than any particular set of answers. These are the categories that you will find listed on the *Ma Kasheh Li?* ?מה קשה לי pages:

1. **Is there superfluous language?**
   The rabbis believe that every word in the Bible is there for a precise purpose. When a word seems repetitive and/or synonymous, the rabbis always justify the existence of each word.

2. **Are there grammatical curiosities?**
   The rabbis respond to sentences with unexpected or incorrect grammar, such as unusual word order, awkward prepositions, illogical sentences, inconsistent verb tenses, or unclear pronouns.

3. **Are there theological or moral dilemmas?**
   The rabbis identify moments that raise questions about God's characteristics, God's role in the world, and how God is depicted in the Bible. They are also troubled by what seems to be breaches of moral or ethical conduct by God and/or human beings.

4. **Are there gaps in the text?**
   The rabbis are also intrigued by what is not in the text. In other words, when feelings, time spans, physical descriptions, conversations, etc. are not written in the text, they often fill in the gaps.

5. **Are there political or sociological issues?**
   The rabbis seek to render power dynamics among nations according to their worldview (e.g. putting Israel or Judaism at the center). Moreover, questions of ethnicity, gender, class, etc. prompt their investigation.

6. **Are there any other difficulties, "*kushiot*/קושיות?"**

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[2] Bibliographical information (including sources for translations of traditional commentators) for these pages can be found in the specific bibliographies for each *megillah* מגילה.

And it is the Torah, and all our texts that mediate the ongoing dialogue and process for us — that make the process Jewish for us. In a sense, "how Jews read the Torah" is by standing again, and again, and again, at Sinai, with our people, ourselves, and God. This reading brings complications and blessings. This is the midrashic process. It is an act of "critical faith". When we confront life "midrashically," we are asking: which questions will we ask? What tensions will inspire us to respond creatively? Which questions have more than one reasonable answer? What will we search for? Who are the friends and study partners - the *chevruta* חברותא - with whom we would like to engage in such probing? This process continues to this day as we engage in our own midrashic response to the question, "*Ma Kasheh Li*? ?מה קשה לי."

What's the Question?
מה קשה לי? *Mah Kasheh Li?*

TEMPLATE

[INSERT BIBLICAL TEXT IN HEBREW HERE]

[INSERT BIBLICAL TEXT IN ENGLISH HERE]

In the box below, you will find a list of principles for interpreting Torah. For each category, ask yourself: does this verse present a difficulty, a *koshi* קשי? If yes, please describe the *koshi* קשי.

1. **Is there superfluous language?**
   The rabbis believe that every word in the Bible is there for its own purpose. When a word seems repetitive and/or synonymous with another word, the rabbis always justify the existence of each word. In the quote above, do you think any words seem repetitive and/or synonymous?

2. **Are there grammatical curiosities?**
   The rabbis respond to sentences with unexpected or incorrect grammar, such as unusual word order, awkward prepositions, illogical sentences, inconsistent verb tenses, or unclear pronouns. In the quote above, is the grammar problematic?

3. **Are there theological or moral dilemmas?**
   The rabbis identify moments that raise questions about God's characteristics, God's role in the world, and how God is depicted in the Bible. They are also troubled by what seem to be breaches of moral or ethical conduct by God and/or human beings. In the quote above, do you find any theological or moral dilemmas?

4. **Are there gaps in the text?**
   The rabbis are also intrigued by what is not in the text. In other words, when feelings, time spans, physical descriptions, conversations, etc. are not written in the text, they often fill in the gaps. In the quote above, do you find anything missing from the text?

5. **Are there political or sociological issues?**
   The rabbis seek to render power dynamics among nations according to their worldview. Moreover, questions of ethnicity, gender, class, etc. prompt their investigation. In the quote above, are any of these kinds of issues relevant?

6. **Are there any other difficulties, *kushiot* קושיות?**

Write a creative response, a possible answer, to the *koshi* קשי that you find most interesting.

What's the Conversation?
מה קשה לנו? Mah Kasheh Lanu?

TEMPLATE

[INSERT BIBLICAL TEXT IN HEBREW HERE]

[INSERT BIBLICAL TEXT IN ENGLISH HERE]

On this page, several commentators respond to the following difficulty, or קשי:
INSERT THE קשי TO WHICH THE COMMENTATORS BELOW RESPOND

QUESTIONS

1. How does each commentator resolve the קשי?
2. How do their conclusions differ from one another?
3. How do you resolve the קשי? Add your voice as a "21st Century Commentator."

Insert Commentator Here

Insert Commentator Here

Insert Commentator Here

21st Century Commentator:

BIOGRAPHY & REFERENCE

INSERT BIOGRAPHICAL & REFERENCE INFORMATION HERE

What's the Connection?
מה הקשר? *Mah HaKesher?*

Torah is not meant to be lived
only in occasional moments and particular places.

"You shall speak of them in your home and on your way, when you lie down and when you rise up" (Deuteronomy 6:7). This famous verse from Deuteronomy, a verse we say every day in the *Shemah* שמע prayer, points to a fundamental truth about Judaism: Torah can be encountered in every moment and in every place. In a famous midrash on Psalm 95, Rabbi Joshua asks Elijah when the Messiah will come. Elijah sends him to the Roman city gate where the Messiah is seated. Rabbi Joshua goes there, finds the Messiah and asks him, "When will you come?" The Messiah answers him, "Today." Rabbi Joshua returns to Elijah and reports that the Messiah obviously lied to him. Elijah responds to Rabbi Joshua saying, "When he told you 'today' he was quoting the first word of a verse that goes on to say, '*If* you will hear God's voice.' (Psalms 95:7)" (Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 98a). In Many ways, Elijah's words to Rabbi Joshua stand before us today as a challenge: can we hear God's voice? Are we even listening?

Mah HaKesher? מה הקשר? invites us listen for Torah, for God's voice, in the world around us – the worlds of art and poetry, philosophy and even popular culture – and in the experiences of our own lives. Life informs our understanding of Torah and Torah informs our understanding of our lives. They are conversation partners and we are their matchmakers.

"*Mah Hakesher?*" "מה הקשר?" literally means, "what is the connection?" In a box on the top of each *Mah Hakesher* מה הקשר page you will find a text that has no

explicit connection to Song of Songs, the Book of Ruth, or the Book of Kohelet. It is a text (e.g. poem, art) that you might encounter somewhere in the wider world. These texts have been chosen because they reflect on the *megillot* מגילות and, more specifically, on particular themes within them. Likewise, the *megillot* מגילות reflect on these unrelated texts. With *Mah Hakesher* מה הקשר, we ask three questions:

1. **What is the connection between the *Mah HaKesher* מה הקשר text and the *megillah* מגילות?** When addressing this question, it might be helpful to think about how it is similar to and different from the theme as it is developed in the *megillah* מגילות?

2. **What is the connection between the *Mah HaKesher* מה הקשר text and the festival to which the *megillah* מגילות is connected?** In this case, try thinking about how the theme plays out on the festival and how the festival might be enhanced by the meanings imbedded in the *Mah HaKesher* מה הקשר text.

3. **What is the connection between the *MahHaKesher* מה הקשר text and your own life?** When considering this question, think about how the theme emerges in your life story. Your task is to think of something from your own experience that, in some way, connects with the theme of the book. In other words: what might you put in a blank box at the top of the page? After having done so, return to the first two questions and ask: how does your text connect to the *megillah* מגילות? How does your text connect to the festival?

After engaging these questions in this way, we hope that you will find echoes of the *megillot* מגילות all around you and that you will begin to hear words of Torah in the unexpected times and places.

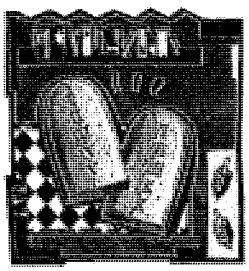
What's the Connection?
מה הקשר? *Mah HaKesher?*

Below you will find a picture [or poem, song, story, excerpt] that relates to the theme of [insert theme]. It is one of many possible ways to encounter the theme in our world.

Insert Picture [or poem, song, story, excerpt]

מה הקשר לרות?
Mah HaKesher to the Book of [Ruth, Kohelet, Song of Songs]:
What connections do you find between the picture above [or other] and the Book of [Ruth, Kohelet or Song of Songs]?

מה הקשר לחג?
Mah HaKesher to the Festival:
What connections do you find between the picture above and the festival?



Now is your chance to draw from your own experience and identify something you have encountered in your world (a conversation, an article in the newspaper, a story, a road trip, etc.) that connects to the book of Ruth [or Kohelet or Song of Songs]. How does your encounter shed light on the book of Ruth [or Kohelet or Song of Songs] and the holiday of Shavuot [or Sukkot or Pesach]?

What's Our Contribution?
?מה קישוט החג *Mah Kishut HeChag?*

We often understand Judaism as a pediatric religion because Judaism has a lot to offer children in terms of holiday celebrations. It is certainly wonderful that in religious schools throughout the country, young children decorate Sukkot, make Israeli flags and miniature Torahs on Simchat Torah, and plant trees on Tu'Bishvat. Although Jewish adults can participate in all of these activities, many desire deeper knowledge and richer experiences.

Although most Jewish adults feel competent in their chosen fields, when it comes to Jewish knowledge, many feel less competent because Jewish learning and experiences ended at age thirteen. At the same time Jewish adults in North America seem to be searching for ways to make life more meaningful. Many are involved with meditation groups through a local yoga center or find non-Jewish spiritual retreats because Jewish resources seem foreign. The fourth application page attempts to add meaning to the holiday celebrations through the lens of the scroll.

Unlike the other three application pages, this one differs for each theme, so we do not include a sample template. The page is titled "*What's Our Contribution? ?מה קישוט החג Mah Kishut HeChag?*"[1] The common link is that each page uses the given theme as a springboard for enhancing the holiday. We invite you to engage in new rituals, to compose journal exercises, to create new liturgy, and to do even more as a way to deepen your own sense of spirituality during the holidays. We hope the meaning you gain will serve you on your journey throughout the entire year.

[1] This phrase literally means "how is the holiday embellished or decorated."

What to Do with This Book

In the introduction, we have offered a rationale for (re-) introducing these *megillot* מגילות in modern Jewish life and we have suggested reasons for them to be (re-) integrated into your everyday life. Now, we send you on your way through them with hopes that you will discover for yourself more reasons to read the *megillot* מגילות and to love them.

You might choose to:

- Find a study partner and select one theme for each holiday.[1] As the holiday approaches, read the essay and then go through the application pages together. This process can be repeated for three more years until you have completed the book. After that, you can come up with your own themes and do it yourselves!
- Organize a day of learning for your community in preparation for a holiday. As part of the day, offer study groups that address each of the themes through mini-lessons based on the essays. Use the application pages for enrichment.
- Gather together a small group to learn the texts with a teacher. Bring in a Jewish educator, rabbi, or lay leader to guide you on your way through one theme for each holiday.
- If you are familiar with these *megillot* מגילות, you may use this book as a resource to help you prepare for teaching a class before or during each of the holidays.

Whatever way you choose to engage this material, we hope that you enjoy learning it and grow from your encounters with it.

[1] The essays are written in a fashion to make this option user-friendly. Therefore, the first time you encounter an author in each particular essay, we introduce the author and include complete bibliographical information.

Introduction:

Scroll of Song of Songs

מגילת שירים השירים

Love poetry. Lyrical expression that has inspired generations. In the Bible, the Song of Songs is the embodiment of this genre. It is the poetic dialogue of a pair of lovers – their moments of searching for one another, of finding one another, of delighting in one another. Readers have the opportunity to see the world through their eyes and, at times, to see them through the eyes of the world. Their story is one of courtship, but there is no simple plot. The lovers wander through the world and we, their readers, are invited to wander with them as they discover each other, and in doing so, reveal many wonders of love.

Literary Aspects

It is not easy to identify the literary structure of Song of Songs. Whereas with other books of the Bible, the structure of a book or story can be helpful in trying to discern its possible meanings, that is not necessarily the case with the Song. In the Song's case, precisely this lack of a coherent structure may define it and help to discern its meaning. As Michael Fox explains, "When all the data are registered, the Song presents not a neat schema of interconnections, not an overall schematic design, but a tangle of parallels, cross-references, and echoes."[1] He continues,

> ...to compensate for the looseness of structure, the poem achieves a unity through coherence of thematic and verbal texture. The Song takes a single romance and turns it around and around like a gem, displaying all its facets. The reader finally sees the gem as a whole, and the order in which the facets were shown does not much matter.[2]

[1] Michael V. Fox, The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985) 209.
[2] Fox 226.

Francis Landy assents by saying, "There is no 'story' in the Song, no truth, only a set of anecdotes, hovering between reality and a dream, that exemplify the relationships of lovers."[3] The very absence of an overall structure[4] sets the Song apart from much of the rest of the Bible and is one of its unique, and perhaps defining, characteristics.

It has been proposed that the genre of the Song is a drama, an idyll, an anthology, or a unified song.[5] Marcia Falk, for example, understands it to be a collection of love poems, whereas Ariel Bloch and Chana Bloch sees it as a play with two main characters and two choruses. The majority view at this point appears to be that the Song is a love poem, not unlike the love poetry of ancient Egypt or ancient Sumer.[6] This most general classification as a love poem "has the advantage of emphasizing the themes and motifs that are not only the common stock of the Song's poetry but are expressive of universal human experiences of love."[7]

Historical Aspects

There are two main questions with regard to its historical setting: who wrote the Song and when? There is no clear answer to either question. Tradition ascribes the Song to King Solomon, per the superscription that says, "The Song of Songs which is Solomon's" (Song 1:1) and the wealth and luxury portrayed throughout the Song

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[3] Francis Landy, "The Song of Songs," The Literary Guide to the Bible, ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987) 316.

[4] Note, though, that the absence of a structure does not mean the absence of discrete units. Rather, the Song is replete with such literary units. However, the units do not coalesce into a complete, coherent structure.

[5] Marvin H. Pope, Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, volume 7C of The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1977) 34.

[6] Sumerian civilization flourished from 3000-2000 BCE. Note also that *love* poetry is a different genre than *wedding* poetry.

[7] Roland E. Murphy, The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990) 60.

(characteristics of Solomon's time). That most literal reading, however, is challenged by current scholarship.[8] Both Michael Fox and the Blochs assert that the book's final shape was probably formed late, most likely in the post-exilic period and, more specifically, in the Hellenistic period.[9] Marvin Pope articulates the ambiguity of the book's date when he writes, "The dating game as played with biblical books like Job and the Song of Songs, as well as with many of the Psalms, remains imprecise.... There are grounds for both the oldest and the youngest estimates."[10] We would suggest as well that the indeterminate date, like the indeterminate structure, might be the work of a masterful poet trying to communicate, as Fox says, that "the events [the Song] describes are not of a particular time."[11] The Song could be placed anywhere and anyone can read him or herself into its story.

These thoughts notwithstanding, there are two things we can say with relative certainty about the Song. First of all, fragments of the Song were found at Qumran, so we can be sure that it attained some status before the first century C.E.[12] In addition, the first definite reference to the Song in rabbinic literature is in the Mishnah so we can assume, again, that it had secured a place in the canon by 100 C.E.[13] Second, the Song shares some common characteristics with ancient Egyptian love poetry[14] and ancient

[8] Instead of reading the superscription (1:1) as an indication Solomon's authorship, it could alternately be understood as, for example, being *dedicated* to him or *about* him.
[9] Ariel Bloch and Chana Bloch, The Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary (New York: Random House, 1995) 23, 25, 27 and Fox 190. The first exile occurred in 586 BCE, and the post-exilic period is dated from the late 4th century BCE to the 1st century BCE.
[10] Pope 27.
[11] Fox 191.
[12] Fox 189.
[13] Murphy 6.
[14] Fox

Sumerian love poetry[15], as well as possibly with ancient Indian poetry.[16] This indicates that the Song likely had a long pre-history.

The identity of the author of the Song is similarly mysterious. If it was not Solomon, as most scholars now agree, then we do not know who wrote it. Andre LaCocque, in his book Romance She Wrote, advances the unusual suggestion that a woman wrote the Song of Songs. All suggestions, however, remain hypotheses at this point and it is likely that the author of the Song will remain unknown.

[15] Murphy 48.
[16] Pope 27-33.

Introduction to Pesach

"In each and every generation, it is incumbent upon each person to see him/herself as if s/he personally went out from Egypt" (Mishnah Pesachim 10:5).

Song of Songs is traditionally read on the festival of Passover, known by its Hebrew name *Pesach* פסח.[17] Pesach invites us, through its stories and rituals, to re-experience the Jewish people's liberation from Egyptian slavery. At the ceremonial meal, or *seder* סדר, that begins the festival, we journey with the children of Israel from slavery to freedom, or *me-avdut l'cherut* מעבדות לחרות, as they – and we – move from the shackles of slavery to the songs of freedom. Throughout the days of the festival, we eat unleavened bread, or *matzah* מצה, that recalls the food our ancestors ate as they made this historic passage. And then, by counting the Omer, the 49 days between Pesach and Shavuot, we continue traveling with them from the shores of freedom to the moment of revelation at Mount Sinai: from redemption to revelation, from serving Pharoah to serving God. By seeing ourselves as if we went out from Egypt alongside our ancestors, we become more than onlookers to our past. We bring that past into the present. We become participants in our own story.

Pesach is fundamentally about redemption and freedom. Like the other festivals, or *regalim* רגלים, however, it is also about connecting with the cycles of nature. Pesach celebrates spring and with it, the rebirth of the land. Like the children of Israel who pass through the split seas to a new life of freedom, so too the rains allow new life to burst through the ground after the barrenness of winter.

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[17] *Pesach* פסח comes from a Hebrew root that means "to pass over." The name of the holiday therefore indicates that God "passed over" the houses of the Israelites during the night of the terrible tenth plague.

"You shall observe the [Feast of] Unleavened Bread, for on this very day I brought your ranks out of the land of Egypt; you shall observe this day throughout the ages as an institution for all time" (Exodus 12:17). As part of the observation of this day, the Rabbis decreed that Song of Songs be read. They understood the Exodus from Egypt to be an expression of God's great love for Israel, a love that is embodied in the words of the Song. The period of the Exodus, beginning with Pesach, and moving towards Shavuot, is the period of courting between God and Israel, only to reach fulfillment at Mount Sinai 50 days later. On Pesach, the children of Israel meet their Lover.

Please refer to the festivals bibliography on page 340 where you will discover a vast array of classical and modern midrashim and commentaries about all aspects — practices, beliefs, and history — of the three pilgrimmage festivals, Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot.

[17] *Pesach* פסח comes from a Hebrew root that means "to pass over." The name of the holiday therefore indicates that God "passed over" the houses of the Israelites during the night of the terrible tenth plague.

The Song of Songs[1]

Chapter 1

1 The Song of Songs which is Solomon's. 2 *Kiss me, make me drunk with your kisses! Your sweet loving is better than wine,* 3 *you are fragrant, you are myrrh and aloes. All the young women want you.* 4 *Take me by the hand, let us run together! My lover, my king, has brought be into his chambers. We will laugh, you and I, and count each kiss, better than wine. Every one of them wants you.* 5 *I am dark, daughters of Jerusalem, and I am beautiful! Dark as the tents of Kedar, lavish as Solomon's tapestries.* 6 *Do not see me only as dark: the sun has stared at me. My brothers were angry with me, they made me guard the vineyards. I have not guarded my own.* 7 *Tell me, my only love, where do you pasture your sheep, where will you let them rest in the heat of noon? Why should I lose my way among the flocks of your companions?* 8 Loveliest of women, if you lose your way, follow in the tracks of the sheep, graze your goats in the shade of the shepherds' tents. 9 My love, I dreamed of you as a mare, my very own, among Pharoah's chariots. 10 Your cheekbones, those looped earrings, that string of beads at your throat! 11 I will make you golden earrings with silver filigree. 12 *My king lay down beside me and my fragrance wakened the night.* 13 *All night between my breasts my love is a cluster of myrrh,* 14 *a sheaf of henna blossoms in the vineyards of Ein Gedi.* 15 And you, my beloved, how beautiful you are! Your eyes are doves. 16 *You are beautiful, my king, and gentle. Wherever we lie our bed is green.* 17 *Our roofbeams are cedar, our rafters fir.*

Chapter 2

1 *I am the rose of Sharon, the wild lily of the valleys.* 2 Like a lily in a field of thistles, such is my love among the young women. 3 *And my beloved among the young men is a branching apricot tree in the wood. In that shade I have often lingered, tasting the fruit.* 4 *Now he has brought me to the house of wine and his flag over me is love.* 5 *Let me lie among vine blossoms, in a bed of apricots! I am in the fever of love.* 6 *His left hand beneath my head, his right arm holding me close.* 7 *Daughters of Jerusalem, swear to me by the gazelles, by the deer in the field, that you will never awaken love until it is ripe.* 8 *The voice of my love: listen! Bounding over the mountains toward me, across the hills.* 9 *My love is a gazelle, a wild stag. There he stands on the other side of our wall, gazing between the stones.* 10 *And he calls to me:* Hurry, my love, my friend, and come away! 11 Look, winter is over, the rains are done, 12 wildflowers spring up in the fields. Now is the time of the nightingale. In every meadow you hear the song of the turtledove. 13 The fig tree has sweetened its new green fruit and the young budded vines smell spicy. Hurry, my love, my friend come away. My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the shadow

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[1] This translation follows that of Ariel Bloch and Chana Bloch, The Song of Songs: A New Translation (New York: Random House, 1995). According to their reading, everything in *italics* is spoken by the young woman; everything in Roman is spoken by the young man; everything in ***italics*** is spoken by the daughters of Jerusalem; and everything in **Roman** is spoken by the brothers. These typefaces are helpful in discerning the various voices in the Song, though there is by no means scholarly consensus about the voices and their lines. This is one valuable suggestion, put forth by Bloch and Bloch, but it is important to recognize that there are other possibilities.

of the cliff, let me see you, all of you! Let me hear your voice, your delicious song. I love to look at you. 15 **Catch us the foxes, the quick little foxes that raid our vineyards now, when the vines are in blossom.** 16 *My beloved is mine and I am his. He feasts in a field of lilies.* 17 *Before day breathes, before the shadows of night are gone, run away, my love! Be like a gazelle, a wild stag on the jagged mountains.*

Chapter 3

1 *At night in my bed I longed for my only love. I sought him, but did not find him.* 2 *I must rise and go about the city, the narrow streets and squares, till I find my only love. I sought him everywhere but could not find him.* 3 *Then the watchmen found me as they went about the city. "Have you seen him? Have you seen the one I love?"* 4 *I had just passed them when I found my only love. I held him, I would not let him go until I brought him to my mother's house, into my mother's room.* 5 *Daughters of Jerusalem, swear to me by the gazelles, by the deer in the field, that you will never awaken love until it is ripe.* 6 ***Who is that rising from the desert like a pillar of smoke, more fragrant with myrrh and frankincense than all the spices of the merchant!*** 7 *Oh the splendors of King Solomon! The bravest of Israel surround his bed, threescore warriors,* 8 *each of them skilled in battle, each with his sword on his thigh against the terror of night.* 9 *King Solomon built a pavilion from the cedars of Lebanon.* 10 *Its pillars he made of silver, cushions of gold, couches of purple linen, and the daughters of Jerusalem paved it with love.* 11 *Come out, O daughters of Zion, and gaze at Solomon the King! See the crown his mother set on his head on the day of his wedding, the day of his heart's great joy.*

Chapter 4

1 How beautiful you are, my love, my friend! The doves of your eyes looking out from the thicket of your hair. Your hair like a flock of goats bounding down Mount Gilead. 2 Your teeth white ewes, all alike, that come up fresh from the pond. 3 A crimson ribbon your lips – how I listen for your voice! The curve of your cheek a pomegranate in the thicket of your hair. 4 Your neck is a tower of David raised in splendor, a thousand bucklers hang upon it, all the shields of the warriors. 5 Your breasts are two fawns, twins of a gazelle, grazing in a field of lilies. 6 Before day breathes, before the shadows of night are gone, I will hurry to the mountain of myrrh, the hill of frankincense. 7 You are all beautiful, my love, my perfect one. 8 Oh come with me, my bride, come down with me from Lebanon. Look down from the peak of Amana, look down from Senir and Hermon, from the mountains of the leopards, the lions' dens. 9 You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride, ravished me with one glance of your eyes, one link of your necklace. 10 And oh, your sweet loving, my sister, my bride. The wine of your kisses, the spice of your fragrant oils. 11 Your lips are honey, honey and milk are under your tongue, your clothes hold the scent of Lebanon. 12 An enclosed garden is my sister, my bride, a hidden well, a sealed spring. 13 Your branches are an orchard of pomegranate trees heavy with fruit, flowering henna and spikenard, 14 spikenard and saffron, cane and cinnamon, with every tree of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, all the rare spices. 15 You are a fountain in the garden, a well of living waters that stream from Lebanon. 16 *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.*

Chapter 5

1 I have come into my garden, my sister, my bride, I have gathered my myrrh and my spices, I have eaten from the honeycomb, I have drunk the milk and the wine. Feast, friends, and drink till you are drunk with love! 2 *I was asleep but my heart stayed awake. Listen! My lover knocking:* "Open, my sister, my friend, my dove, my perfect one! My hair is wet, drenched with the dew of night." 3 *"But I have taken off my clothes, how can I dress again? I have bathed my feet, must I dirty them?"* 4 *My love reached in for the latch and my heart beat wild.* 5 *I rose to open to my love, my fingers wet with myrrh, sweet flowing myrrh on the doorbolt.* 6 *I opened to my love but he had slipped away. How I wanted him when he spoke! I sought him everywhere but could not find him. I called his name but he did not answer.* 7 *Then the watchmen found me as they went about the city. The beat me, they bruised me, they tore the shawl from my shoulders, those watchmen of the walls.* 8 *Swear to me, daughters of Jerusalem! If you find him now you must tell him I am in the fever of love.* 9 ***How is your lover different from any other, O beautiful woman? Who is your lover that we must swear to you?*** 10 *My beloved is milk and wine, he towers above ten thousand.* 11 *His head is burnished gold, the mane of his hair black as the raven.* 12 *His eyes like doves by the rivers of milk and plenty.* 13 *His cheeks a bed of spices, a treasure of precious scents, his lips red lilies wet with myrrh.* 14 *His arm a golden scepter with gems of topaz, his loins the ivory of thrones inlaid with sapphire,* 15 *his thighs like marble pillars on pedestals of gold. Tall as Mount Lebanon, a man like a cedar!* 16 *His mouth is sweet wine, he is all delight. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.*

Chapter 6

1 ***Where has your lover gone, O beautiful one? Say where he is and we will seek him with you.*** 2 *My love has gone down to his garden, to the beds of spices, to graze and gather lilies.* 3 *My beloved is mine and I am his. He feasts in a field of lilies.* 4 You are beautiful, my love, as Tirzah, majestic as Jerusalem, daunting as the stars in their courses. 5 Your eyes! Turn them away for they dazzle me. Your hair is like a flock of goats bounding down Mount Gilead. 6 Your teeth white ewes, all alike, that come up fresh from the pond. 7 The curve of your cheek a pomegranate in your thicket of hair. 8 Threescore are the queens, fourscore the king's women, and maidens, maidens without number. 9 One alone is my dove, my perfect, my only one, love of her mother, light of her mother's eyes. Every maiden calls her happy, queens praise her, and all the king's women: 10 ***"Who is that rising like the morning star, clear as the moon, bright as the blazing sun, daunting as the stars in their courses!"*** 11 Then I went down to the walnut grove to see the new green by the brook, to see if the vine had budded, if the pomegranate trees were in flower. 12 And oh! Before I was aware, she sat me in the most lavish of chariots.

Chapter 7

1 ***Again, O Shulamite, dance again, that we may watch you dancing! Why do you gaze at the Shulamite as she whirls down the rows of dancers?*** 2 How graceful your steps in those sandals, O nobleman's daughter. The gold of your thigh shaped by a master craftsman. 3 Your navel is the moon's bright drinking cup. May it brim with wine!

Your belly is a mound of wheat edged with lilies. 4 Your breasts are two fawns, twins of a gazelle. 5 Your neck is a tower of ivory. Your eyes are pools in Heshbon, at the gates of that city of lords. Your proud nose the tower of Lebanon that looks toward Damascus. 6 Your head crowns you like Mount Carmel, the hair of your head like royal purple. A king is caught in the thicket. 7 How wonderful you are, O love, how much sweeter than all other pleasures! 8 That day you seemed to me a tall palm tree and your breasts the clusters of its fruit. 9 I said in my heart, let me climb into that palm tree and take hold of its branches. And oh, may your breasts by like clusters of grapes on a vine, the scent of your breath like apricots, 10 your mouth good wine – *that pleases my lover, rousing him even from sleep.* 11 *I am my lover's, he longs for me, only for me.* 12 *Come, my beloved, let us go out into the fields and lie all night among the flowering henna.* 13 *Let us go early to the vineyards to see if the vine has budded, if the blossoms have opened and the pomegranate is in flower. There I will give you my love.* 14 *The air is filled with the scent of mandrakes and at our doors rare fruit of every kind, my love, I have stored away for you.*

Chapter 8

1 *If only you were a brother who nursed at my mother's breast! I would kiss you in the streets and no one would scorn me.* 2 *I would bring you to the house of my mother and she would teach me. I would give you spiced wine to drink, my pomegranate wine.* 3 *His left hand beneath my head, his right arm holding me close.* 4 *Daughters of Jerusalem, swear to me that you will never awaken love until it is ripe.* 5 ***Who is that rising from the desert, her head on her lover's shoulder!*** 6 *There, beneath the apricot tree, your mother conceived you, there you were born. In that very place, I awakened you.* 6 *Bind me as a seal upon your heart, a sign upon your arm, for love is fierce as death, its jealousy bitter as the grave. Even its sparks are a raging fire, a devouring flame.* 7 *Great seas cannot extinguish love, no river can sweep it away. If a man tried to buy love with all the wealth of his house, he would be despised.* 8 **We have a little sister and she has no breasts. What shall we do for our sister when suitors besiege her?** 9 **If she is a wall, we will build a silver turret upon her. If she is a door, we will bolt her with beams of cedarwood.** 10 *I am a wall and my breasts are towers. But for my lover I am a city of peace.* 11 King Solomon had a vineyard on the Hill of Plenty. He gave that vineyard to watchmen and each would earn for its fruit one thousand pieces of silver. 12 My vineyard is all my own. Keep your thousand, Solomon! And pay two hundred to those who must guard the fruit. 13 O woman in the garden, all our friends listen for your voice. Let me hear it now. 14 *Hurry, my love! Run away, my gazelle, my wild stag on the hills of cinnamon.*

שיר שירים

פרק א

א שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים אֲשֶׁר לִשְׁלֹמֹה׃ ב יִשָּׁקֵנִי מִנְּשִׁיקוֹת פִּיהוּ כִּי־טוֹבִים דֹּדֶיךָ מִיָּיִן׃ ג לְרֵיחַ שְׁמָנֶיךָ
טוֹבִים שֶׁמֶן תּוּרַק שְׁמֶךָ עַל־כֵּן עֲלָמוֹת אֲהֵבוּךָ׃ ד מָשְׁכֵנִי אַחֲרֶיךָ נָּרוּצָה הֱבִיאַנִי הַמֶּלֶךְ חֲדָרָיו
נָגִילָה וְנִשְׂמְחָה בָּךְ נַזְכִּירָה דֹדֶיךָ מִיַּיִן מֵישָׁרִים אֲהֵבוּךָ׃ ה שְׁחוֹרָה אֲנִי וְנָאוָה בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלָם
כְּאָהֳלֵי קֵדָר כִּירִיעוֹת שְׁלֹמֹה׃ ו אַל־תִּרְאוּנִי שֶׁאֲנִי שְׁחַרְחֹרֶת שֶׁשְּׁזָפַתְנִי הַשָּׁמֶשׁ בְּנֵי אִמִּי נִחֲרוּ־בִי

שָׂמֻנִי נֹטֵרָה אֶת־הַכְּרָמִים כַּרְמִי שֶׁלִּי לֹא נָטָרְתִּי: ז הַגִּידָה לִּי שֶׁאָהֲבָה נַפְשִׁי אֵיכָה תִרְעֶה אֵיכָה
תַּרְבִּיץ בַּצָּהֳרָיִם שֶׁלָּמָּה אֶהְיֶה כְּעֹטִיָּה עַל עֶדְרֵי חֲבֵרֶיךָ: ח אִם־לֹא תֵדְעִי לָךְ הַיָּפָה בַּנָּשִׁים
צְאִי־לָךְ בְּעִקְבֵי הַצֹּאן וּרְעִי אֶת־גְּדִיֹּתַיִךְ עַל מִשְׁכְּנוֹת הָרֹעִים: ט לְסֻסָתִי בְּרִכְבֵי פַרְעֹה
דִּמִּיתִיךְ רַעְיָתִי: י נָאווּ לְחָיַיִךְ בַּתֹּרִים צַוָּארֵךְ בַּחֲרוּזִים: יא תּוֹרֵי זָהָב נַעֲשֶׂה־לָּךְ עִם נְקֻדּוֹת
הַכָּסֶף: יב עַד־שֶׁהַמֶּלֶךְ בִּמְסִבּוֹ נִרְדִּי נָתַן רֵיחוֹ: יג צְרוֹר הַמֹּר | דּוֹדִי לִי בֵּין שָׁדַי יָלִין: יד אֶשְׁכֹּל
הַכֹּפֶר | דּוֹדִי לִי בְּכַרְמֵי עֵין גֶּדִי: טו הִנָּךְ יָפָה רַעְיָתִי הִנָּךְ יָפָה עֵינַיִךְ יוֹנִים: טז הִנְּךָ יָפֶה דוֹדִי
אַף נָעִים אַף־עַרְשֵׂנוּ רַעֲנָנָה: יז קֹרוֹת בָּתֵּינוּ אֲרָזִים רַהִיטֵנוּ [רַחִיטֵנוּ] בְּרוֹתִים:

פרק ב

א אֲנִי חֲבַצֶּלֶת הַשָּׁרוֹן שׁוֹשַׁנַּת הָעֲמָקִים: ב כְּשׁוֹשַׁנָּה בֵּין הַחוֹחִים כֵּן רַעְיָתִי בֵּין הַבָּנוֹת: ג כְּתַפּוּחַ
בַּעֲצֵי הַיַּעַר כֵּן דוֹדִי בֵּין הַבָּנִים בְּצִלּוֹ חִמַּדְתִּי וְיָשַׁבְתִּי וּפִרְיוֹ מָתוֹק לְחִכִּי: ד הֱבִיאַנִי אֶל־בֵּית הַיָּיִן
וְדִגְלוֹ עָלַי אַהֲבָה: ה סַמְּכוּנִי בָּאֲשִׁישׁוֹת רַפְּדוּנִי בַּתַּפּוּחִים כִּי־חוֹלַת אַהֲבָה אָנִי: ו שְׂמֹאלוֹ תַּחַת
לְרֹאשִׁי וימינו [וִימִינוֹ] תְּחַבְּקֵנִי: ז הִשְׁבַּעְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם בִּצְבָאוֹת אוֹ בְּאַיְלוֹת הַשָּׂדֶה
אִם־תָּעִירוּ | וְאִם־תְּעוֹרְרוּ אֶת־הָאַהֲבָה עַד שֶׁתֶּחְפָּץ: ח קוֹל דּוֹדִי הִנֵּה־זֶה בָּא מְדַלֵּג
עַל־הֶהָרִים מְקַפֵּץ עַל־הַגְּבָעוֹת: ט דּוֹמֶה דוֹדִי לִצְבִי אוֹ לְעֹפֶר הָאַיָּלִים הִנֵּה־זֶה עוֹמֵד אַחַר
כָּתְלֵנוּ מַשְׁגִּיחַ מִן־הַחַלֹּנוֹת מֵצִיץ מִן־הַחֲרַכִּים: י עָנָה דוֹדִי וְאָמַר לִי קוּמִי לָךְ רַעְיָתִי יָפָתִי
וּלְכִי־לָךְ: יא כִּי־הִנֵּה הַסְּתָו [הַסְּתָיו] עָבָר הַגֶּשֶׁם חָלַף הָלַךְ לוֹ: יב הַנִּצָּנִים נִרְאוּ בָאָרֶץ עֵת
הַזָּמִיר הִגִּיעַ וְקוֹל הַתּוֹר נִשְׁמַע בְּאַרְצֵנוּ: יג הַתְּאֵנָה חָנְטָה פַגֶּיהָ וְהַגְּפָנִים | סְמָדַר נָתְנוּ רֵיחַ קוּמִי
לָכִי [לָךְ] רַעְיָתִי יָפָתִי וּלְכִי־לָךְ: יד יוֹנָתִי בְּחַגְוֵי הַסֶּלַע בְּסֵתֶר הַמַּדְרֵגָה הַרְאִינִי אֶת־מַרְאַיִךְ
הַשְׁמִיעִנִי אֶת־קוֹלֵךְ כִּי־קוֹלֵךְ עָרֵב וּמַרְאַיִךְ נָאוֶה: טו אֶחֱזוּ־לָנוּ שׁוּעָלִים שׁוּעָלִים קְטַנִּים
מְחַבְּלִים כְּרָמִים וּכְרָמֵינוּ סְמָדַר: טז דּוֹדִי לִי וַאֲנִי לוֹ הָרֹעֶה בַּשּׁוֹשַׁנִּים: יז עַד שֶׁיָּפוּחַ הַיּוֹם וְנָסוּ
הַצְּלָלִים סֹב דְּמֵה־לְךָ דוֹדִי לִצְבִי אוֹ לְעֹפֶר הָאַיָּלִים עַל־הָרֵי בָתֶר:

פרק ג

א עַל־מִשְׁכָּבִי בַּלֵּילוֹת בִּקַּשְׁתִּי אֵת שֶׁאָהֲבָה נַפְשִׁי בִּקַּשְׁתִּיו וְלֹא מְצָאתִיו: ב אָקוּמָה נָּא
וַאֲסוֹבְבָה בָעִיר בַּשְּׁוָקִים וּבָרְחֹבוֹת אֲבַקְשָׁה אֵת שֶׁאָהֲבָה נַפְשִׁי בִּקַּשְׁתִּיו וְלֹא מְצָאתִיו:
ג מְצָאוּנִי הַשֹּׁמְרִים הַסֹּבְבִים בָּעִיר אֵת שֶׁאָהֲבָה נַפְשִׁי רְאִיתֶם: ד כִּמְעַט שֶׁעָבַרְתִּי מֵהֶם עַד
שֶׁמָּצָאתִי אֵת שֶׁאָהֲבָה נַפְשִׁי אֲחַזְתִּיו וְלֹא אַרְפֶּנּוּ עַד־שֶׁהֲבֵיאתִיו אֶל־בֵּית אִמִּי וְאֶל־חֶדֶר הוֹרָתִי:
ה הִשְׁבַּעְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם בִּצְבָאוֹת אוֹ בְּאַיְלוֹת הַשָּׂדֶה אִם־תָּעִירוּ | וְאִם־תְּעוֹרְרוּ
אֶת־הָאַהֲבָה עַד שֶׁתֶּחְפָּץ: ו מִי זֹאת עֹלָה מִן־הַמִּדְבָּר כְּתִימֲרוֹת עָשָׁן מְקֻטֶּרֶת מוֹר וּלְבוֹנָה
מִכֹּל אַבְקַת רוֹכֵל: ז הִנֵּה מִטָּתוֹ שֶׁלִּשְׁלֹמֹה שִׁשִּׁים גִּבֹּרִים סָבִיב לָהּ מִגִּבֹּרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: ח כֻּלָּם אֲחֻזֵי
חֶרֶב מְלֻמְּדֵי כֶ֫לְחָמָה אִישׁ חַרְבּוֹ עַל־יְרֵכוֹ מִפַּחַד בַּלֵּילוֹת: ט אַפִּרְיוֹן עָשָׂה לוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ
שְׁלֹמֹה מֵעֲצֵי הַלְּבָנוֹן: י עַמּוּדָיו עָשָׂה כֶסֶף רְפִידָתוֹ זָהָב מֶרְכָּבוֹ אַרְגָּמָן תּוֹכוֹ רָצוּף אַהֲבָה
מִבְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלִָ֫ם: יא צְאֶינָה | וּרְאֶינָה בְּנוֹת צִיּוֹן בַּמֶּלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה בָּעֲטָרָה שֶׁעִטְּרָה־לּוֹ אִמּוֹ בְּיוֹם
חֲתֻנָּתוֹ וּבְיוֹם שִׂמְחַת לִבּוֹ:

פרק ד

א הִנָּךְ יָפָה רַעְיָתִי הִנָּךְ יָפָה עֵינַיִךְ יוֹנִים מִבַּעַד לְצַמָּתֵךְ שַׂעְרֵךְ כְּעֵדֶר הָעִזִּים שֶׁגָּלְשׁוּ מֵהַר גִּלְעָד:
ב שִׁנַּיִךְ כְּעֵדֶר הַקְּצוּבוֹת שֶׁעָלוּ מִן־הָרַחְצָה שֶׁכֻּלָּם מַתְאִימוֹת וְשַׁכֻּלָה אֵין בָּהֶם: ג כְּחוּט הַשָּׁנִי
שִׂפְתוֹתַיִךְ וּמִדְבָּרֵיךְ נָאוֶה כְּפֶלַח הָרִמּוֹן רַקָּתֵךְ מִבַּעַד לְצַמָּתֵךְ: ד כְּמִגְדַּל דָּוִיד צַוָּארֵךְ בָּנוּי
לְתַלְפִּיּוֹת אֶלֶף הַמָּגֵן תָּלוּי עָלָיו כֹּל שִׁלְטֵי הַגִּבּוֹרִים: ה שְׁנֵי שָׁדַיִךְ כִּשְׁנֵי עֳפָרִים תְּאוֹמֵי צְבִיָּה

הָרוֹעִים בַּשּׁוֹשַׁנִּים׃ ו עַד שֶׁיָּפוּחַ הַיּוֹם וְנָסוּ הַצְּלָלִים אֵ֣לֶךְ לִי אֶל־הַר הַמּוֹר וְאֶל־גִּבְעַת הַלְּבוֹנָה׃
ז כֻּלָּךְ יָפָה רַעְיָתִי וּמוּם אֵין בָּךְ׃ ח אִתִּי מִלְּבָנוֹן כַּלָּה אִתִּי מִלְּבָנוֹן תָּבוֹאִי תָּשׁוּרִי | מֵרֹאשׁ
אֲמָנָה מֵרֹאשׁ שְׂנִיר וְחֶרְמוֹן מִמְּעֹנוֹת אֲרָיוֹת מֵהַרְרֵי נְמֵרִים׃ ט לִבַּבְתִּנִי אֲחֹתִי כַּלָּה לִבַּבְתִּינִי
בְּאַחַד [בְּאַחַת] מֵעֵינַיִךְ בְּאַחַד עָנָק מִצַּוְּרֹנָיִךְ׃ י מַה־יָּפוּ דֹדַיִךְ אֲחֹתִי כַּלָּה מַה־טֹּבוּ דֹדַיִךְ מִיַּיִן
וְרֵיחַ שְׁמָנַיִךְ מִכָּל־בְּשָׂמִים׃ יא נֹפֶת תִּטֹּפְנָה שִׂפְתוֹתַיִךְ כַּלָּה דְּבַשׁ וְחָלָב תַּחַת לְשׁוֹנֵךְ וְרֵיחַ
שַׂלְמֹתַיִךְ כְּרֵיחַ לְבָנוֹן׃ יב גַּן | נָעוּל אֲחֹתִי כַּלָּה גַּל נָעוּל מַעְיָן חָתוּם׃ יג שְׁלָחַיִךְ פַּרְדֵּס רִמּוֹנִים
עִם פְּרִי מְגָדִים כְּפָרִים עִם־נְרָדִים׃ יד נֵרְדְּ | וְכַרְכֹּם קָנֶה וְקִנָּמוֹן עִם כָּל־עֲצֵי לְבוֹנָה מֹר וַאֲהָלוֹת
עִם כָּל־רָאשֵׁי בְשָׂמִים׃ טו מַעְיַן גַּנִּים בְּאֵר מַיִם חַיִּים וְנֹזְלִים מִן־לְבָנוֹן׃ טז עוּרִי צָפוֹן וּבוֹאִי
תֵימָן הָפִיחִי גַּנִּי יִזְּלוּ בְשָׂמָיו יָבֹא דוֹדִי לְגַנּוֹ וְיֹאכַל פְּרִי מְגָדָיו׃

פרק ה

א בָּאתִי לְגַנִּי אֲחֹתִי כַּלָּה אָרִיתִי מוֹרִי עִם־בְּשָׂמִי אָכַלְתִּי יַעְרִי עִם־דִּבְשִׁי שָׁתִיתִי יֵינִי עִם־חֲלָבִי
אִכְלוּ רֵעִים שְׁתוּ וְשִׁכְרוּ דּוֹדִים׃ ב אֲנִי יְשֵׁנָה וְלִבִּי עֵר קוֹל | דּוֹדִי דוֹפֵק פִּתְחִי־לִי אֲחֹתִי
רַעְיָתִי יוֹנָתִי תַּמָּתִי שֶׁהִאשִׁי נִמְלָא־טָל קְוֻצּוֹתַי רְסִיסֵי לָיְלָה׃ ג פָּשַׁטְתִּי אֶת־כֻּתָּנְתִּי אֵיכָכָה
אֶלְבָּשֶׁנָּה רָחַצְתִּי אֶת־רַגְלַי אֵיכָכָה אֲטַנְּפֵם׃ ד דּוֹדִי שָׁלַח יָדוֹ מִן־הַחֹר וּמֵעַי הָמוּ עָלָיו׃ ה קַמְתִּי
אֲנִי לְפְתֹחַ לְדוֹדִי וְיָדַי נָטְפוּ־מוֹר וְאֶצְבְּעֹתַי מוֹר עֹבֵר עַל כַּפּוֹת הַמַּנְעוּל׃ ו פָּתַחְתִּי אֲנִי לְדוֹדִי
וְדוֹדִי חָמַק עָבָר נַפְשִׁי יָצְאָה בְדַבְּרוֹ בִּקַּשְׁתִּיהוּ וְלֹא מְצָאתִיהוּ קְרָאתִיו וְלֹא עָנָנִי׃ ז מְצָאַנִי
הַשֹּׁמְרִים הַסֹּבְבִים בָּעִיר הִכּוּנִי פְצָעוּנִי נָשְׂאוּ אֶת־רְדִידִי מֵעָלַי שֹׁמְרֵי הַחֹמוֹת׃ ח הִשְׁבַּעְתִּי
אֶתְכֶם בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלִָם אִם־תִּמְצְאוּ אֶת־דּוֹדִי מַה־תַּגִּידוּ לוֹ שֶׁחוֹלַת אַהֲבָה אָנִי׃ ט מַה־דּוֹדֵךְ
מִדּוֹד הַיָּפָה בַּנָּשִׁים מַה־דּוֹדֵךְ מִדּוֹד שֶׁכָּכָה הִשְׁבַּעְתָּנוּ׃ י דּוֹדִי צַח וְאָדוֹם דָּגוּל מֵרְבָבָה׃
יא רֹאשׁוֹ כֶּתֶם פָּז קְוֻצּוֹתָיו תַּלְתַּלִּים שְׁחֹרוֹת כָּעוֹרֵב׃ יב עֵינָיו כְּיוֹנִים עַל־אֲפִיקֵי מָיִם רֹחֲצוֹת
בֶּחָלָב יְשֻׁבוֹת עַל־מִלֵּאת׃ יג לְחָיָו כַּעֲרוּגַת הַבֹּשֶׂם מִגְדְּלוֹת מֶרְקָחִים שִׂפְתוֹתָיו שׁוֹשַׁנִּים נֹטְפוֹת
מוֹר עֹבֵר׃ יד יָדָיו גְּלִילֵי זָהָב מְמֻלָּאִים בַּתַּרְשִׁישׁ מֵעָיו עֶשֶׁת שֵׁן מְעֻלֶּפֶת סַפִּירִים׃ טו שׁוֹקָיו
עַמּוּדֵי שֵׁשׁ מְיֻסָּדִים עַל־אַדְנֵי־פָז מַרְאֵהוּ כַּלְּבָנוֹן בָּחוּר כָּאֲרָזִים׃ טז חִכּוֹ מַמְתַקִּים וְכֻלּוֹ
מַחֲמַדִּים זֶה דוֹדִי וְזֶה רֵעִי בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלִָם׃

פרק ו

א אָנָה הָלַךְ דּוֹדֵךְ הַיָּפָה בַּנָּשִׁים אָנָה פָּנָה דוֹדֵךְ וּנְבַקְשֶׁנּוּ עִמָּךְ׃ ב דּוֹדִי יָרַד לְגַנּוֹ לַעֲרוּגוֹת הַבֹּשֶׂם
לִרְעוֹת בַּגַּנִּים וְלִלְקֹט שׁוֹשַׁנִּים׃ ג אֲנִי לְדוֹדִי וְדוֹדִי לִי הָרֹעֶה בַּשּׁוֹשַׁנִּים׃ ד יָפָה אַתְּ רַעְיָתִי
כְּתִרְצָה נָאוָה כִּירוּשָׁלִָם אֲיֻמָּה כַּנִּדְגָּלוֹת׃ ה הָסֵבִּי עֵינַיִךְ מִנֶּגְדִּי שֶׁהֵם הִרְהִיבֻנִי שַׂעְרֵךְ כְּעֵדֶר
הָעִזִּים שֶׁגָּלְשׁוּ מִן־הַגִּלְעָד׃ ו שִׁנַּיִךְ כְּעֵדֶר הָרְחֵלִים שֶׁעָלוּ מִן־הָרַחְצָה שֶׁכֻּלָּם מַתְאִימוֹת וְשַׁכֻּלָה
אֵין בָּהֶם׃ ז כְּפֶלַח הָרִמּוֹן רַקָּתֵךְ מִבַּעַד לְצַמָּתֵךְ׃ ח שִׁשִּׁים הַמָּה מְלָכוֹת וּשְׁמֹנִים פִּילַגְשִׁים
וַעֲלָמוֹת אֵין מִסְפָּר׃ ט אַחַת הִיא יוֹנָתִי תַּמָּתִי אַחַת הִיא לְאִמָּהּ בָּרָה הִיא לְיוֹלַדְתָּהּ רָאוּהָ בָנוֹת
וַיְאַשְּׁרוּהָ מְלָכוֹת וּפִילַגְשִׁים וַיְהַלְלוּהָ׃ י מִי־זֹאת הַנִּשְׁקָפָה כְּמוֹ־שָׁחַר יָפָה כַלְּבָנָה בָּרָה
כַּחַמָּה אֲיֻמָּה כַּנִּדְגָּלוֹת׃ יא אֶל־גִּנַּת אֱגוֹז יָרַדְתִּי לִרְאוֹת בְּאִבֵּי הַנָּחַל לִרְאוֹת הֲפָרְחָה הַגֶּפֶן
הֵנֵצוּ הָרִמֹּנִים׃ יב לֹא יָדַעְתִּי נַפְשִׁי שָׂמַתְנִי מַרְכְּבוֹת עַמִּי־נָדִיב׃

פרק ז

א שׁוּבִי שׁוּבִי הַשּׁוּלַמִּית שׁוּבִי שׁוּבִי וְנֶחֱזֶה־בָּךְ מַה־תֶּחֱזוּ בַּשּׁוּלַמִּית כִּמְחֹלַת הַמַּחֲנָיִם׃ ב מַה־יָּפוּ
פְעָמַיִךְ בַּנְּעָלִים בַּת־נָדִיב חַמּוּקֵי יְרֵכַיִךְ כְּמוֹ חֲלָאִים מַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵי אָמָּן׃ ג שָׁרְרֵךְ אַגַּן הַסַּהַר
אַל־יֶחְסַר הַמָּזֶג בִּטְנֵךְ עֲרֻמַּת חִטִּים סוּגָה בַּשּׁוֹשַׁנִּים׃ ד שְׁנֵי שָׁדַיִךְ כִּשְׁנֵי עֳפָרִים תְּאֹמֵי צְבִיָּה׃

ה צַוָּארֵךְ כְּמִגְדַּל הַשֵּׁן עֵינַיִךְ בְּרֵכוֹת בְּחֶשְׁבּוֹן עַל־שַׁעַר בַּת־רַבִּים אַפֵּךְ כְּמִגְדַּל הַלְּבָנוֹן צוֹפֶה פְּנֵי
דַמָּשֶׂק׃ ו רֹאשֵׁךְ עָלַיִךְ כַּכַּרְמֶל וְדַלַּת רֹאשֵׁךְ כָּאַרְגָּמָן מֶלֶךְ אָסוּר בָּרָהָטִים׃ ז מַה־יָּפִית
וּמַה־נָּעַמְתְּ אַהֲבָה בַּתַּעֲנוּגִים׃ ח זֹאת קוֹמָתֵךְ דָּמְתָה לְתָמָר וְשָׁדַיִךְ לְאַשְׁכֹּלוֹת׃ ט אָמַרְתִּי אֶעֱלֶה
בְתָמָר אֹחֲזָה בְּסַנְסִנָּיו וְיִהְיוּ־נָא שָׁדַיִךְ כְּאֶשְׁכְּלוֹת הַגֶּפֶן וְרֵיחַ אַפֵּךְ כַּתַּפּוּחִים׃ י וְחִכֵּךְ כְּיֵין הַטּוֹב
הוֹלֵךְ לְדוֹדִי לְמֵישָׁרִים דּוֹבֵב שִׂפְתֵי יְשֵׁנִים׃ יא אֲנִי לְדוֹדִי וְעָלַי תְּשׁוּקָתוֹ׃ יב לְכָה דוֹדִי נֵצֵא
הַשָּׂדֶה נָלִינָה בַּכְּפָרִים׃ יג נַשְׁכִּימָה לַכְּרָמִים נִרְאֶה אִם פָּרְחָה הַגֶּפֶן פִּתַּח הַסְּמָדַר הֵנֵצוּ
הָרִמּוֹנִים שָׁם אֶתֵּן אֶת־דֹּדַי לָךְ׃ יד הַדּוּדָאִים נָתְנוּ־רֵיחַ וְעַל־פְּתָחֵינוּ כָּל־מְגָדִים חֲדָשִׁים
גַּם־יְשָׁנִים דּוֹדִי צָפַנְתִּי לָךְ׃

פרק ח

א מִי יִתֶּנְךָ כְּאָח לִי יוֹנֵק שְׁדֵי אִמִּי אֶמְצָאֲךָ בַחוּץ אֶשָּׁקְךָ גַּם לֹא־יָבוּזוּ לִי׃ ב אֶנְהָגְךָ אֲבִיאֲךָ
אֶל־בֵּית אִמִּי תְּלַמְּדֵנִי אַשְׁקְךָ מִיַּיִן הָרֶקַח מֵעֲסִיס רִמֹּנִי׃ ג שְׂמֹאלוֹ תַּחַת רֹאשִׁי וְיְמִינוֹ תְּחַבְּקֵנִי׃
ד הִשְׁבַּעְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלִַם מַה־תָּעִירוּ | וּמַה־תְּעֹרְרוּ אֶת־הָאַהֲבָה עַד שֶׁתֶּחְפָּץ׃ ה מִי
זֹאת עֹלָה מִן־הַמִּדְבָּר מִתְרַפֶּקֶת עַל־דּוֹדָהּ תַּחַת הַתַּפּוּחַ עוֹרַרְתִּיךָ שָׁמָּה חִבְּלַתְךָ אִמֶּךָ שָׁמָּה
חִבְּלָה יְלָדַתְךָ׃ ו שִׂימֵנִי כַחוֹתָם עַל־לִבֶּךָ כַּחוֹתָם עַל־זְרוֹעֶךָ כִּי־עַזָּה כַמָּוֶת אַהֲבָה קָשָׁה כִשְׁאוֹל
קִנְאָה רְשָׁפֶיהָ רִשְׁפֵי אֵשׁ שַׁלְהֶבֶתְיָהּ׃ ז מַיִם רַבִּים לֹא יוּכְלוּ לְכַבּוֹת אֶת־הָאַהֲבָה וּנְהָרוֹת לֹא
יִשְׁטְפוּהָ אִם־יִתֵּן אִישׁ אֶת־כָּל־הוֹן בֵּיתוֹ בָּאַהֲבָה בּוֹז יָבוּזוּ לוֹ׃ ח אָחוֹת לָנוּ קְטַנָּה וְשָׁדַיִם
אֵין לָהּ מַה־נַּעֲשֶׂה לַאֲחוֹתֵנוּ בַּיּוֹם שֶׁיְּדֻבַּר־בָּהּ׃ ט אִם־חוֹמָה הִיא נִבְנֶה עָלֶיהָ טִירַת כָּסֶף
וְאִם־דֶּלֶת הִיא נָצוּר עָלֶיהָ לוּחַ אָרֶז׃ י אֲנִי חוֹמָה וְשָׁדַי כַּמִּגְדָּלוֹת אָז הָיִיתִי בְעֵינָיו כְּמוֹצְאַת
שָׁלוֹם׃ יא כֶּרֶם הָיָה לִשְׁלֹמֹה בְּבַעַל הָמוֹן נָתַן אֶת־הַכֶּרֶם לַנֹּטְרִים אִישׁ יָבִא בְּפִרְיוֹ אֶלֶף
כֶּסֶף׃ יב כַּרְמִי שֶׁלִּי לְפָנַי הָאֶלֶף לְךָ שְׁלֹמֹה וּמָאתַיִם לְנֹטְרִים אֶת־פִּרְיוֹ׃ יג הַיּוֹשֶׁבֶת בַּגַּנִּים
חֲבֵרִים מַקְשִׁיבִים לְקוֹלֵךְ הַשְׁמִיעִינִי׃ יד בְּרַח | דּוֹדִי וּדְמֵה־לְךָ לִצְבִי אוֹ לְעֹפֶר הָאַיָּלִים עַל הָרֵי
בְשָׂמִים׃

Two Facets of A Precious Gemstone

Love has facets, but no formulas. Accordingly, the Song of Songs is no formula for love. It is, however, a beautiful portrait of love's many facets. As Michael Fox, a contemporary Bible scholar, writes, "The Song of Songs takes a single romance and turns it around and around like a gem, displaying all its facets."[1] Every scene reveals a new dimension of the lovers' relationship, or deepens one previously revealed. Although many Bible scholars have tried to identify one, there is no easily discernible structure to the Song of Songs, just as none exists for love. Like love itself, the poem flows, it circles, it spirals; as Fox writes, "The Song is like a meandering river."[2] Let us then float down the river with the lovers. Let us admire the gemstone. Let us revel in this portrait of love by looking closely at six of its dimensions as exemplified by particular verses scattered throughout the Song. The dimensions discussed here have been organized in alphabetical order precisely because, in the Song, as in love, they have no order. In most cases, other verses from other parts of the Song could have been chosen just as easily to embody the notions they express therein. The following is a beginning, a snapshot, of six significant elements of the lovers' encounter.

Eroticism

"Kiss me, make me drunk with your kisses!
Your sweet loving is better than wine" (1:2).

This, the very first utterance in the Song of Songs, clearly indicates that the love and longing of the Song are not simply for that of a close companion. From the beginning, the Song is an erotic poem. The word translated here as "your love," or

[1] Michael V. Fox, The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985) 226.

dodecha דֹדֶיךָ, actually implies a more erotic meaning. As Ariel Bloch and Chana Bloch, contemporary biblical scholars, assert, "The word *dodim*, which occurs six times in the Song, including the opening verse – 'Your *dodim* are better than wine' – is almost always translates as 'love,' though it refers specifically to sexual love."[3] Throughout the Song, the lovers speak in metaphors that drip with subtle (and not so subtle) eroticism. The Blochs further explain, "In the Song, sexuality is evoked primarily by metaphors.... 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."[4]

Longing

"The voice of my love: listen! Bounding over the mountains toward me, across the hills. My love is a gazelle, a wild stag. There he stands on the other side of our wall, gazing between the stones. And he calls to me: Hurry, my love, my friend, and come away! Look, winter is over, the rains are done, wildflowers spring up in the fields. Now is the time of the nightingale. In every meadow you hear the song of the turtledove. The fig tree has sweetened its new green fruit and the young budded vines smell spicy. Hurry, my love, my friend, come away. My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the shadow of the cliff, let me see you, all of you! Let me hear your voice, your delicious song. I love to look at you" (2:8-14).

Longing is a characteristic of the lovers' relationship. In the moment described above, a barrier of some sort separates the man and woman. The man calls to his beloved to come forth and meet him. He expresses his yearning to see her face and hear her

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[2] Fox, Song of Songs 225.
[3] Ariel Bloch and Chana Bloch, The Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary (New York: Random House, 1995) 4.

voice. Throughout the Song, the man and the woman have moments of separation and moments of yearning, moments of searching and moments of finding. As Michael Fox writes, "The basic love story repeats itself, for lovers – and not only those in our song – must seek each other continually, time after time, as long as their love exists; one finding is never the end of the story."[5] Separation is the vehicle for their longing. Marcia Falk, a modern Jewish interpreter, explains, "...the pleasure of anticipation finds more expression here than the satisfaction of consummation."[6]

Responsiveness and Reciprocity

"My love, I dreamed of you as a mare, my very own, among Pharoah's chariots. Your cheekbones, those looped earrings, that string of beads at your throat! I will make you golden earrings with silver filigree. *My king lay down beside me and my fragrance wakened the night. All night between my breasts, my love is a cluster of myrrh, a sheaf of henna blossoms in the vineyards of Ein Gedi.* And you, my beloved, how beautiful you are! Your eyes are doves. *You are beautiful, my king, and gentle. Wherever we lie our bed is green. Our roofbeams are cedar, our rafters fir. I am the rose of Sharon, the wild lily of the valleys.* Like a lily in a field of thistles, such is my love among the young women. *And my beloved among the young men is a branching apricot tree in the wood. In that shade I have often lingered, tasting the fruit"* (1:9-2:3).

In this passage, the phrases indicated with "Roman" typeface are those spoken by the man, while those in *italics* are those spoken by the woman.[7] What is clear here is that the two lovers interact with each other and respond to one another. The man begins

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[4] Bloch 14. For more on metaphor, see the section of this essay entitled, "Dual Meaning: Allegory and Metaphor."
[5] Fox Song of Songs 226.
[6] Marcia Falk, "Song of Songs," Harper's Bible Commentary, ed. J.L. Mays. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1998) 527. Note that this quote refers specifically to what happens in the countryside.
[7] This assertion about which lover speaks which words is made by the Bloch's in their translation.

speaking of his beloved in majestic terms (i.e. "Pharoah's chariots") and the woman responds by speaking to the man using a similar metaphor ("my king"). Then, the two exchange declarations of praise, proclaiming each other's beauty. Following that, the woman says that she is "the wild lily of the valleys" to which the man replies, "like a lily in a field of thistles..." and the woman again counters by comparing her lover to "a branching apricot tree in the wood...." They pick up on each other's metaphors and even on each other's exact language. Fox emphasizes this characteristic of the Song when he says,

> Not only do the lovers address each other and exchange words, they *influence* each other. They speak to and respond to each other.... One way the artist brings out the interaction of the lovers and establishes the mutuality of their communication is by making the words of one lover echo the words of the other.[8]

Moreover, Fox explains that this feature of their relationship differentiates it from ancient Egyptian love songs that are not dialogues.[9] The Song, unlike the Egyptian songs, is not a string of monologues. In the Song, the lovers not only speak *about* each other, but they speak *to* each other. In their responsiveness, one finds in their relationship characteristic reciprocity. Falk writes, in agreement with Fox:

> ...the Song is especially striking for its expression of mutuality in relationship between women and men.... In the Song of Songs, women speak as assertively as men, initiating action at least as often; men are free to be as gentle, as vulnerable, even as coy as women. Men and women similarly praise each other for their sensuality and beauty, and identical phrases are sometimes used to describe the lovers of both genders.[10]

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[8] Michael V. Fox, "Love, Passion, and Perception in Israelite and Egyptian Love," Journal of Biblical Literature 102/2 (1983): 221.
[9] Fox "Love, Passion" 221.

Complete Connection

*"At night in my bed I longed for the one whom my **soul** loves.*[11] *I sought him, but did not find him. I must rise and go about the city, the narrow streets and squares, till I find the one whom my **soul** loves. I sought him everywhere but I could not find him. Then the watchmen found me as they went about the city. "Have you seen him? Have you seen the one whom my **soul** loves?" I had just passed them when I found the one whom my **soul** loves. I held him and would not let him go until I brought him to my mother's house, into my mother's room. Daughters of Jerusalem, swear to me by the gazelles, by the deer in the field, that you will never awaken love until it is ripe"* (3:1-5).

The word *nefesh* נפש, most commonly translated as "soul," occurs four times in this short passage; in each case its meaning is embedded in the woman's search for "the one whom my *nefesh* נפש loves." She is not looking for just anyone; she seeks her soul mate, the one to whom she feels completely connected, the one whom her *nefesh* נפש loves. To better understand her, we must ask, what she means by that? What, exactly, does the word *nefesh* נפש mean in the Song of Songs? The word *nefesh* נפש occurs over 750 times in the Bible, with many different meanings. Among them are the following:

- Life Force – that which animates life (e.g., Genesis 2:7, "YHVH God formed *Adam* from the dust of the earth. YHVH blew into his nostrils the breath of life and *Adam* became a **living being**, ***nefesh*** *chayah* חיה **נפש**.")

- Feelings/Empathy – that which allows us to understand the feelings or experience of another person (e.g., Exodus 23:9, "You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the **feelings**, ***nefesh*** **נפש**, of a stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt.")

- Spirit – an internal state of being (e.g., I Samuel 22:2, "Everyone who was in debt and everyone who was **desperate**, *mar-**nefesh*** מר-**נפש**, joined him....")

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[10] Falk 528.

[11] Throughout their translation, Bloch and Bloch translate this phrase, *et she-ahavah nafshi* את שאהבה נפשי, as "my only love" or "the one I love." A more literal translation is used here in order to explore the core meaning of these verses.

- "Being-ness" – a sort of life essence that can be directed towards accomplishing a goal (e.g., II Kings 23:3, "The king stood by the pillar and solemnized the covenant before YHVH: that they would follow YHVH with all their heart and **soul**, ***nefesh*** **נפש**....)

- Appetite – a person's hunger (e.g., Proverbs 23:1-2, "When you sit down to dine with a ruler, consider well who is before you. Thrust a knife into your gullet if you have a **large appetite**, *ba'al* ***nefesh*** **נפש** בעל.)

- Desire – something that expresses longing and has the possibility of being satiated (e.g., Kohelet 6:9, "Is the feasting of the eyes more important than the pursuit of **desire**, ***nafesh*** **נפש**?)

The contemporary scholar, M. Deckers, writes that the word *nefesh* נפש in Song of Songs "... denotes the essential being of the speaking woman, her vitality, her principle of life. Therefore I propose to translate this Hebrew suffixed noun into 'my being.'"[12] Furthermore, based on the above interpretations of *nefesh* נפש from elsewhere in the Bible, it becomes clear that when the woman searches for and finally finds "the one whom my *nefesh* נפש loves," she is speaking of a man she loves with her total being, the man whom she desires, the man who satiates her appetite for love and life, the man she understands and who understands her. She is speaking of one who animates her life force, who enlivens her, with whose life hers is bound. She speaks of her *nefesh* נפש because it is this that extends to the depths and breadth of her being.

Uniqueness

"One alone is my dove, my perfect, my only one, love of her mother, light of her mother's eyes. Every maiden calls her happy, queens praise her, and all the king's women" (6:9).

[12] M. Deckers, "The Structure of the Song of Songs and the Centrality of Nefesh (6.12)," A Feminist Companion to the Song of Songs, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd., 1993) 189.

Repeatedly in the Song, the lovers praise one another's uniqueness. This verse is only one of many times that one of the lovers exclaim the other's singularity in the world. Moreover, here, as elsewhere, it is not the lover alone who sees the beloved as exceptional, but others in the world see it as well. The lovers cannot help but assume that the whole world sees them as they see each other. Roland Murphy, in his scholarly commentary on Song of Songs, notes, "As many episodes show, their admiration of and yearning for each other is both reciprocal and comparably intense: each considers the other to be unrivalled, superlative...."[13]

Vision

"Come, my beloved, let us go out into the fields and lie all night among the flowering henna. Let us go early to the vineyards to see if the vine has budded, if the blossoms have opened and the pomegranate is in flower. There I will give you my love. The air is filled with the scent of mandrakes and at our doors rare fruit of every kind, my love, I have stored away for you" (7:12-14).

The Song is not only about how the lovers see one another; it is also about how they see the world.[14] As the Blochs describe it, "The Song of Songs offers us an imaginary garden – with real lovers in it."[15] In this passage, the woman[16] sees a world of abundance, a world in which all of the best fruits are piled at their doorway. Just as their love is ripening, so too does she see the world around them ripening. In the Song, the lovers describe a world that is as fragrant, as beautiful, as potent as their love. Their

[13] Roland E. Murphy, The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990) 101-102.
[14] Fox "Love, Passion" 227.
[15] Bloch 8.
[16] According to Bloch, the woman is the speaker in these verses.

descriptions may offer us a picture of a world idealized rather than as it actually is, but that is hardly important. In the Song, we, the readers, are allowed to see the world through the lovers' eyes. We see how they perceive the world to be. And, as in this passage, their perception is stunning.

Even more, the lovers paint their imagined garden onto each other's bodies. Several times in the Song the lovers describe each other's bodies with somewhat strange yet beautiful metaphors. All together, Fox writes,

> The images... combine to convey a unified picture of a self-contained world: a peaceful, fruitful world, resplendent with the blessings of nature and the beauties of human art. That world blossoms in a perpetual spring. Birds sing and bathe in milk; spices give forth their fragrance; springs flow with clear water; fruits and wines offer their sweetness; heaps of wheat are surrounded by lilies; ewes, white and clean, bear twins and never miscarry; goats stream gently down the mountainside; proud and ornate towers stand tall above the landscape. Nor are there lacking silver and gold, precious stones, and objects of art: a rich and blessed world.
>
> Not only does this world proved a pleasant backdrop to the expression of love, it also reveals the author's idea of a lover's view of the world.... The imagery of the praise thus shows us not how the lovers look but how they see.... The imagery shows us a world *created* by love, for it comes into being and is unified only through the lovers' vision of each other.[17]

"... Not how the lovers look but how they see." This is the essence of their vision of the world. Their love does not necessarily change the world in which they live, but it does change they way they experience it. Francis Landy, another modern scholar, states, "The subject of the poem is not just or simply human love, but also everything that enters into

[17] Fox "Passion" 227.

relationship with it in the poem, the whole world as it is experienced or animated through love."[18]

The Song of Songs as Allegory

As we have seen, a literal reading of Song of Songs renders it a poem about *human* love. Yet, for centuries, commentators have read the Song as an *allegory* of love between God and Israel. We might then ask whether the six dimensions of love explored above also hold true for this kind of relationship? Are those facets also appropriate descriptors of the relationship between God and Israel? As we explore each of them again, this time from the perspective of a God-Israel relationship, we will look at various examples of how these same facets manifest in the whole of Jewish tradition. The examples, embedded in different realms of Jewish tradition, signify Jewishly authentic ways to understand this relationship between God and Israel.

A. Eroticism – Do God and Israel have an erotic relationship? Hasidsim, a religious revival movement in Eastern Europe that began in the early 1700's, championed the pursuit of an intense longing to become one with God, or *devekut* דביקות.[19] That intense longing for union is the essence of eroticism. Arthur Green and Barry Holtz translate a particular hasidic passage this way,

> Prayer is union with the Divine Presence.
> Just as two people will move their bodies
> back and forth as they begin the act of love,
> so must a person accompany
> the beginning of prayer
> with the rhythmic swaying of the body.
> But as one reaches the heights of union
> with the Presence,
> the movement of the body ceases.[20]

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[18] Francis Landy, "The Song of Songs," The Literary Guide to the Bible, ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987) 306.
[19] Note also that this same word in used in Genesis 2:24.
[20] Arthur Green and Barry Holtz, ed. and transl., Your Word is Fire: The Hasidic Masters on Contemplative Prayer (Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1993) 80.

In their notes on this passage, they write that in the Hasidic reading of union, "it is God and the worshiper who are locked in the embrace of intimacy."[21]

B. Longing – Do God and Israel long for one another? In Psalms 27:4, for example, the Psalmist writes of Israel's longing for God, "One thing I ask of YHVH, only that do I seek: to live in the house of YHVH all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of YHVH, to frequent YHVH's temple." The modern philosopher Abraham Joshua Heschel writes of God's longing for Israel:

> From the perspective of the Bible: Who is man? *A being in travail with God's dreams*, with God's dream of a world redeemed, of reconciliation of heaven and earth. God's dream is not to be alone, to have mankind as a partner in the drama of continuous creation.[22]

C. Responsiveness and Reciprocity – Do God and Israel respond to one another? Do they have a reciprocal relationship? In the Book of Hosea,[23] for example, God and Israel participate in a cycle of responsiveness that begins when God says to Israel,

> And I will espouse you forever: I will espouse you with righteousness and justice, and with goodness and mercy, and I will espouse you with faithfulness; then you shall be devoted to the YHVH. In that day, I will respond, declares YHVH. I will respond to the sky, and it shall respond to the earth; and the earth shall respond with new grain and wine and oil, and they shall respond to Jezreel. I will sow her in the land as My own; and take Lo-Ruhama back in favor; and I will say to Lo-ammi, "You are my people," and he will respond "[You are] my God."[24]

God espouses Israel and Israel responds with devotion. God then responds to that devotion by making the land fruitful and by taking Israel (signified in the names "Lo-ruhama" and "Lo-ammi") back with love. Finally, Israel responds to God by echoing God's expressive statement about their relationship. Israel and God's

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[21] Green and Holtz 126.

[22] Abraham Joshua Heschel, The Insecurity of Freedom, (New York: Farr, Straus and Giroux Inc., 1959) 160.

[23] Hosea is the only Northern prophet to have his words preserved in a book. He began to prophesy sometime near the end of the reign of Jeroboam II (786-756 BCE). His book ends before the destruction of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BCE, but not too long before it.

[24] Hosea 2:21-25

responsiveness indicates a reciprocity, a mutuality, of relationship that is present in the very notion of covenant.[25]

D. Complete Connection – Are God and Israel connected with the totality of their beings? Are they soul mates? In the liturgy for welcoming Shabbat, for example, we sing a song addressed to God entitled "*Yedid Nefesh* ידיד נפש," meaning exactly that, "soul mate" or "friend of my soul." We call God our soul mate, the One to whom the essence of our being is attached. Even more, it is possible to say that the idea of *nefesh* נפש is at the core of the covenant between God and Israel. Covenant entails a commitment of *nefesh* נפש, a commitment of the totality of our beings, to each other.

E. Uniqueness – Do God and Israel see each other as unique? In Isaiah 43:1, God says to Israel, "... Fear not, for I will redeem you; I have singled you out by name, You are Mine." And in Deuteronomy 6:4, and in our daily prayers, we say "Hear, O Israel! YHVH is our God, YHVH alone."

F. Vision – Do Israel and God perceive the world differently on account of their relationship? In the story of the creation of the world, God speaks of creation as "good." However, in Genesis 1:31, after creating the first human being, *Adam*, God finds the world to be "very good." God's perception of the world changes when human beings enter it.[26] For our part, our changed perception of the world with God in it can be seen in the liturgy we create. For example, in the evening we say, "Blessed are You YHVH...whose word brings on the evening." Night does not just happen. God makes it happen by speaking; evening comes only at God's word. The cycles of the natural world are invested with divine direction.

Dual Meaning: Allegory and Metaphor

We have seen that the six facets of love explored in this essay are fitting, both for the human lovers in the Song and for the imagined relationship between God and Israel in its later interpretation. Now, we turn to examine the relationship between two methods of reading the Song – the literal (i.e. human lovers) and the interpretive (i.e. God and Israel). In 1921, Marcus Jastrow offered a surprising explanation for the allegorical interpretation:

[25] Note, however, that the relationship between God and Israel has a different power dynamic than that of the lovers in the Song. Though God and Israel's relationship certainly contains elements of mutuality, of mutual responsibility and mutual love, they are not equals as the lovers of the Song are.

> ...the allegorical interpretation...arose as the explanation of the Song of Songs, *because* of the secular character of the songs which was so manifest on the surface. The Song of Songs viewed as an allegory was a theory of despair that suggested itself, one might say *forced* itself, upon the pious Rabbis of the early centuries of our era in order to satisfy their consciences in having a series of love songs in a collection of books that had by its intimate association with the religion of the people acquired a sacred and inviolate character. The allegorical theory thus becomes an additional testimony to the secular character of the songs, recognized as such by those who tried their best to conceal it – to explain it away by *superimposing* a theory that only enhances the difficulties of the problem.[27]

Reading the Song as an allegory is problematic not only because it hides the secular character of the book, as Jastrow argues, but also because it purports to replace it. Michael Fox, writing about the allegorical interpretation of Kohelet 12 states,

> The 'allegorical approach' has commonly treated the images as if it were a disguise covering the 'true' meaning of the poem. The interpreter's task then becomes to strip off this disguise and triumphantly to reveal what lies hidden behind it. Once removed, the guise itself ceases to be of interest. The allegorical interpretation has invariably failed to recognize that the imagery, the surface of the poem, is what the author chooses to show us first and most clearly. Rather than thinking of imagery as an expendable outer garb, we should compare it to the visible surface of a painting. The imagery *is* the painting. We can discuss the painting's symbolism, emotive overtones, ideological message, and so on, but only as projections of the surface imagery, not as substitutes of it.[28]

These words could have been written about the Song. The problem with allegory, and the reason many modern scholars are apt to dismiss it as a form of apologetics for the

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[26] Note that this citation is not specifically about Israel, but rather about all of humanity. More specifically, it is about the first human being to whom Jews, and all others, trace their descent.

[27] Morris Jastrow, The Song of Songs (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1921) 30-31.

[28] Micahel V. Fox, "Aging and Death in Qohelet 12," Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 42 (1988): 57.

Song, is that it purports a theory of replacement, i.e. the allegorical reading replaces the literal one.

Metaphor, on the other hand, does not force replacement. It is not representational (e.g., the human lovers in the Song *represent* God and Israel), but rather is symbolic (e.g., the human lovers in the Song *symbolize* God and Israel). Writing about symbolism, Fox explains, "...in symbol we observe a reality thickened and clarified (e.g., Esther both *is* a Jew in the diaspora and symbolically *embodies* the experience of the Jewish people in the diaspora....)"[29] The same is true of metaphor, and the same can be said of the Song: the lovers both *are* a man and woman and *embody* the relationship between God and Israel. Literary scholar J. Hillis Miller explains metaphor in the following way:

> In the seventeenth century "perspective" was the common name for a telescope or for any system of mirrors and lenses used to play tricks with light and apparent distance and shape. A metaphor works like a "perspective glass." It distorts and omits, but it reveals. If a "perspective," either metaphorical or actual, is luckily made, aspects of reality never before known will be revealed.... In a metaphor the "real" nature of an object is distorted or things are omitted from it, but our omission or distortion of them is what makes for the fecundity of implications about the object which may be evolved by developing the metaphor wholeheartedly.[30]

Thus, a metaphorical reading of the Song as symbolic of the love between God and Israel offers a new *perspective* on that relationship. The metaphorical reading "distorts" (in Miller's words) the more literal reading, but the literal meaning does not disappear. Just as in a "telescope or system of mirrors" the object can also be taken out

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[29] Fox "Aging" 64.
[30] Hillis J. Miller, Tropes, Parables, Performative: Essays on Twentiety-Century Literature (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991) 5.

and viewed in plain sight, so too the Song can be stripped of its metaphor and seen in its primary manifestation as a poem about human love. Even more, while being seen through the metaphoric lens, the reader knows what it looks like to the unaided eye and vice-versa. Reading the Song as a metaphor rather than an allegory means understanding that multiple interpretations can coexist with creative friction. The difference between allegory and metaphor might be illustrated as such:

ALLEGORY	METAPHOR
Human Love → Human-Divine Love	Human Love←→ Human-Divine Love

Reading the Song symbolically does not obliterate its more literal reading about human lovers. Since Jewish commentators have, for centuries, been developing this symbolic reading and since this symbolic reading has been more easily dismissed in our times, it is important to take a moment to explore its implications. What insight might the symbolic reading offer about the relationship between human beings and God? What lessons might we discover in its interpretation of the Song about our own relationship with God? Imagine: how would your relationship with God change if you envisioned God as a lover? How often would you choose to speak to God? How excited would you be for those encounters? What would you say? How would you say it? The fact that the Rabbis saw Song of Songs as symbolic of the relationship between God and Israel says quite a bit about how they related to God. What does it say about how you might relate to God? And, conversely, how might such a relationship with God influence your relationship with your beloved?

One Gemstone, Two Facets

Eroticism. Longing. Responsiveness and Reciprocity. Complete Connection. Uniqueness. Vision. Having now explored the facets of this gemstone, the twists and turns of this meandering river, it is easy to see that both modern commentators who read the Song more literally and early Jewish commentators who read it symbolically reveal important truths about the dimensions of love. As students of both interpretations, as students of metaphor, we see that Song of Songs sings of one gemstone, one river, that reflects light in myriads of ways, simultaneously reflecting two perspectives, both of which contain important insights into the nature of love. The two melodies harmonize with each other, creating a splendid song.

Connection to Pesach

Song of Songs is not about the entirety of a relationship. It is, perhaps, only about courtship. Though some commentators have read marriage into the Song, the lovers make no explicit statements of permanent commitment to each other. As the Blochs write, the theme of Song of Songs "is the wonder of a woman with a man – an unmarried woman, with no concern about perpetuating the family line and no motive but pleasure. In it, eros is its own reward."[31] The Song of Song records the excitement of the lovers' early discoveries and their awe at having found one another.

Similarly, Pesach may be viewed as a moment of initiation. It celebrates the excitement of God and Israel having (re-) discovered each other after many years of Egyptian slavery. It inaugurates a season of courtship. God and Israel make no

commitments to one another at the shores of the Red Sea. The Israelites sing and dance in celebration of their redemption, in celebration of this great act of God's love. Pesach celebrates this experience, this extraordinary journey from slavery to freedom, but it leaves the Israelites on the shores of the Red Sea.

After Pesach the Israelites begin to move, begin another journey, this time from courtship to commitment. The period between Pesach and Shavuot in the Jewish calendar is called the Omer.[32] Since rabbinic times, Jews have counted each of the 49 days between the two holidays, linking them together through this act. We might compare this period to God and Israel's engagement. It is during these days that they move beyond simple courtship. Their relationship is affirmed at Shavuot, the holy day that is often referred to as the marriage between God and Israel. In midrashic lore, the Torah is seen as the wedding contract, or *ketubah* כתובה, that God gives Israel. At Sinai, on Shavuot, God and Israel make specific commitments to one another. Their love expands to include significant responsibilities. They enter the covenant of marriage, with all that it entails.

When we read Song of Songs on Pesach every year, we are given the opportunity to re-experience love's beginning. We sing and dance with our ancestors, and then we begin to move with them from the Red Sea, through the desert, to Mount Sinai – from Pesach, through the period of the Omer, to Shavuot. We journey from courtship to commitment. And then we realize that commitment is only the beginning.

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[31] Bloch 14.

[32] The Omer is also marked by grain offerings. For more on the Omer see Lev. 23:15-21.

Song of Songs: Applied Learning Pages

For an explanation on how to use the following pages, please refer to the Introduction: How to Use This Book, on Page 7.

What's the Question?
מה קשה לי? *Mah Kasheh Li?*

שיר שירים ח:ו

שִׂימֵנִי כַחוֹתָם עַל־לִבֶּךָ כַּחוֹתָם עַל־זְרוֹעֶךָ כִּי־עַזָּה כַמָּוֶת אַהֲבָה

Song of Songs 8:6

Bind me as a seal upon your hearts, a sign upon your arm, for love is as fierce as death…

In the box below, you will find a list of principles for interpreting Torah. For each category, ask yourself: does this verse present a difficulty, a *koshi* קשי? If yes, please describe the *koshi* קשי.

1. **Is there superfluous language?**
   The rabbis believe that every word in the Bible is there for a precise purpose. When a word seems repetitive and/or synonymous with another word, the rabbis always justify the existence of each word. In the quote above, do you think any words seem repetitive and/or synonymous?

2. **Are there grammatical curiosities?**
   The rabbis respond to sentences with unexpected or incorrect grammar, such as unusual word order, awkward prepositions, illogical sentences, inconsistent verb tenses, or unclear pronouns. In the quote above, is the grammar problematic?

3. **Are there theological or moral dilemmas?**
   The rabbis identify moments that raise questions about God's characteristics, God's role in the world, and how God is depicted in the Bible. They are also troubled by what seem to be breaches of moral or ethical conduct by God and/or human beings. In the quote above, do you find any theological or moral dilemmas?

4. **Are there gaps in the text?**
   The rabbis are also intrigued by what is not in the text. In other words, when feelings, time spans, physical descriptions, conversations, etc. are not written in the text, they often fill in the gaps. In the quote above, do you find anything missing from the text?

5. **Are there political or sociological issues?**
   The rabbis seek to render power dynamics among nations according to their worldview (e.g. putting Israel or Judaism at the center). Moreover, questions of ethnicity, gender, class, etc. prompt their investigation. In the quote above, are any of these kinds of issues relevant?

6. **Are there any other difficulties, *kushiot* קושיות?**

Write a creative response, a possible answer, to the *koshi* קשי that you find most interesting.

What's the Conversation?
מה קשה לנו? *Mah Kasheh Lanu?*

שיר שירים ח:ו

שִׂימֵנִי כַחוֹתָם עַל־לִבֶּךָ כַּחוֹתָם עַל־זְרוֹעֶךָ כִּי־עַזָּה כַמָּוֶת אַהֲבָה

Song of Songs 8:6

Bind me as a seal upon your heart, a sign upon your arm, for love is as fierce as death…

On this page, several commentators respond to the following difficulty, or קשי: What does it mean to say that "love is as strong/fierce as death?"

QUESTIONS

1. How does each commentator resolve the קשי?
2. How do their conclusions differ from one another?
3. How do you resolve the קשי? Add your voice as a "21st Century Commentator."

R. Abraham ben Isaac ha-Levi (TaMaKH): "כִּי־עַזָּה כַמָּוֶת אַהֲבָה" "FOR LOVE IS AS FIERCE AS DEATH" …she tells him how troubled she was during his absence, an absence that was as harsh as death. Without their love she would live in desolation, looking on in loneliness at the serene delights of other maidens with their lovers. Her jealousy would be cruel as the grave. She speaks of two flashes of fire – burning love and jealousy.

Rashi:
"כִּי־עַזָּה כַמָּוֶת אַהֲבָה"
"FOR LOVE IS AS FIERCE AS DEATH" The love that I loved You is to me equal to my death, for I am killed for Your sake.

Rachel Adler: "כִּי־עַזָּה כַמָּוֶת אַהֲבָה" "FOR LOVE IS AS FIERCE AS DEATH" [Song of Songs] is non-linear, even dream-like; one setting fades into another, and fantasy cannot be distinguished from action.... If death is the triumph of time, love is the triumph of timelessness. Outside the dimension of time, the lovers have enjoyed, have never enjoyed, are always enjoying one another's love. Hence, passages hinting at a consummated relationship are interspersed with passages that revert to unconsummated longings.

David Altschuler:
"כִּי־עַזָּה כַמָּוֶת אַהֲבָה" "FOR LOVE IS AS FIERCE AS DEATH" My love for You is so strong that I would even choose death rather than give up this love. It is therefore only proper that You do not remove Your love from me.

21st Century Commentator:

Marcia Falk: "כִּי־עַזָּה כַמָּוֶת אַהֲבָה" [7:7-10 and 8:6-7] make two different statements about love: whereas the one proclaims the sensual joy of love, the other asserts its power. These two appreciations represent the emotional range of the text.

BIOGRAPHY

Rachel Adler: Contemporary Jewish commentator and Professor of Jewish Thought at Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion in Los Angeles.
Marcia Falk: Contemporary Jewish feminist liturgist, poet and translator.
David Altschuler: (18th Century) Jewish Bible commentator who wrote *Metzudat David.*
TaMaKh: R. Abraham ben Isaac ha-Levi (14th Century) The commentary attributed to this rabbi is a philosophic work. The identity of the author remains uncertain.
Rashi: Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzhak (1040-1105), most famous of all commentators on both Bible and Talmud. His commentaries are a fundamental tool to the Jewish method of studying sacred text.

What's the Connection?
מה הקשר? *Mah HaKesher?*

Below you will find a recipe that relates to the theme of relationships. It is one of many possible ways to encounter the theme in our world.

Recipe for Great Spinach Salad

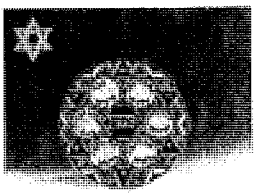
Spinach Salad
1 lb. fresh, washed spinach leaves, ½ lb. seedless red grapes, cut in half
8 oz. feta or blue cheese, ½ lb. walnuts

Dressing
1 oz. olive oil, 2 oz. cider vinegar
4 oz. plain, non fat yogurt, ½ tsp. Dijon mustard
1 tsp. maple syrup, ½ tsp. basil
¼ tsp. tarragon, dash of salt and pepper

What to do
1) Mix salad ingredients together.
2) Mix dressing ingredients together.
3) Toss and Enjoy!

מה הקשר
לשיר השירים?
Mah HaKesher to Song of Songs:
What connections do you find between the recipe above and Song of Songs?

מה הקשר לחג?
Mah HaKasher to Pesach:
What connections do you find between the recipe above and Pesach?



Now is your chance to draw from your own experience and identify something you have encountered in your world (a conversation, an article in the newspaper, a story, a road trip, etc.) that connects to Song of Songs. How does your encounter shed light on Song of Songs and the holiday of Pesach?

What's Our Contribution?
מה קישוט החג? *Mah Kishut HeChag?*

Loving Song of Songs

Pesach is an eight day festival.[1]
There are eight chapters in Song of Songs.
A perfect match.

◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆

Choose a particular facet of love that intrigues you. Start with one from the essay in this chapter:

- ✡ Eroticism
- ✡ Longing
- ✡ Reciprocity & Responsiveness
- ✡ Complete Connection
- ✡ Uniqueness
- ✡ Vision

Or, choose one of your own.

Every evening of the holiday, read one chapter of the Song. If possible, read it with a learning partner, or *chevruta* חברותא. Learning is often more fruitful and fun when done with a friend. Begin by saying the blessing for studying Torah:

Blessed are you Adonai our God, Ruling Spirit of the universe,
Who makes us holy through your commandments
and commands us to busy ourselves in the study of Torah.

Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech Ha'olam, asher kidishanu bmitzvotav, vitzivanu
La'asok b'divrei Torah.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ
לַעֲסוֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה.

◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆

Now trace the facet you chose above through each chapter of Song of Songs. Ask yourself the following questions:

1. How is this facet manifest in this chapter?
2. How is this facet manifest in my life?
3. How is this facet manifest in my relationship with God?

*** Next year, explore the Song again by choosing a different facet ***

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[1] Jews living in Israel celebrate Pesach for only seven days, along with many Reform Jews who live in the Diaspora, as it says in Exodus 23:15, "You shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread – eating unleavened bread for seven days as I have commanded you…." Uncertainty about accurate dating of the lunar calendar led the Talmudic period (3rd-5th centuries) to extend the holiday to eight days. If your celebration lasts seven days, this activity can be adjusted by doubling up on one of the days.

Body Conscious

In the first chapter of Genesis, we learn that God created both male and female in God's image, *b'tzelem Elohim* בצלם אלהים (Genesis 1:27). The human body is endowed with significance, even though its simple origins are from the dust of the earth. Tradition asks that Jews attribute holiness and sanctity to the human form. In fact, there exists in the morning service, or *shacharit* שחרית, a prayer that praises God as the architect of a miraculously functioning body. In this section we will argue that Song of Songs employs a similar kind of dignity and awe for the human figure throughout its the poetry.

Song of Songs contains passages describing and defining the physical human form from the perspective of each lover. Both female and male lovers describe each other's body with rich images. These descriptions are sometimes playful, sometimes metaphoric, and frequently beautiful. As we will soon see, each time the body is described it is affirmed for what it is, with appreciation and with praise. In addition, the bodies of the lovers suggest to the unique individual housed within the body. The physical body, the exterior, however beautiful to the eyes of the other, will never substitute for inner qualities or for the whole person.

In an interesting contrast emerges when we consider our contemporary treatment of the body. In our world too there is appreciation for the body, but it is only for one specific type of body. Bodies are objectified to sell products while media messages define only the thin, tall bodies as beautiful. Song of Songs helps us understand how a loving person affirms the body of his or her lover, regardless of its shape or size. Song of Songs models a world in which lovers see their bodies as a sacred gift, through which the world becomes more beautiful and more importantly that directs them to the individual beckoning from beneath its physical confines.

Body Language

There are specific times when the lovers pause in their lyrical dance to depict the bodies of their lover. The bodily descriptions communicate sanctity and appreciation through imagery, simile, and metaphor. According to biblical scholar Robert Alter, Song of Songs is exceptional for its use of "innovative imagery." He proposes, "figurative language plays a more prominent role in Song of Songs than anywhere else in biblical poetry."[1] For example, in chapter two we hear the young man in awe over his new love, "Like a lily in a field of thistles, such is my love among the young women" (Song of Songs 2:2). The use of metaphor, simile, and imagery are so rich that Alter suggests, that at times it is difficult to discern the difference between metaphor and reality. Yet not all the images capture our hearts at first read. Some of the images selected to describe the human body are strange and playful. For example one of the lovers describes the other's neck as "a tower of ivory" (7:5), taken literally the neck might be stiff, concrete-like, or jarringly large. Yet, these images, however unique or strange for our world, may be appropriate for their context, and help us understand the world these lovers live in.

In Song of Songs the body is described feature by feature in four separate passages. These four descriptions or 'wasfs[2]' specifically depict the physical attributes of the human body. Marvin Pope defines a wasf as a 'descriptive song' or a series of more or less detailed descriptions of bodily features. The body parts are treated in order, either beginning with the head (eyes, hair, teeth, etc) or in admiration of a dance (hips, vulva,

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[1] Robert Alter, The Art of Biblical Poetry (USA: Basic Books, 1985) 189.

[2] Pope notes, a wasf or 'descriptive song'; a series of more or less detailed descriptions of the bodily features... the parts of the body are treated in order, either beginning with the head (eyes, hair, teeth, etc) or in admiration of a dance (hips vulva, breasts, neck, eyes, nose, head, and hair). Marvin Pope, Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1977) 67.

breasts, neck, eyes, nose, head, and hair).[3] In these wasfs, "the female and male body, are each portrayed in the Song through a graphic series of verbal images."[4] Three wasfs depict the female body from the perspective of her male lover as he speaks directly to her (4:1-7; 6:4-7 and 7:2-10). One of the four wasfs is a description of the male by the female lover. When the female speaks however, she offers this description to the "daughters of Jerusalem" (5:8-16). As mentioned above, there are times when the metaphors, similes and images used to depict the bodies seem awkward. The first wasf may be an example of this awkwardness: "Your teeth white ewes, all alike, that come up fresh from the pond" (4:2). Comparing someone's teeth to a flock of goats that have just been bathing in pond water might not sound romantic or even complimentary. Yet, as Bloch suggests the reader must be careful to remember that these comparisons are not literal.

> The images are not literally descriptive; what they convey is the delight of the lover in contemplating the beloved, finding in the body a reflected image of the world in its freshness and splendor.[5]

The use of metaphor and creatively reappropriated familiar images to convey respect and delight in the human form occurs through the poetic language of the Song. Below the chart breaks up the wasfs and looks at each body part and how it is described in various ways throughout Song of Songs.[6] Note below that body parts in the Song compare particular physical attributes to a well-known artifacts from nature, or to ancient material objects. In addition, the speaker compares attributes using either simile or metaphor to best express praise. The chart reveals repetitions, and a certain freedom to assign the

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[3] Pope 67.
[4] Carol L. Meyers, "Gender Imagery in the Song of Songs," Hebrew Annual Review 10 (1986) 209-23.
[5] Ariel and Chana Bloch, The Song of Songs: A New Translation with an Introduction and Commentary (New York: Random House, 1995) 15.
[6] In the appendix, you will find a chart organized by wasf.

same image regardless of gender. The words in italics highlight the considerable use of metaphor and simile when describing the body.

Chapter: Verse	**Physical attribute**	**Parallel Image (Similes or Metaphors)**
5:15	Countenance (face)	Tall as Mount Lebanon, a man *like* a cedar
4:1	Eyes	The doves of (which) *are* looking out from the thicket of your hair
5:12	Eyes	*Like* doves by the rivers of milk and plenty
7:5	Eyes	*Are* pools in Heshbon, at the gates of that city of lords
4:1 and 6:5	Hair	*Like* a flock of goats bounding down Mount Gilead
5:11	Hair	The main of his hair black *as* the raven
7:6	Hair	*Like* royal purple; a king is caught in the thicket
7:5	Proud Nose	*(Is)* the tower of Lebanon that looks toward Damascus
4:2	Teeth	*(Are)* White ewes, all alike, that come up fresh from the pond
6:6	Teeth	*(Are)* White ewes, all alike, that come up fresh from the pond
4:3	Voice	How I listen for (it)
5:16	Mouth	*Is* sweet wine
7:10	Roof of mouth	*(Is)* good wine— That pleases my lover, rousing him even from sleep
7:9	Breath	*Like* apricots
4:3	Lips	A crimson ribbon (*are)* your lips
5:13	Lips	*(Are)* red lilies wet with myrrh
4:3	Cheeks	*A* pomegranate in the thicket of your hair
5:13	Cheeks	*(Are)* a bed of spices, *(are)* a treasure of precious scents
6:7	Cheeks	*A* pomegranate in the thicket of your hair
5:11	Head	*Is* burnished gold
7:6	Head	Crowns you *like* Mount Carmel
7:5	Neck	*Like* a tower of ivory
5:14	Arm	*(Is)* a golden scepter with gems of topaz
4:5 and 7:4 (stops at gazelle)	Breasts	*Are* two fawns, twins of a gazelle, grazing in a field of lilies
7:8	Breasts	*Like* clusters of fruit
5:14	Belly	*(Is)* the ivory of thrones inlaid with sapphire
7:3	Belly	*(Is)* a mound of wheat edged with lilies
7:3	Navel	*(Is)* the moon's bright drinking cup. May it brim with wine

5:15	Thighs	*Like* marble pillars on pedestals of gold
7:2	Rounded Thighs	*Like* jewels, the work of the hands of an artist
7:2	Feet	How graceful your steps (*Are)* in those sandals
5:10	Beloved (Whole Body)	*Is* white and ruddy, distinguished among ten thousand
7:8-9	You (build)	*(Like)* a palm tree...Let me climb into that palm tree and take hold of its branches
5:16	He (My lover)	*Is* lovely
6:4	You (My lover)	*Are* beautiful as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, awesome as an army with banners

Literary and Poetic Techniques

Both literary and poetic devises operate in the Song to help convey messages of love and admiration. Poetic devises, such as the use of simile and metaphor augment descriptions of the body beyond mere physicality. In addition, a literary device such as comparing body parts to natural surroundings offers the reader the backdrop for this grand love story.

Francis Landy, presents this definition of how metaphor is used in the Song :

> Through metaphor... resemblances are discovered between the most distant objects; they are associated through similarity.[7]

The image selected for comparison is almost always followed by a dependent clause (containing verbs or other parts of speech) that emphasizes the metaphor. For example, "Your navel *is the moon's bright drinking cup. May it brim with wine,"* (7:3) or "His eyes like doves *by the rivers of milk and plenty*" (5:12). Keel points out that the

[7]Francis Landy, "Song of Songs," The Literary Guide to the Bible, ed. R. Alter and F. Kermode (Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987) 515.

dependent clauses help "warn against a static understanding of the comparisons,"[8] and signals the expression of explicit attention to the lover in connection to the lover's world.

The literary devices working in the Song include three particular categories of images chosen to depict the body: animal, nature, and architecture. The author uses these three kinds of images to help depict the lover's body. Carol Meyers argues that the author uses more imagery drawn from nature than from other foundations:

> Images drawn from the natural world predominate. Indeed, the Song is sometimes referred to as nature poetry because of the richness and variety in the allusions to flora and fauna, to vineyards and gardens, and to uncultivated landscapes.[9]

In the Song the lovers portray each other in association with what is familiar, admired and acclaimed. For example, "Your neck is *a tower of David raised in splendor, a thousand bucklers hang upon it, all the shields of the warriors*" (4:4). These striking images help the lovers communicate flattery and desire.

> The discourse of love, of which the Song is a distillation, draws into its orbit things, plants, animals, geography. It can do nothing else: lovers can communicate only through the world, through metaphor.[10]

The metaphors of the Song suggest that the lovers have respect for the other's physical attributes and there is a sense that the clinical aspects of body parts are avoided. This leads to the probability that the comparisons are intended to evoke feelings within the reader as much as to represent a physical reality. So the intent of the defamiliarization is to affect the reader in a certain way.

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[8]Othmar Keel, The Song of Songs: A continental Commentary (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994) 139.
[9] Meyers 212.
[10] Landy 305.

As the lovers survey the terrain of their beloved, are they careful and sensitive, hoping to pay tribute to the magnificent creature standing before them? Do they compliment the body for physical attributes only, or do the metaphoric comparisons hope to signify something pertaining to the lover's personality? As mentioned earlier comparisons to the lush natural world prevail. Perhaps the most productive way to approach the imagery is to see it as a cultural code, as Keel has suggested:

> The Song is a cultural product; its interpretation depends more on an understanding of culture than of nature.... To understand the Song it is much more important to study archaeological findings than to study the landscape — above all, one should study the pictorial images in seals, amulets, ivories, and other valuables with which the well-to-do people who wrote the Song were daily surrounded.[11]

To discern whether these descriptions were in fact written as respectful of the human body, one needs to trace cultural history for some of the physical features mentioned in the song.

Feature Presentation: A Closer Look at love's Body

In support of our argument, one must look carefully at particular instances in which a lover describes the body. Specifically worthy of investigation are the body parts our contemporary culture seems most insecure about, namely the stomach (belly), and the thighs (legs), and not only the body as a whole.

In the first and the third wasf (*Wasf* 1(4:1-7); *Wasf 3 (6:4-7)*, there is attention to the attributes of both the male and female lover. In describing his belly to the "daughters

[11] Keel 27.

of Jerusalem," she says, "his belly[12] the ivory of thrones inlaid with sapphire" (5:14). Contemporary commentators Bloch and Keel, among others, found that the phrase used for belly, here *me'av eshet shen* מעיו עשת שן, has a unique meaning when used in the Song, equating the abdomen with items that were precious and highly valued.

> Ivory, not just stark white but also in rosy flesh tones was treasured in ancient Israel as a rare and beautiful material. It was carved, covered with gold leaf, inlaid with semiprecious stones, and used for furniture, beds, and panels of palace walls...[13]

In using such luxury items of great worth to depict her lover's belly, the reader may associate his mid-section with either statuesque firmness, or to simply state that his belly is a prized and precious commodity.

In the Song's fourth wasf, he takes a turn in describing her stomach, "your belly is a mound of wheat edged with lilies" (7:3). In his comprehensive commentary on Song of Songs, Marvin Pope notes that the belly is compared to wheat for its "hemispherical form," since wheat is piled in heaps.[14] In addition, the wheat might signify the color of her skin. Keel offers a different explanation in that wheat, a vital sustenance for Israel, when combined with wine, symbolizes a "festive diet." Pope too comments that wheat is synonymous with agricultural prosperity. If wheat is a symbol of prosperity and fullness, it may be that the metaphor comments on her fullness of belly (a literal description), or that like wheat—a most basic sustenance— it was essential, necessary, and desirable. The two descriptive metaphors for the male and female belly allude to a deeper sense of the lover's intention. The belly serves as a catalyst to remark on the inner and outer beauties and an expression of its importance.

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[12] Bloch translates as "loins."
[13] Bloch 187.

The thighs of the woman and legs of the man are also depicted in these wasfs. The love-struck female describes, "his thighs like marble pillars on pedestals of gold" (5:15). The metaphor describing the man's legs finds its roots in the Temple's architecture. Accordingly, "in I Chron 29:2 marble is among the precious stones collected for the building of the Temple."[15] These pillars, set upon bases of fine gold, parallel the woman's opening metaphor, "His head is burnished gold" (5:11). In Keel's opinion, "the woman's beloved is gold from head to foot."[16] Again, the woman uses precious goods to describe her lover, goods associated with royalty and architectural grace.

The male describes thighs as round and like jewels: "Your rounded thighs[17] shaped by the master craftsman" (7:2). While Pope and others tend to take the 'roundness' to depict her literal symmetrical shape, Bloch notes that the "the turns/curves/rounds 'of your thighs...' evokes notions of slippery smoothness."[18] Keel asserts that the man's description of the woman's thighs continues to illustrate valuable commodities and Israelite values.

> The sculptured quality of the subtle curves of the inner thighs, the buttocks, and the hips are extolled as the work of a master hand.... Artists and artisans belonged to the highest level of society (Jer. 52:15, 24-25; cf. Prov. 8:30) among the artists; the goldsmiths enjoyed a particularly high rank because of the value of the material with which they worked.[19]

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[14] Pope 621.
[15] Pope 547.
[16] Keel 205.
[17] Bloch translates "the gold of your thigh."
[18] Bloch 200.
[19] Keel 234.

Some believe that the world seems more beautiful when a person is in love. Likewise, these lovers see the world in their lovers and love in the world as they simultaneously describe the beauty of their lover's body and the beauty of their world.

Finally, each lover comments on the entire body or its stature. The woman begins her description by telling the young inquiring women, that her "beloved is white and red." According to Bloch, white and red have broader definitions that expand color to the skin's appearance, or state. The color white might signify "shining, or radiant," and red, "earth-colored or flushed." In addition, Bloch proposes that these colors have biblical associations — white with milk and red with wine.

> Milk and wine are associated with health, youthful strength, earthiness, and marvelous fertility... In the Song, in addition, they evoke sweetness and intoxicating sensuality, in reference to both the man and the [woman].[20]

Keel adds that these features (white/red) are signs of "liveliness and intensity."[21] Keel further comments that in Egyptian art the traditional color for man was a dark red-brown. In Israelite culture too, the red man was a symbol "for the presence of YHVH," most likely since God formed man from the red-clayed earth.[22] The woman's intention in this opening simile is not to describe his coloring, but rather to set up the rest of her passage that will intermingle "architectural solidity with tenderness and sweetness."[23] She intends to reveal more about his nature than the color of his body. She declares from the outset that her lover is intense, alive, strong, and deeply rooted in the earth on which she stands on.

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[20] Bloch 185.
[21] Keel 198.
[22] Keel 198.
[23] Bloch 185.

His verbal sketch of her body comes near the end of his last description, when he explains, "That day you seemed to me like a tall palm tree... I said in my heart, let me climb into that palm tree and take hold of its branches" (7:8-9). It may be that this description refers to her height. Keel's position is that the tree here does not refer to boy-like skinniness valued in Western culture but rather serves to show how delightful she is. He asserts that the special meaning of the palm in Near Eastern culture helps explain the metaphor.

> The palm is the archetype for the holy tree pictured countless times throughout the ancient Near East from the third millennium B.C.[E.] on. In the OT, this tree is known, among other things, as the "tree of life".... Portraying the woman in the Song as a palm is one of those theomorphisms that say she is the best that could be imagined or experienced in the ancient Near East. [24]

Both lovers carefully choose images that depict the body in order to compliment physical form, affirm the body of the lover as it is, and in many cases allude to qualities beyond the skin's surface. The images of architecture, nature, and at times even animals, elicit personality traits, as well as help the lover articulate overwhelming admiration. In addition these descriptions, especially according to Keel, suggest a great deal about the values of the culture of an ancient time and place.

Reverent Form

When reading the Song for the first time, one might find some of the metaphors awkward and confusing. In literary critical form, we might refer to this as "defamiliarization." For example, when we hear that "Your head crowns you like Mount

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[24] Keel 242.

Carmel" (7:6), we may worry that this person has an enormously disproportioned head. Do these bizarre associations mean to pay homage to the body crafted and formed by its Creator? Contemporary commentator Marcia Falk suggests that even scholars find these images "peculiar and tend to dismiss them as appealing to an ancient aesthetic that is not present in contemporary standards of taste."[25] For example, today our notion of sweet-smelling breath is usually an artificial minty-fresh aroma, not "apricots" (7:9). However, other cultures may associate good breath with a different scent or taste. Another example might be how we tend to describe beautiful eyes today. Usually we hear words like "his eyes were of deep blue, like the ocean." The song uses doves, flapping around in milky water, "Your eyes are like doves by the rivers of milk and plenty" (5:12). Yet just because these metaphors are not necessarily what we might choose to compliment or flatter, can we see that these descriptions are offered with sincere appreciation? One scholar challenges the notion that these lyrics bespeak admiration, and regard the images as grotesque. Fiona Black offers this view by suggesting that the Song has difficulties and problems, even if it is "love poetry." Black is troubled by the images used to describe the female body.

> Three of the detailed body descriptions pertain to the woman, and these may be conflated to create a fuller picture of a creature who is ill-proportioned, odd-looking and impossible. A giant, her head is as massive as Mt. Carmel... The woman is more like a biblical Barbie — though much less alluring — for she appears so ill-proportioned that she could not stand. Written on this comical body are the traces of daily life, of the mundane. Wheat, pomegranates, dates and wine bear the obligations of all comestibles; they are to be cultivated, processed, then masticated, salivated over, enjoyed, digested, excreted.

[25] Marcia Falk, Love Lyrics from the Bible: A Translation and Literary Study of the Song of Song (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1976) 211.

> They are said to be plentiful and appealing, but carry with them the threat of spoiling, of want.[26]

Yet Black does declare that one cannot read the wasfs in isolation from the rest of the Song. These verses cannot be extracted from the context of the entire Song that reveals themes of love, passion, desire, and devotion. In addition, after careful review of Near Eastern culture, there is little doubt that the author chose images that reflect the most beautiful and highly valued pieces of Israelite culture. In addition, the wasfs should not be read as if the images literally depict the male or female in the poem. As Bloch suggests,

> The images are not literally descriptive; what they convey is the delight of the lover in contemplating the beloved, finding in the body a reflected image of the world in its freshness and splendor.[27]

If these images are not literal descriptions of the body, and one can assume that Song of Songs is "love poetry," then what is the true intention of the one delivering such odd flattery? Perhaps the intention is to arouse the feelings experienced by the suitor as he/she looks upon their beloved.

> The poet's rhetorical strategy is to point us to each part of the lover's bodies as if describing them, then to set before our eyes images that cannot comfortably be assimilated to their referents. Our attention focuses on the images themselves more than on the parts of the body. The images thus become largely independent of their referents and combine to convey a unified picture of a self-contained world: a peaceful, fruitful world, resplendent with the blessings of nature and the beauties of human art. [28]

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[26]Fiona C. Black, "Beauty or the Beast: The Grotesque Body in The Song of Songs," Biblical Interpretation: A Journal of Contemporary Approaches 8.3 (2000) 311-12.
[27] Bloch 15.
[28]Michael Fox, "Love, Passion, and Perception in Israelite and Egyptian Love Poetry," Journal of Biblical Literature 102.2 (1983) 227.

In constructing a world of beauty that exists only to help describe the body, the lovers express their admiration for one another.

The intention of the lover stretches beyond mere physical arousal. The lovers comment on physical attributes and inner qualities simultaneously. Take for example the man's closing verse in Wasf 1, "You are beautiful, my love; my perfect one" (4:7). Read literally, the woman is aesthetically flawless. However Keel points out that the Hebrew word for 'flaw' or, *mum* מוּם, usually describes "defects in priests or sacrifices," those defects found displeasing to God. This new understanding of the term adds a different intention to his understanding of "flawless." There is nothing in her (physically or personally) that would cause him to be displeased. She is a perfect offering of love for him, one that he accepts with gratitude and praise.

The intention of the lovers to honor and revere the body was evident to the rabbis of the commentaries and midrash who later interpreted the Song's meaning. Although they usually read the Song as an allegorical relationship between God and Israel, they acknowledged the passion, love, respect, and dignity lurking in the text. Rabbi Abraham bĕn Isaac ha Levi (TaMaKH), in his interpretation of the Song's wasfs, connects each body part to revered aspects of Israelite community. He teaches for example, that the eyes refer to the leaders, chiefs, and pious ones; the hair is like the people of Israel in its multitude; and the lips are the prophets.[29] It is as if the rabbis were creating their own theological wasf by appropriating through allegory. The rabbis understood the Song's intent— that these descriptions were meant to flatter and compliment the other.

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[29]R. Abraham b. Issac Ha-Levi (TaMaKH) The Commentary on the Song of Songs, Transl. Leon A. Feldman (Netherlands: Royal Van Gorcum Ltd., 1970) 113.

Satisfying Shape

The body, created and formed from dust, is a working miracle, and a tribute to God. Lovers, above all, who take the time to marvel at the body's wonder, are constantly aware of its beauty. More importantly however, these lovers learn to see beauty in the world around them, and learn to articulate admiration in a respectful and honorable manner. Yet, the description of the human body found in the Song is distinct from how contemporary writers, journalists, and advertisers remark on physique. Take breasts for example. In the Song the male remarks, "Your breasts are two fawns, twins of a gazelle, grazing in a field of lilies" (7:4). The image is beautiful, her body creates an entire scene, what he creates in this description is calm, natural and yet inviting, intriguing, and even sexy. Today we are inundated with images of a different type, images that expose and objectify the female form conspicuously. Magazine pictures don't allude to anything, they simply show the person's body in its raw from, naked, and exposed, eliminating our need for imagination. In addition, the Song affirms the body's natural state. The Song tells us that a woman in biblical society had "rounded thighs" (7:2), and a "belly like a mound of wheat" (7:3) or a "proud nose like the tower of Lebanon" (7:5). She was curvy and had a big strong nose. Today we struggle to appreciate natural body shapes. In fact, we are a society that encourages girls to be so thin that their tiny bodies shut down, or men to be so muscular that they jeopardize their heart with steroids. The Song of Songs reminds us that the body is round; faces have big noses, yet still evoke such strong sentiments such as love, lust, and admiration. When we compliment one another with words such as thin, lean, fit, or even *svelte*, we deny ourselves the dignity our bodies deserve. Where do images of beauty exist for us? What pieces of the world do we see in

our lover, in our friends, or in our family members? Can those images help us to affirm the body of our loved ones and then see beyond the physical to the innermost parts of that person's soul? Can those images help us articulate better what we see — a person so wonderful we see them in everything that surrounds us? The Song bespeaks body consciousness, but not the kind of consciousness we feel in a dressing room, staring at our bodies in shiny mirrors under neon lights, and not the kind of consciousness we feel while sun bathing in public view. The body consciousness that the Song declares alerts us to respect the body of our loved one by affirming its natural wonder. The Song of Song affords us the opportunity to reflect and be conscious of what our bodies mean and bring to one another, to be conscious of our articulation of the body, to be ever-conscious that these bodies house the most important piece of us – that piece that is created in the image of God or, *b'tzelem Elohim*, בצלם אלוהים.

Connection to Pesach

Pesach celebrates Israel's liberation from Egyptian bondage. The Exodus tells the tale of Israel's miraculous movement from slavery to freedom. However, our yearly celebration does not ask us to merely commemorate a historical event. The Exodus is contemporary for Jews of all times, of all generations, for we read in the Haggadah that we should see ourselves as if we came out of Egypt personally. (Mishneh Pesachim 10:5) And yet, each year we struggle to feel a sense of that slavery — since for many of us, freedom is a right we have enjoyed since birth. Many of us have never known physical bondage. But here is an opportunity to explore other forms of 'spiritual slavery' that keep us in shackles and chains, which we propose may have to do with our sense of our bodies.

According to the American Anorexia Bulimia Association, over five million American women and men are affected by various eating disorders. Of those five million, two out of every 10 anorexics die from the disease. The Association believes that eating disorders cover a wide array of issues beyond the extreme cases of anorexia and bulimia.

> Dangerous fad diets are also widespread in this country. In a society where thinness is equated with success and happiness, nearly every American woman, man and child has suffered at one time or another from issues of weight, body shape and self-image. [30]

Moreover, the AABA states unequivocally that the shame and depression that accompany binge eating, starvation, and dieting "disrupt families, interrupt schooling, damage careers bright with promise, and destroy relationships." But most significantly, the mind is enslaved to thoughts of worthlessness, and self-doubt. Even those of us who do not suffer from eating disorders, are at one time or another slaves to poor body images that television projects, or that we see in magazines, or that we view on our computer screens. These images encourage abnormally small body sizes, and most often the women and men who pose for such pictures have been covered in make-up or their photograph is computer-altered to look 'ideal.'

On Pesach, we traditionally chant Song of Songs, both in services, on the Shabbat of the festival, and at the end of the first night's Seder. The Song delivers beautiful images of the lovers' bodies, decorated with nature and highly respected materials of ancient Israel's time. This Pesach, perhaps we can imagine freeing ourselves from America's grotesque body images, to a more nurturing understanding of the body, as explored in Song of Songs. In the Song, the lovers affirm and flatter the other's body.

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[30] American Anorexia Bulimia Association Official Website (August 2001).

Affirmation and pride in one's appearance may come from external forces, such as one's lover. Today however, we measure *ourselves* against unrealistic physical standards, even when outsiders offer compliments. True affirmation then, must come from our inner selves. To honor our inner selves we might learn to forfeit notions of the "perfect body." As Rabbi Kook said: honoring our inner selves brings worth and value to our lives, the opposite however enslaves our spirit.

> Real freedom is that noble spirit by which the individual and indeed the whole people are elevated to become loyal to their inner essential self, to the image of God within them. Through this characteristic, they can perceive their lives as purposeful and worthy of value. This is not true regarding people with the spirit of a slave— the content of their lives and their feelings are never attuned to the characteristics of their essential self, but rather to what is considered beautiful and good by others. [31]

The deliverance from Egypt depended on God, the master Redeemer, and the Israelites. But the Israelites were responsible for the release from their spiritual slavery. Redemption from any kind of spiritual slavery, including that of reductionist body images, requires a partnership. Our work in this spiritual release comes in seeing the beauty of the human form. Each day we could learn to release our ties to these images and bless the body we have, praising God for the body itself and for the soul within the miraculous body, regardless of its size or shape.

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[31] Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook, The Family Participation Haggadah: A Different Night, ed. Noam Tzion and David Dishon (Jerusalem: The Shalom Hartman Institute, 1997) 73.

Appendix I

Wasf 1(4:1-7;) Wasf 2 (5:9-16); Wasf 3 (6:4-7;)Wasf 4 (7:2-10).

Chapter: Verse	**Physical attribute**	**Parallel Image**
4:1	Eyes	The doves of (which) *are* I looking out from the thicket of your hair
4:1 and 6:5	Hair	*Like* a Flock of goats sliding down from Mount Gilead
4:2	Teeth	*(Are)* White ewes, all alike, that come up fresh from the pond
4:3	Lips	A crimson ribbon *(are)* your lips
4:3	Voice	How I listen for (it)
4:3	Cheeks	*A* pomegranate in the thicket of your hair
4:5 and 7:4 (stops at gazelle)	Breasts	*Are* two fawns, twins of a gazelle, grazing in a field of lilies
5:10	Beloved (Whole Body)	*Is* milk and wine, he towers above ten thousand
5:11	Head	*Is* burnished gold
5:11	Hair	The main of his hair black *as* the raven
5:12	Eyes	*Like* doves by the rivers of milk and plenty
5:13	Cheeks	*(Are)* a bed of spices, a treasure of precious scents
5:13	Lips	*(Are)* red lilies wet with myrrh
5:14	Arm	*(Is)* a golden scepter with gems of topaz
5:14	Belly	*(Are)* the ivory of thrones inlaid with sapphire
5:15	Thighs	*Like* marble pillars on pedestals of gold
5:15	Countenance (face)	Tall as Mount Lebanon, a man *like* a cedar
5:16	Mouth	*Is* sweet wine
5:16	He (My lover)	*Is* a delight
6:4	You (My lover)	Are beautiful, my love, *as* Tirzah, majestic *as* Jerusalem, daunting *as* the stars in their courses
6:6	Teeth	*(Are)* white ewes, all alike, that come up fresh from the pond
6:7	Cheeks	The curve of your cheek *(is)* a pomegranate in your thicket of hair
7:2	Feet	How graceful your steps *(are)* in those sandals
7:2	Rounded Thighs	The gold of your thigh *(is)* shaped by a master craftsman
7:3	Navel	*(Is)* the moon's bright drinking cup. May it brim with wine
7:3	Belly	*Is* a mound of wheat edged with lilies
7:5	Neck	*Is* a tower of ivory
7:5	Eyes	*Are* pools in Heshbon, at the gate of that city of

		lords
7:5	Proud Nose	*(Is)* the tower of Lebanon that looks toward Damascus
7:6	Head	Crowns you *like* Mount Carmel
7:6	Hair	*Like* royal purple. A king is caught in the thicket
7:8-9	Stature (Build)	You *seemed* to me a tall palm tree...let me climb into that palm tree and take hold of its branches
7:8-9	Breasts	The clusters of its (the Palm tree) fruit... may they be *like* clusters of grapes on a vine
7:9	Breath	*Like* apricots
7:10	Mouth	*(Is)* Good wine

Song of Songs: Applied Learning Pages

For an explanation on how to use the following pages, please refer to the Introduction: How to Use This Book, on Page 7.

What's the Question?
מה קשה לי? *Mah Kasheh Li?*

שיר שירים ה:יב
עֵינָיו כְּיוֹנִים עַל־אֲפִיקֵי מָיִם רֹחֲצוֹת בֶּחָלָב יֹשְׁבוֹת עַל־מִלֵּאת׃

Song of Songs 5:12
His eyes are like doves by the rivers of milk and plenty.

In the box below, you will find a list of principles for interpreting Torah. For each category, ask yourself: does this verse present a difficulty, a *koshi* קשי? If yes, please describe the *koshi* קשי.

1. **Is there superfluous language?**
   The rabbis believe that every word in the Bible is there for a precise purpose. When a word seems repetitive and/or synonymous with another word, the rabbis always justify the existence of each word. In the quote above, do you think any words seem repetitive and/or synonymous?

2. **Are there grammatical curiosities?**
   The rabbis respond to sentences with unexpected or incorrect grammar, such as unusual word order, awkward prepositions, illogical sentences, inconsistent verb tenses, or unclear pronouns. In the quote above, is the grammar problematic?

3. **Are there theological or moral dilemmas?**
   The rabbis identify moments that raise questions about God's characteristics, God's role in the world, and how God is depicted in the Bible. They are also troubled by what seem to be breaches of moral or ethical conduct by God and/or human beings. In the quote above, do you find any theological or moral dilemmas?

4. **Are there gaps in the text?**
   The rabbis are also intrigued by what is not in the text. In other words, when feelings, time spans, physical descriptions, conversations, etc. are not written in the text, they often fill in the gaps. In the quote above, do you find anything missing from the text?

5. **Are there political or sociological issues?**
   The rabbis seek to render power dynamics among nations according to their worldview (e.g. putting Israel or Judaism at the center). Moreover, questions of ethnicity, gender, class, etc. prompt their investigation. In the quote above, are any of these kinds of issues relevant?

6. **Are there any other difficulties, *kushiot* קושיות?**

Write a creative response, a possible answer, to the *koshi* קשי that you find most interesting.

What's the Conversation?
מה קשה לנו? *Mah Kasheh Lanu?*

שיר שירים ה:יב

עֵינָיו כְּיוֹנִים עַל־אֲפִיקֵי מָיִם רֹחֲצוֹת בֶּחָלָב יֹשְׁבוֹת עַל־מִלֵּאת׃

Song of Songs 5:12

His eyes like doves by the rivers of milk and plenty.

On this page, several commentators respond to the following difficulty, קשי: What is the significance of the metaphors in this verse?

QUESTIONS

1. How does each commentator resolve the קשי?
2. How do their conclusions differ from one another?
3. How do you resolve the קשי? Add your voice as a "21st Century Commentator."

Blochs: "עֵינָיו כְּיוֹנִים" "HIS EYES ARE LIKE DOVES" A poetic fantasy. Doves indeed choose regions with abundant water, and "milk" may allude to the color of doves, or the whites of the lover's eyes, as has been suggested. But here again it is pointless to approach the images with a dogged literalism. Rather, the images of abundant waters and sensuous bathing in milk suggest lushness and a tranquil sensuality (p. 185)

21st Century Commentator:

Song of Songs Rabbah: "עֵינָיו כְּיוֹנִים" "HIS EYES ARE LIKE DOVES" "His eyes" are the Sanhedrin who are the eyes of the congregation, as it says, "Then it shall be, if it be done by the eyes of the congregation" (Num. 25:24). There are 248 limbs in the human body, and all are directed by the eyes. So Israel can do nothing without their Sanhedrin.

R. Abraham ben Isaac ha-Levi (TaMaKH): "עֵינָיו כְּיוֹנִים" "HIS EYES ARE LIKE DOVES" His eyes are praised for their similarity to doves in the strength of their desire.... They are greatly devoted to the practice of love, which is especially enjoyable beside the water channels. The eyes are praised for their dazzling whiteness, as if always bathed in milk; there is no redness in them whatsoever.

Murphy: "עֵינָיו כְּיוֹנִים" "HIS EYES ARE LIKE DOVES" The point of the comparison here is not the eyes of the dove, but doves at a water pool. Thus far, the comparison would seem to bring out the glistening character of eyes (p. 166).

BIOGRAPHY

TaMaKh: R. Abraham ben Isaac ha-Levi (14th Century) Commentary attributed to this rabbi is a philosophic work. The identity of the author remains uncertain.
Song of Songs Rabbah: A 6th century and oldest classical midrash on the five books of the Torah and the *megillot* מגילות.
Ariel Bloch: Jewish Professor Emeritus of Near Eastern Studies at the University of California at Berkeley.
Chana Bloch: Jewish Professor of English and director of the creative writing program at Mills College.
Roland E. Murphy: G.W. Ivey Professor Emeritus at Duke University.

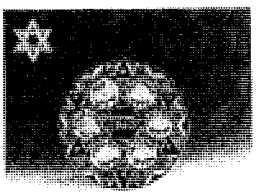
What's the Connection?
מה הקשר? *Mah HaKesher?*

Below you will find a picture that relates to the theme of body consciousness. It is one of many possible ways to encounter the theme in our world.

"The Birth of Venus" by Sandro Botticelli

מה הקשר
לשיר השירים?
Mah HaKesher to Song of Songs:
What connections do you find between the picture above and Song of Songs?

מה הקשר לחג?
Mah HaKasher to Pesach:
What connections do you find between the picture above and Pesach?



Now is your chance to draw from your own experience and identify something you have encountered in your world (a conversation, an article in the newspaper, a story, a road trip, etc.) that connects to Song of Songs. How does your encounter shed light on Song of Songs and the holiday of Pesach?

What's Our Contribution?
מה קישוט החג? *Mah Kishut HeChag?*

Finding My Freedom

Every year the story of Israel's exodus is recited at tables around the world. But it is more than a story; it is a piece of *our* shared history and collective experience. According to the Haggadah, in each generation, each person should feel as though he/she personally had gone forth from Egypt, as it is written: "And you shall explain to your child on that day, 'it is because of what Adonai did for me when I [myself] went forth from Egypt'" (Exodus 13:8). And yet, it is so difficult for us to experience the tales of slavery as our own.

Rabbi Kook taught, "We can find a wise bondman whose spirit is filled with freedom, and a free person who has the spirit of a slave."[1] In truth, we are all slaves — slaves whose backs are broken by the weight of oppressive images that make us measure ourselves to unrealistic standards. The story of Pesach begins with degradation and ends with Hallel — rejoicing for freedom. Take this opportunity to walk that path, to write about your experience — from slavery to freedom.

In Egypt, I was a slave to Pharaoh and it was his cruelty that held me back and prevented me from reaching the shores of freedom. Pharaoh can be a part of myself or a part of the world around me. Who or what is my Pharaoh today?

God heard the cry of the Israelites and sent Moses to help free us from Egypt. But we couldn't break free from the chains without faith and courage. What do I need today in order to break myself free from these burdensome chains?

During the Seder we journey from degradation to praise, or *genut* גנות to *shevach* שבח. By the evening's end we are singing psalms of Hallel, marveling at the greatest gift we people received, freedom. What do I wish to celebrate? Who will I be once I have broken my chains, once I have crossed the Red Sea? What song will I sing to God?

[1] Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook. The Family Participation Haggadah: A Different Night, ed. Noam Zion and David Dishon. (Jerusalem: The Shalom Hartman Institute, 1997) 73.

All the Choice Perfumes

What do 20th century American paintings of Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986) and the ancient[1] scroll of Song of Songs have in common? One of O'Keeffe's great artistic revolutions is also a daring innovation for that intrepid biblical poetry called "Song of Songs." As art historian Britta Benke puts it, O'Keeffe's work "is resplendent with color and laden with hidden sensuality." Moreover, Benke states that "O'Keeffe's reputation rests mainly on the large-format pictures that have assured her an unusual place in the annals of art, between realism and abstraction."[2] Consider two feats of O'Keeffe's work. First, rather than depicting the actual *spacial* size of her now famous flowers, O'Keeffe used her art as a vehicle for depicting the *emotional* size of the experience of beholding the sumptuous petals. While lilies and irises are no more than a few inches wide by objective measurement, O'Keeffe's paintings feature petals and pollen that are magnified to adjust for the subjective experience of them, their lived emotional proportions. In many cases, she depicts flowers larger than we are. In other words, while the beauty of many of O'Keeffe's subjects was empirically small, her art reflects adjusted proportions that our *desire* effects (internally). Her work reflects the emotional size of that beauty.

Secondly, O'Keeffe's maverick style is not only about adjusting for the magnitude of experience. Her lilies, irises, poppies, petunias, and leaves are more than impressively giant, they are also "anatomically correct." O'Keeffe's paintings uncannily capture subtle velvety textures, deep and rich colors, flowing, rounding, dissolving contours and — certainly for botanists — even sweet scents can be suggested through the

[1] The scroll likely dates to sometime between the 6th and 4th centuries B.C.E. We were first introduced to this creative notion of considering O'Keeffe's work as an analogy for Song of Songs by Professor Tamara Cohn Eskenazi in a course on Song of Songs at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles.

[2] Britta Benke, Georgia O'Keeffe 1887-1986: Flowers in the Desert (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2001) inside flap of front cover.

brush. The beauty of her art is not, of course, limited to the purpose of rendering anatomically correct flowers. Sometimes they are also beautiful celebrations of a woman's curves.[3] Still, while Freud's famous claim that "sometimes a cigar is just a cigar" was correct, it is clear that O'Keeffe's flowers are not *just* flowers.

So which is the "real" subject of O'Keeffe's painting? Flora or eros? Don't answer, it is a trick question. Surely it does not have to be one or the other. It can be both. The question is unfair because "flora ***or*** eros" is a false dichotomy, for if we sought to distill one from the other, we would likely do violence to the integrity of each. When we allow ourselves to get lost in one or another levels of meaning, both (and all) meanings can remain whole, can co-exist. In fact, the more attuned we are to the details of the flower qua flower, the richer the secondary meanings become. The reverse can be true as well: depending upon the power of our imagination, secondary interpretations can enrich primary meanings.

Going back at least 2300 years, we find a biblical poet (possibly even a woman herself?) using words instead of paint to create her suggestive images. Judging by the elaborate and detailed descriptions of gazelles, hills, and streams, vineyards, grapes, and pomegranates rarely found anywhere else in the Bible, it is clear that this artist was also striving to convey - poetically - the intense emotional size of her subjects' desire. And, anticipating O'Keeffe by a few millennia, the poet develops her own flair for suggestive "anatomically correct" figures. Take, for example, the unmistakably libidinous use of pomegranate imagery. Six times throughout the book we are treated to an encounter with this exquisite fruit: twice the pomegranate is "the curve of your cheek" (Song of Songs

[3] O'Keeffe's work also bears "male flowers," as in a certain painting of an iris.

4:3 and 6:7),[4] once the woman's limbs become "an orchard of pomegranate trees heavy with fruit" (4:13), twice it is asked if the "pomegranate trees are in flower" (6:11 and 7:13), and finally, at 8:2, the woman says to her lover, "...I would give you spiced wine to drink, my pomegranate wine." Like O'Keeffe's flowers, pomegranates also suggest textures deep and rich, colors flowing, contours rounding. Carey Ellen Walsh, contemporary biblical scholar and author of Exquisite Desire: Religion, the Erotic and the Song of Songs, elaborates rather frankly on what is subtly allusive (though unmistakably present) in the Song. She explains,

> [p]omegranates, for their part, are a sexual symbol. Their juice is both sweet and tart, keeping the drinker poised between delight and a borderline bitter aftertaste. And the fruit itself is almost obscene upon opening. It is juicy, red, hard, and full of seeds, each of which happens to be the size and shape of a clitoris, and requires precision from the tongue.[5]

So can a pomegranate ever be just a pomegranate? In Song of Songs, it is not likely — at least not *solely* a pomegranate. Moreover, the erotic imagery in Song of Songs is not at all limited to genitalia; indeed, desire can be unlocked from all features of the lovers' bodies — not to mention from the flora and fauna around them. In fact, in Song of Songs it becomes unclear, for example, where a flock of goats skipping down a rolling hill images into being a woman's flowing hair (4:1, 6:5), or where a rising tower becomes an elegant neckline (4:4, 7:5). In biblical scholar Michael Fox's words, the "...eroticism of the Song is not genital-centered; rather it is diffused throughout the body and projected onto the world beyond."[6] The entire body is suffused with erotic energy.

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[4] JPS translates this phrase as "a pomegranate split open."
[5] Carey Ellen Walsh, Exquisite Desire: Religion, The Erotic and the Song of Songs (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000) 86.
[6] Michael Fox, "Song of Songs and Egyptian Love Poetry," Journal of Biblical Literature 102/2 (1983) 228.

Metaphor and reality merge, creating a poetic world where at every moment, any part of nature is ready and eager to offer its form for the cause; that is, to communicate the many sides of desire. Indeed, as Robert Alter noted especially for uniting literary theory with biblical scholarship explains of Song of Songs, "imagery is given such full and free play that the lines of semantic subordination blur, and it becomes a little uncertain what is illustration and what is referent."[7]

What happens, therefore, if we ask that same trick question of Song of Songs that we asked of O'Keeffe's paintings; namely, what is the real subject of the poem? Is it an ode to the multi-sensory beauty of the natural world? A couple longing after one another? Sex? Or how about, as Rabbinic tradition has asserted, the relationship between God and the Jewish people? This time, the distinction between primary object and secondary interpretation is hazier, more complex. For the analogy between O'Keeffe's art and Song of Songs' use of metaphor breaks down in the feasibility of distinguishing between primary and secondary interpretations. However, multiple levels of meaning coexist in both works of art. Similarly, if we can allow ourselves to get lost in one or another of the levels of meaning, both (and all) meanings can remain whole and become mutually enriching. Even so, there is a larger theme in the Song that subsumes the various interpretations posited above. Along with scholars such as Rachel Adler and Carey Ellen Walsh, this study submits that this theme is *desire*, and must be examined on both literal and metaphorical levels of interpretation. And if we are open to the possibilities of both

[7] Robert Alter, The Art of Biblical Poetry (USA: Basic Books, 1985) 193.

levels of meaning for this desire, we just might merit a whiff of "all the choice perfumes" (4:14).[8]

In order to pursue our exploration of the nature of desire in the Song of Songs on both levels of meaning, it is important to begin with definitions of what each of these levels entails. Jewish tradition employs the technical terms *p'shat* פשט and *d'rash* דרש to refer to primary meanings and secondary interpretations, respectively. *P'shat* פשט is often defined as the "plain meaning" of the text, while *drash* דרש refers to the meanings we read into this plain sense of the text.[9] David L. Lieber, senior editor of Etz Hayim (the Consevative Movement's recent commentary on the Pentateuch) describes in more detail the ideal goals and means of a *p'shat* פשט commentary:

> Archaeology, philology, anthropology, a new awareness of ancient cultures — all of these have added to our knowledge of the biblical world. We see our people in the flow of time, in history, participating with the civilizations around them, yet with their very own perspectives. What they gave to the ancient world and what they took from it — these are embedded in the p'shat [פשט], the plain basic meaning of the text. We try to understand Torah as it was once understood by Israelites — before the rabbis of the Talmud began to use the text for the fashioning of the great civilization known as Rabbinic Judaism. We use the tools of modern-day p'shat [פשט] to recover ancient Scripture....The hallmark of the p'shat [פשט] is lucidity; its goal is to see the text in a time and place and to have it speak to us.[10]

Whereas *p'shat* פשט interpretations require the interpreter to refrain from reading his/her own meanings into the text, *d'rash* דרש depends on it, as follows:

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[8] This is the JPS translation of *kol-rashei v'samim* כל-ראשי בשמים, selected out of aesthetic preference. The Blochs translate the phrase as follows: "all the rare spices."

[9] In a biblical scholarly terms these levels might be called "exegesis" and "eisegesis," respectively.

[10] David Lieber, senior ed. Etz Hayim (New York: Rabbinical Assembly, 2001) xix.

> D'rash (or midrash) is a traditional nonliteral way of reading sacred texts. The term comes from a Hebrew verb meaning 'to inquire, to investigate,' and it refers to a process of close reading of the text to find insights that go beyond the plain meaning of the words. [i.e. beyond the p'shat פשט]. In Jacob J. Petuchowski's felicitous simile, Jews read Torah as one reads a love letter, eager to squeeze the last drop of meaning from every word: Why was that word used rather than another? What is the significance of the repetition of certain words? What does the choice of a word reveal about the speaker's innermost thoughts?[11]

With the help of this vocabulary, we will now be able to orient ourselves amidst the centuries old discourse about desire in the Song of Songs and attempt to assess what might be the poetry's convictions about this universal human trait.

On a *p'shat* פשט level Song of Songs might be described as a depiction of an erotically playful couple, whose figure-eight like meetings and separations heighten their longing for one another. Whether their desire is consummated becomes a contentious literary debate, since what is at stake is the ultimate message about desire in the Song. The most likely passage depicting a consummation is 5:4-6, and even there it remains only allusive. Thus Walsh asserts the book is "not about sex per se, but sexual yearning.... a sheer celebration of desire for its own sake."[12] And the sexual yearning of a man and woman — but especially of a woman — is not the subject of any other book in the Bible. Without consummation, the book bears a frustrated, excruciating, and for Walsh an exquisite and delectable, longing. Similarly, without any marital union which would contain the relationship legally, there is an element of social anarchy. Therefore, Song of Songs has attracted interpreters with a variety of interpretational agendas, including allegorical and metaphorical. Shortly, we will see how the use of metaphor

[11] Lieber xix.
[12] Walsh 29, 30.

allows for multiple theological understandings. Overall, it seems difficult for commentators to remain long in the world of *p'shat* פשט before various impulses to *d'rash* דרש take over. In fact, at least since the third century C.E.,

> ...the dominant interpretation of the Song for Jews and Christians alike has been an allegorical one, whereby the human lovers depicted are understood to represent God and Israel or Christ and the Church. The Song's overt sexual meanings have only become commonplace with the commentaries in the twentieth century.[13]

A few instances of how the rabbinic tradition engages in *drash* דרש are sufficient to get a sense of the rabbis' notions of *divine*-human desire. Consider, for example, the moment when the lover comes to his beloved's door and asks her to open it, saying "...my head is drenched with dew, my locks with the damp [rain] of the night (5:2)." For Rashi, the "dew" becomes God's reward for good deeds, while the "rain of the night" becomes "hardship and weariness" – the retribution exacted from those who forsake and anger God. To indicate his midrashic move, Rashi used phrases such as *this is the language of* compassion, etc. In many cases, however, commentators will omit the explicit transition to allegory (or metaphor) and simply comment on the *p'shat* פשט of the verse. On 5:1, for example, when the man announces, "I have come into to my garden," the commentator known as Mezudat David omits any indication of a divine-human relationship in his commentary on the verse, which is as follows:

> The young man sends his word and says: I will hasten to come to the garden that you have prepared for me, and I will gather the myrrh with the other species of spices that you have prepared for me, and I will eat sugar with such a ravenous appetite that I will eat the sugar cane along with it

[13] Walsh 47.

> in order to suck the sugar out, and I will drink the wine with the milk that you have prepared for me.[14]

Is the reader to presume that these acts of coming to the garden and of ravenous eating are *of course* meant to be understood on the allegorical level?

The commentary of TaMaKh (Rabbi Abraham ben Isaac) presents yet another mode of responding to this *p'shat* פשט/*drash* דרש ambiguity. Throughout his commentary on Song of Songs, he will do one of two things. In most cases, he will offer an explanation of the *p'shat* פשט that is followed by (but clearly distinguished from) the *drash* דרש by the phrase, "Its occult meaning..." Alternatively, he will, at times, also provide *only* an interpretation of the *p'shat* פשט. What seems to make TaMaKh unique is that even in verses with erotic references, offering *only* an interpretation of the *p'shat* פשט is acceptable to him. For example, on verse 4:6 which reads, "Before day breathes, before the shadows of night are gone, I will hurry to the mountain of myrrh, the hill of frankincense," TaMaKh comments rather seductively,

> When he reaches her breasts, after praising each of her organs, he is gripped by desire, unable to prolong her praises. In his desire for union, he tells her that 'the day is still warm', there being no shade anywhere, and that he will enjoy her delights during the noonday siesta. He compares her to 'the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense' because of her wonderful fragrance.[15]

In terms of literary process, what is so fascinating about these examples is that *p'shat* פשט is not left behind. It co-exists in creative tension *with* the *drash* דרש. As such, there is something more than allegorical at work here. In other words, there is more than a simple *replacement* of an allegorical meaning with the literal one. Rather, the two

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[14] Cited in, A.J. Rosenberg, transl., The Megilloth and Rashi's Commentary with Linear Translation (Israel: Hebrew Linear Classics: 1983) 55.

levels of meaning are interdependent which creates rich, multiple meanings. Thus, we might more accurately label the rabbis' relatively free and fluid movement between the *p'shat* פשט and *drash* דרש of Song of Songs as *metaphorical*, rather than strictly allegorical.[16] In this light, the book becomes both erotic *and* theological, rather than theological *instead* of erotic. In this way, the rabbis are able to pursue a divine-human interpretation without censoring or deflating the bursting passion in the *p'shat* פשט of the biblical text. Contemporary theologian Rachel Adler gracefully articulates how the language of Song of Songs is actually ideal for speaking of the divine. Of Song of Songs she states,

> ...imagination is its primary erogenous zone. In contrast to the narrowly focused specificity of the genital, polymorphous eroticism is charged with metaphor. Metaphor makes the entire universe a prism to refract human yearning and delight. Disentangling the knot of sensuous experience into iridescent threads, it reweaves them into images that point toward what is too vast and too complex ever to be wholly grasped. It is this capacity for bridging the gap between the embodied and the ineffable that befits metaphor for sacred language...[17]

It is important not to overstate this exciting metaphorical dance, though. However freely the rabbis may feel to use *p'shat* פשט or *drash* דרש to enhance one another, in an ultimate sense, the *p'shat* פשט in Song of Songs is servant to the exigencies of *drash* דרש, and not the other way around. In some way, then, the *drash* דרש does eclipse the *p'shat* פשט. With Song of Songs in particular, the rabbis seem to evince a love-hate relationship with the *p'shat* פשט. It is dangerous because of the liberating implications for women's sexuality, and sexuality in general. But the *p'shat* פשט is simultaneously

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[15] Feldman 111.

[16] For more on this distinction, please refer to *Two Facets of a Precious Gemstone*, on p. 34.

indispensable for letting loose their powerful, passionate *drash* דרש on the mutual desire between God and Israel. *P'shat* פשט and *drash* דרש meanings can come to enrich one another, even as it seems clear that the highest message is not the *p'shat* פשט, but the *drash* דרש. A salient difference between this classical rabbinic approach to the Song and a contemporary Jewish interpretation might be that we would not privilege one level of meaning over the other. In fact, an interesting sort of reversal may have occurred. For the rabbis the *p'shat* פשט is exciting but also dangerous. However, for many contemporary readers of Song of Songs, the *p'shat* פשט is simply exciting, while it is the traditional *drash* דרש with its erotically charged theology that may strike us as dangerous.

A Close Reading of Desire

Once again, the question of consummation has become paramount; this time what is at stake is theological. Do God and Israel ever meet in an ultimate way, or is this relationship one of continued yearning? Actually, from a Jewish theological perspective, it is necessary that no consummation be read into the Song. Contemporary theologian Rachel Adler describes the importance of this non-consummation as follows: "Commentators have noted that the absence of an explicit sexual consummation distances the Song from the erotica of polytheistic religions and also makes it usable for theologies in which eschatological fulfillment is yet to come."[18] For Jews, a messianic era has yet to be heralded, and so for the rabbis' *drash* דרש to work, the couple's desire (*p'shat* פשט)

[17] Rachel Adler, Engendering Judaism. (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1998) 138-139.
[18] Adler 139.

must be one of prolonged and intense yearning, longing to unite with each other. What is also theologically interesting here is that not only carnal Israel, but God, too, has desire.

Ultimately, the nature of this desire, and its implications for *p'shat* פשט and *drash* דרש interpretations alike, hinges upon the question of consummation. We already know that both Adler and Walsh argue that neither in *p'shat* פשט nor *drash* דרש senses is there any consummation between the lovers in the Song. This understanding depends on a very careful *p'shat* פשט reading of chapter 5:4-6, not surprisingly one of the most debated passages of the book. As mentioned, the passage in 5:4-6 is the closest, but still quite allusive reference to intercourse between the lovers. After carefully considering the passage for oneself, it is interesting to encounter an array of responses in the field of biblical scholarship. Bear in mind what is theologically at stake in terms of consummation versus non-consummation.

According to Francis Landy, the male lover's possession and enjoyment of the garden of love's fruits (5:1) do, in fact, constitute the one act of consummation in the poem. As a result, this becomes the emotional center of the poem around which all other scenes are grouped. [19] Ariel and Chana Bloch, the authors of our translation, come to a similar conclusion, though by different means and with different implications. Notice too, how they invoke the *p'shat* פשט sense of the text for their explanation,

> For centuries, exegetes have considered their [the lovers'] relationship chaste, ignoring the plain sense of the Hebrew. The word *dodim*, which occurs six times in the Song, including the opening verse- 'Your *dodim* are better than wine' – is almost always translated as 'love,' though it refers specifically to sexual love. Moreover, metaphors of feasting suggest fulfillment, particularly when they are in

[19] Francis Landy, "Song of Songs," Literary Guide to the Bible, ed's. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987) 316-317.

> the perfect tense, and the verb 'to come into' or 'to enter' often has a patently sexual meaning in biblical Hebrew...All this strengthens our conviction that the sexual relationship between the two lovers is not just yearned for – as has often been assumed – but actually consummated.[20]

Significantly for our theological question, however, the Blochs qualify this consummation as follows: "[the couple] move[s] from desire to anticipation to fulfillment and back to desire; sexual consummation, expressed in 5:1 and 6:12, is an episode in the poem, not its grand finale, and it doesn't appease their hunger for very long."[21] According to this understanding, a theology of yearning is suggested, although moments – however fleeting – of actual encounter, of union with the divine, are also indicated.

Noted scholar of Song of Songs, Marvin Pope, remains far more equivocal in his reading of this infamous passage. He is willing to state that "the language is at least suggestive."[22] In 5:3, for example, Pope refers to the well-known use of "feet" as a euphemism for genitals. For Pope, though, it is in the beginning of 5:4, where his literalizing of the metaphor leads him to a most graphic depiction, even if it is still only *suggestive* of intercourse,

> Given the attested use of 'hand' as a surrogate for phallus, there can be no question that, whatever the context, the statement "my love thrust his 'hand' into the hole" would be suggestive of coital intromission, even without the succeeding line descriptive of the emotional reaction of the female.[23]

As certain as Pope is that the phrase (using his translation) "my love thrust his hand into the hole" is suggestive of coitus, Robert Gordis is certain that it is not. Gordis,

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[20] Ariel and Chanah Bloch, The Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary (New York: Random House, 1995) 4.
[21] Bloch 17.

commenting in the 1950's, acknowledges that the words "from the hole", or *min hachor* מן-החור, are extremely difficult. Although he recognizes that some translate the phrase as "through" the door, Gordis asserts that the context of the preoposition *min* מן implies "withdrawal" and that "...there is no need to read...the 'peering-hole' as an obscene term for the vagina." [24] The lover was merely withdrawing his hand from the door just as he was getting ready to let himself in. Gordis obviously rejects (and possibly even resents) the suggestion that chapter five bears genital imagery, and so this does not represent consummation for him. Interestingly enough, both he and the Blochs rely on *p'shat* פשט meanings for their argument, though they come to opposite conclusions.

A final example, of Carey Ellen Walsh's reading, will demonstrate perhaps the most unconventional reading of this passage. Despite (or because of) its uniqueness, it presents an explanation for how it is possible to acknowledge the woman's explicit sexual climax, without needing to conclude that the couple had intercourse. Walsh recognizes that "ardent yearnings for sex are articulated" in chapter five.[25] But rather than being about the couple having intercourse, she boldly supposes that the passage is the "biblical wet dream of a woman... and possible allusion to autoeroticism."[26] For Walsh, a great deal is at stake since "[n]ot having this couple consummate is the point and power of th[e] book."[27] According to her passionate thesis, the Song is ultimately

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[22] Marvin H. Pope, Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary (New York: Doubleday, 1977) 515.
[23] Pope 519.
[24] Robert Gordis, The Song of Songs: A Study, Modern Translation and Commentary, (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1954) 88.
[25] Walsh 116ff.
[26] Walsh 113.
[27] Walsh 35.

about the woman's ownership of her own sexual (and all other types of) desire.[28] For example, Walsh states that the Song

> ...probes: the limits of both language and the body; the assertion of identity, in a self-ownership that ultimately redeems desire from mere stalking – yearning having taken a hostage; and the terrible, delicious ache of waiting, the ecstasy and the danger.[29]

Desire, furthermore, is "an impulse and emotion for more in life at any given moment," and it is "the discipline to live on that edge between wanting and satisfaction."[30] With Walsh's treatment of chapter five and of the Song as a whole, a tremendous theology is implicated. God and Israel, who are both *like* the lovers and also *embody* the lovers, experience a longing that burns with intensity. It is a yearning that reflects humanity's actual-lived spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and material hungers. It is a theology that, using Walsh's words, is neither for the "timid nor the fickle."[31] Finally, it is a theology that allows *p'shat* פשט and *drash* דרש to be exquisitely intertwined.

Song of Songs is ultimately a book not only about a very powerful and urgent longing for closeness, for nearness, for intimacy between people, or between God and humanity. It is also a book about the chemistry that can exist between layers of meaning. Just as we have seen theological models of God and Israel struggling to unite with one other, on a literary level, we have also witnessed *p'shat* פשט and *drash* דרש in a sort of literary dance, longing to be one. Even before engaging in *drash* דרש, metaphor and reality in Song of Songs become seamlessly, harmoniously, gorgeously intertwined.

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[28] Walsh 131.
[29] Walsh 9.
[30] Walsh 11, 22.
[31] Walsh 22.

Consider *p'shat* פשט and *drash* דרש as themselves metaphors, where *p'shat* פשט comes to indicate the daily life that we perceive through the five senses, and *drash* דרש represents the spiritual and transcendent meanings we can bring to these experiences. *Drash* דרש renders our experiences both deeper *and* loftier, more concrete *and* more transcendent. Like great art, drash דרש adjusts for the actual lived proportions of our experience. It seeks to express the depth and intensity of our *p'shat* פשט. As such, neither exists without the other, and desire lives in both. The wholeness of our desire requires allowing *p'shat* פשט and *drash* דרש, to function in tandem, as a team and not at odds with one another. It is not one or the other. It was not so for the rabbis. And it certainly need not be for us.

Connection to Pesach

Commenting on a verse in Song of Songs, the 13th century rabbinic text, the Zohar, describes its own version of the ongoing tension involved in desire. Here, the metaphor is conveyed through a crocus (or rose), the *chavatzelet* חבצלת of the plains and a lotus (or lily), the *shoshana* שושנה of the valley. Today, the coastal plains of Sharon actually refer to one of the most fertile regions in all of Israel. But the Zohar transforms the Sharon into a desert in accordance with what it interprets to be the larger context of the passage.

אֲנִי חֲבַצֶּלֶת הַשָּׁרוֹן שׁוֹשַׁנַּת הָעֲמָקִים

I am the crocus of the plain, the lotus of the valley (2:1).

In section III, page 107b, the Zohar interprets:

> *Havatzelet Hasharon* חבצלת השרון: Her wells need/seek watering from a deep river, a spring that flows. Sharon: A desert. A singing desert.
> *Shoshanat Ha'amakim* שושנת העמקים: Found in the deep places. Found in a place called the "ultimate depth", that extends on all sides.

What a powerful image to long for: a "water source that goes out without ever stopping." The Havatzelet is of the Sharon, and a parched expanse whose desire is none other than the life-sustaining source, water. While it may seem at first that she is suffering, we consider the oxymoron, "a singing desert." As well we are treated to a pun, since the Hebrew root for Sharon is also that for *shir* שיר (song). The yearning is not painful, but delectable. Desire has a voice, and it is gloriously sounded. The Sharon desert sings.

Were it not for this voice, we would not be able to name our longings, hopes, dreams, desires. Were it not for this precious capacity for song, we would not bear the means for expression. We would not have that divine capacity for language, speech, words, letters. The bold theosophy here is that our words *do* have cosmic impact. No Jewish holiday other than Pesach could be as inextricably linked to the expressed word. After all, the children of Israel's first response to crossing the miraculously parted sea, was *song*. This "Song at the Sea" (found in Exodus 15:1-18) continues to be sung as a part of daily Jewish liturgy, thanking God for freedom. Moreover, we read from a text that is actually called a "telling," the *Haggadah.* But too often, we have come to use the Haggadah not as a *telling*, but as a fixed script. Recalling the exodus of our people could ideally force us to struggle with finding appropriate language to name our deep longings and desire for freedom. The Pesach seder could provide a rich opportunity for each

participant to express his/her hopes and dreams, and a context for celebrating desire, in its largest sense.

It is also our right and our privilege to experience what Walsh calls "gorgeously unbearable longings." Honoring one's desire involves no less than loving life, and embracing it as a gift, in all its complications. So, do we take the risk? Dare we live fully, willing to deepen our reservoirs of desire? Do we risk creating such *amakim* עמקים, such deep places? After all, the deeper our inner drives, the greater our capacity to be full, but also the greater our capacity to be very empty. Pursuing our desire-fueled journeys requires the redemptive courage of Moses, but also the ideally supportive community of a Pesach seder gathering.

Song of Songs: Applied Learning Pages

For an explanation on how to use the following pages, please refer to the Introduction: How to Use This Book, on Page 7.

What's the Question?
מה קשה לי? *Mah Kasheh Li?*

שיר שירים א:ב

יִשָּׁקֵנִי מִנְּשִׁיקוֹת פִּיהוּ כִּי־טוֹבִים דֹּדֶיךָ מִיָּיִן׃

Song of Songs 1:2

Let him give me of the kisses of his mouth for your love is more delightful than wine.

In the box below, you will find a list of principles for interpreting Torah. For each category, ask yourself: does this verse present a difficulty, a *koshi* קשי? If yes, please describe the *koshi* קשי.

1. **Is there superfluous language?**
   The rabbis believe that every word in the Bible is there for a precise purpose. When a word seems repetitive and/or synonymous with another word, the rabbis always justify the existence of each word. In the quote above, do you think any words seem repetitive and/or synonymous?

2. **Are there grammatical curiosities?**
   The rabbis respond to sentences with unexpected or incorrect grammar, such as unusual word order, awkward prepositions, illogical sentences, inconsistent verb tenses, or unclear pronouns. In the quote above, is the grammar problematic?

3. **Are there theological or moral dilemmas?**
   The rabbis identify moments that raise questions about God's characteristics, God's role in the world, and how God is depicted in the Bible. They are also troubled by what seem to be breaches of moral or ethical conduct by God and/or human beings. In the quote above, do you find any theological or moral dilemmas?

4. **Are there gaps in the text?**
   The rabbis are also intrigued by what is not in the text. In other words, when feelings, time spans, physical descriptions, conversations, etc. are not written in the text, they often fill in the gaps. In the quote above, do you find anything missing from the text?

5. **Are there political or sociological issues?**
   The rabbis seek to render power dynamics among nations according to their worldview (e.g. putting Israel or Judaism at the center). Moreover, questions of ethnicity, gender, class, etc. prompt their investigation. In the quote above, are any of these kinds of issues relevant?

6. **Are there any other difficulties, *kushiot* קושיות?**

Write a creative response, a possible answer, to the *koshi* קשי that you find most interesting.

What's the Conversation?
מה קשה לנו? *Mah Kasheh Lanu?*

שיר שירים א:ב
יִשָּׁקֵנִי מִנְּשִׁיקוֹת פִּיהוּ כִּי־טוֹבִים דֹּדֶיךָ מִיָּיִן׃

Song of Songs 1:2
Let him give me of the kisses of his mouth for your love is more delightful than wine.

On this page, several commentators respond to the following difficulty, or קשה: What is the nature of the kisses?

QUESTIONS

1. **How does each commentator resolve the קשה?**
2. **How do their conclusions differ from one another?**
3. **How do you resolve the קשה? Add your voice as a "21st Century Commentator."**

Carey Ellen Walsh: "יִשָּׁקֵנִי מִנְּשִׁיקוֹת פִּיהוּ" "LET HIM GIVE ME THE KISSES OF HIS MOUTH" The Song starts out with the mouth…she wants his mouth on hers, and she wants it repeatedly. This is no random place to start a song about desire. The mouth is the first boundary in the crossing towards intimacy, typically the first site for the exchange of bodily fluids. Kissing is a transgression of social distance and so initiates the possibility that other barriers can come down. In fact, part of the excitement comes through the crossing of boundaries.

Song of Songs Rabbah: "יִשָּׁקֵנִי מִנְּשִׁיקוֹת פִּיהוּ" "LET HIM GIVE ME THE KISSES OF HIS MOUTH" The Rabbis, however, say: the commandment itself went in turn to each of the Israelites and said to him, "Do you undertake to keep me? So many rules are attached to me, so many penalties, so many precautionary measures, so many regulations are attached to me, so many relaxations and rigours; such-and-such a reward is attached to me." He would reply, "yes, yes," and straightway the commandment kissed him on the mouth…and taught him Torah.

Rashi: "יִשָּׁקֵנִי מִנְּשִׁיקוֹת פִּיהוּ" "LET HIM GIVE ME THE KISSES OF HIS MOUTH" This song she is uttering with her mouth in her exile and in her widowhood, "If only King Shlomo would give me the kisses of his mouth as of yore, for there are places where they kiss on the back of the hand or on the shoulder, but I desire and long for him to conduct himself with me after the former manner, like a groom to a bride, mouth to mouth."

21st Century Commentator:

BIOGRAPHY

Rashi: Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzhak (1040-1105), most famous of all commentators on both Bible and Talmud. His commentaries are a fundamental tool to the Jewish method of studying sacred text.
Carey Ellen Walsh: Currently an assistant professor of Hebrew Bible at Rhodes College, Memphis, Tennessee.
Song of Songs Rabbah: A 6th century and oldest classical Babylonian midrash on the five books of the Bible and the scrolls, or *megillot* מגילות.

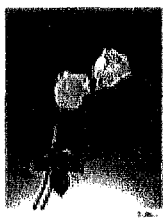
What's the Connection?
מה הקשר? *Mah HaKesher?*

Below you will find an excerpt that relates to the theme of desire. It is one of many possible ways to encounter the theme in our world.

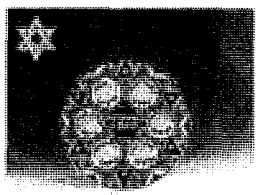
Theodore Gaster Herzl was the 19th century Austrian journalist who would be remembered for his passionate desire to emancipate European Jewry politically. One of his oft-quoted phrases is "If you will it, it is no dream." By the spring of 1895, Herzl had begun formulating his new Zionist idea. Only days after the first heated exchanges with colleagues about his radical thoughts, he began to write with urgency about his dream. Below is an excerpt from his notebook:

For some time now I have been engaged in a work of indescribable greatness...It has assumed the aspect of some powerful dream. But days and weeks have passed since it has filled me utterly, it has overflown into my unconscious self, it accompanies me wherever I go, it broods above all prosaic conversation... it disturbs and intoxicates me. What it will lead to is impossible to surmise as yet. But my experience tells me that it is something marvelous, even as a dream, and that I should write it down — Title: "The Promised Land." — Howard M. Sachar, A History of Israel: From the Rise of Zionism to Our Time (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996) 38.

מה הקשר
לשיר השירים?
Mah HaKesher to Song of Songs:
What connections do you find between the excerpt above and Song of Songs?



מה הקשר לחג?
Mah HaKasher to Pesach:
What connections do you find between the excerpt above and Pesach?



Now is your chance to draw from your own experience and identify something you have encountered in your world (a conversation, an article in the newspaper, a story, a road trip, etc.) that connects to Song of Songs. How does your encounter shed light on Song of Songs and the holiday of Pesach?

What's Our Contribution?
מה קישוט החג? *Mah Kishut Hechag?*

Spicing Up Pesach

Said Rabbi Joshua ben Levi: What is the meaning of the verse, "His cheeks are like gardens of spices *l'chayav ka'arugat habosev* לְחָיָו כַּעֲרוּגַת הַבֹּשֶׂם (Song of Songs 5:13, also "...a texture of spices"). With every word that came forth from the mouth of God, the whole world filled up with fragrant spices [Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 88b].

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai taught: It was the Torah given by the Holy One, that gave life back to Israel. The Torah asked God to show compassion for Israel, saying, "Sovereign of the Universe, is there a king who marries off his daughter [ie. the Torah] and slays the beloved of his household [Israel]? The entire world is happy for me, while your children are dead!" Immediately Israel's souls returned and God animated them. As it says, "Adonai's Torah is perfect/whole, renewing the spirit,

Torat Adonai t'mima m'shivat nafesh,
תּוֹרַת יְהוָה תְּמִימָה מְשִׁיבַת נָפֶשׁ[1]

[Song of Songs Rabbah 5].

In many ways, the imagery in Song of Songs treats us to both sensory and sensual awakenings. Drawing upon this power in the Song of Songs text, Shimon bar Yochai suggests that God's fragrances have the power to revive — perhaps he meant emotionally, physically, sexually, or even intellectually. Through the act of sharing with a loved one the fragrant aromas of roses, as if from the very Garden described in Song of Songs 2:1, we could bring to life some of the sensory delight that can be found throughout Pesach's *megillah* מגילה.

A new ritual object for Pesach could be a Pesach vase, or an *Agartal Pesach* אגרטל פסח. Be it in glass or ceramic, etc., it would bear the blessing for flowers and herbs:

Blessed are You, Adonai, Ruler of the universe,
Who creates fragrant flowers and herbs.
Baruch Atah Adona, Eloheinu Melech Ha'olam boreh eesvei v'samim.
בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא עִשְׂבֵי בְשָׂמִים.

[1] This is part of the prayer, whose original source is Psalms 19:8, we say during services when returning the Torah to the ark.

The Accordion of Relationships

Accordion is defined as "a musical instrument with keys, metal reeds, and bellows; it is played by alternately pulling out and pressing together the bellows to force air through the reeds..."[1]

Imagine a conversation between psychologists Sigmond Freud and Carl Jung about Song of Songs. They certainly would have discussed the fact that eight brief chapters of this love song include seven references to the lovers' mothers.[2]

Every psychological school of thought says something about relationships between a mother and her child. One current emphasis in child rearing is on attachment theory, first proposed by psychological theorist John Bowlby (1907-1990). His basic principle is that "...one cannot understand development without paying close attention to the mother/infant bond."[3] In her newsletter written for new parents, clinical psychologist Elaine Silberman asks questions regarding this unique relationship:

> What enables a secure and healthy attachment to develop between you and your baby? How can you encourage the development of a deep and rich human relationship which will lay down the foundation for all her future relationships? How can you insure that she will develop the capacity to engage in intimate human relationships in the future?

These questions represent the issues addressed by attachment theory experts who maintain that the intimate connection established between a mother and her baby becomes the foundation for all of the child's future relationships.

Reading Song of Songs through this psychological lens adds insight into the intimacy of the lovers in the poem. Song of Songs uses many different metaphors to describe intimacy between loving partners; one powerful and compelling metaphor is the mother-child dyad. As we will see, the Song seems to acknowledge that the relationship

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[1] Victoria Neufeldt, ed., Webster's New World Dictionary (New York: Webster's New World, 1984) 9.
[2] 1:6, 3:4, 3:11, 6:9, 8:1, 8:2, 8:5
[3] William Crain, Theories of Development (Engelwood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1992) 38.

between a mother and her child lays the foundation for intimacy, serving as the model for later love relationships. In particular, by examining references to mothers in the Song, we will see that the Song informs our understanding of the lovers' relationship by utilizing aspects of our experiences with our own mothers.

Close examination of all references to conception, birth, nursing, and weaning in the Song ultimately sheds light not only on the lovers' relationship but also on the essence of all relationships. This framework does not explain all complexities of the lovers' relationship in the Song, much less our relationships outside the Song. However, this perspective highlights provocative questions —why does the poet use mother imagery in erotic love poetry? How does this metaphor inform an understanding of the nature of the lovers' relationship beyond the verses of the Song?

Creation of Intimacy and Separation

And God created humanity
in God's image.
male and female,
God created them.
(Genesis 1:27)

This one at last
Is bone of my bones
And flesh of my flesh.
This one shall be called Woman,
For from man was she taken.
(Genesis 2:23)

These two quotes share an important element — that our desire for intimacy stems all the way back to the stories of creation. At one point, man and woman experience oneness. Separation comes later. It seems that our whole lives we search for the union that once existed in both creation stories. We each experienced a similar union when our mother carried us inside her womb. However, just as separation follows union in the creation story, so too separation follows union when we are born. Our longing for

this closeness begins as we suckle at our mother's breast. That too lasts only a short while, for eventually we are weaned. And so it seems we continue through life, in all relationships — we have moments of union and moments of separation. Song of Songs eloquently expresses this dynamic.

To Be Conceived

I had just passed them
When I found my only love.
I held him, I would not let him go
Until I brought him to my mother's house,
Into the chamber of her who conceived me.
(3:4)

Under the apple tree I roused you;
It was there your mother conceived you,
There she who bore you conceived you.
(8:5)

The two quotes in the Song about conception occur in the context of some kind of union – imagined or remembered – between the lovers. In 3:4, the lovers meet after a period of separation. The poet tells the reader that the woman wishes not only to bring her lover to her mother's house, but more specifically to the room where she was conceived, the place where she experienced the most intimate relationship that exists, the one between a mother and her unborn child.

In 8:5, the woman shares another moment of connection with her lover (in this context a seemingly sexual encounter) set under an apple tree. In this verse, twice she mentions that her lover was conceived there, emphasizing the depth of their intimacy.

Before birth each of us is housed within our mother's body and soul. In this state of intimacy, there is a permeable boundary. The mother completely nourishes her unborn child. Looking at contemporary reflections by women about conception sheds light on

the meanings embedded in these texts. Expressing the connection between a pregnant woman and her unborn child, one woman wrote,

> Oh honey, it's alright you cryin' and don't know why.
> Sometimes when a pregnant woman is cryin' over nothin',
> she's cryin' for her baby 'cause it can't cry yet,
> and when she laugh over nothin'
> she laugh for her baby all happy in there.[4]

There are also permeable boundaries between the lovers in Song of Songs, as described by the writer Daphne Merkin:

> All the ordinary mooring points of identity are so tentatively established in the famous love poem – a dramatic dialogue with remarkably diffuse boundaries – that the reader is left feeling deeply uncertain as to exactly who is doing the talking, much less what sex the person is. The first sliver of doubt brings others in its wake, revolving around the basic dyad of Self and Other upon which the enigma of amorous choice is based: Are you me, am I you, are you there, are you gone, are you worthy, are you ridiculous, who is the male (i.e., dominant-aggressive) and who is the female (i.e., subordinate-receptive)? Who is the lover and who is the loved?[5]

Here there is a blurring of boundaries between the lovers. This blurring is similar to the relationship between a mother and her unborn child. Mother and child share an intense emotional connection, coupled with the physical change each brings to the other. As the two lovers explore their relationship, both physically and emotionally, sharing one love and longing to share each other's body, the boundaries between them become diffuse.

There are, however, important differences between the mother-child dyad and the relationship between adult lovers. Unlike a mother and young child, only two adults can understand the depth and mutuality of 2:16, "My beloved is mine and I am his." With

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[4] Pam England and Rob Horowitz, Birthing From Within (Albuquerque, NM: Partera Press, 1998) 47.

adult love, there is often complex thought and deep commitment that an infant cannot fathom. The sense of willing, mutual obligation demands greater intellectual and emotional development than is found in the mother-child dyad, since the child cannot yet fully reciprocate those feelings and commitments.

The other obvious difference between the Song's lovers and a mother and her child is the nature of their love. The lovers are clearly involved in an erotic, carnal passion, "While the king was on his couch, my nard gave forth its fragrance. My beloved is to me a bag of myrrh lodged between my breasts" (1:12-13). This particular image does not reflect the same feeling of pure, unconditional love felt by most new mothers (though a similar feeling may also be part of relationship between adult lovers). Although both pairs evoke strong passion for each other, the sensual nature of the Song's lovers should not be mistaken for the nurturing, protective love of a mother for her child. But by using the references to mother, the Song elsewhere taps precisely into these primal possibilities of what mother and child experience.

To Be Born

One alone is my dove,
my perfect, my only one,
The only one of her mother,
The delight of the mother who bore her"
(6:9).

Under the apple tree I roused you;
it was there your mother conceived you,
there she who bore you conceived you
(8:5).

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[5] Daphne Merkin, "The Women in the Balcony: On Rereading The Song of Songs" in Christina Buchman and Celina Spiegel, ed., Out of the Garden: Women Writers on the Bible (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1994) 240.

One way to understand the two allusions to birth in the Song is to analyze the quotes through this psychological lens.[6] In Chapter 6, the man devotes many verses to describing the woman's physical beauty. By 6:9, he has convinced the reader that the woman is quite unique. He describes every detail of her body using images that are beautiful in his world. His lust, attraction, and intrigue are quite obvious, as noted in the chapter titled "Body Conscious." Why then does he mention her birth in this context? Perhaps he praises her in regard to her birth because only once she separated from her mother did she become her own person, only after that separation could she grow into the woman the man now sees as precious.

In 8:5 she mentions both the place of her lover's conception and immediately thereafter, the place of his birth. By applying a psychological perspective to this passage, it is possible to see this reference to birth as an attempt to emphasize her individuality. Her birth represents the first separation. It is as if she reminds him first that he experienced intimacy with his mother, then that the separation gave rise to his individuality. Although he experienced a loss of connection with his mother at the moment of birth, this resulted in his growth and identity formation; it ultimately made the lover's union possible.

Creation of the individual requires separation from others, and often this is a painful process. Song of Songs is a series of expressed longings for union and intimacy, balanced by forced or deliberate separation. In every relationship, people need time and space to figure things out as individuals. Distance enables us to feel a sense of desire,

[6] Some people emend "she would teach me" in 8:2 to "she who bore me" (see Pope 659; note also JPS translation). If this were the case, it would be yet another example of the importance of giving birth in the Song.

longing, yearning for the things that are missing. Relationships often deepen as a result of this space.

Throughout Song of Songs, the lovers experience moments of separation. For example, early in the Song, in 2:17, the woman says, "when the day blows gently and the shadows flee, turn, my beloved, swift as a gazelle or a young stag, for the hills of spices!" The text implies that the man obeys her command, for the next chapter begins with the lovers separated.

The ebb and flow of the distance between the lovers creates both the dramatic tension felt in the poem and the interpersonal tension of the characters as they develop their own sense of self. Lovers need time apart to live their own individual lives. Lovers need time and space in order to understand what they are feeling and what they want to do next. Lovers need separation in order to better enjoy their reunions. Couples often search for this balance between the depths of intimacy and preservation of separate identity. In other words, even a song dedicated to intimacy and union must include moments of separation. Francis Landy captures this tension in the Song with the title of his book, *Paradoxes of Paradise: Identity and Difference in Song of Songs*.[7]

To Be Nursed

If only you were a brother
Who nursed at my mother's breast (8:1)!

The one reference to nursing may sound disturbing to some readers. After all, why would a woman fantasize about being her lover's brother?[8] Perhaps it is less

[7] Francis Landy, Paradoxes of Paradise: Identity and Difference in the Song of Songs (England: Almond Press, 1983) 315.
[8] Note that in 5:1 he also calls her "my sister, my bride" *achoti kalah* אחותי כלה.

disturbing if we consider the fact that the first set of intimate relationships are with family members. What closer relationship could the lovers have but to share in the special moment of nursing from one mother's breast? Of knowing each other since infancy? Here, the woman expresses the type of closeness and union she wishes to feel with her lover.

The woman in the Song not only says that she wishes her lover was her brother, but she used the image of nursing together at her mother's breast. Nursing represents the possibility for continuing the intimate relationship that developed between a mother and her baby during pregnancy. Following the separation of birth, a baby naturally gravitates toward its mother's breast as a way of feeling safe, secure, connected, loved, and one with the mother. A nursing baby learns to depend on the security and comfort that nursing provides. Therefore, the baby becomes anxious when away from its mother and often clings to the mother's breast following a long period of separation.

This same pattern of anxiety following separation is found in Song of Songs. For example, chapter 3 directly responds to the separation of the previous verse where the woman sends her lover away. The Chapter begins,

> At night in my bed
> I longed for my only love.
> I sought him but did not find him.
> I must rise and go about the city,
> The narrow streets and squares,
> Till I find my only love.
> I sought him everywhere
> but I could not find him (3:1-2)

The reader feels the woman's sense of urgency and anxiety about finding her lover. The anxiety of physical separation is directly followed by a union of the lovers in 3:4where she says, "I had just passed them when I found my only love. I held him. I would not let

him go." In this verse, she seems to holds onto her lover as does the nursing baby with its mother. Indeed, the woman in the Song explicitly recalls the mother and conception in what follows, "until I brought him to my mother's house, to the chamber of her who conceived me" (3:4).

The woman in this verse behaves like a suckling baby who desires connection with its mother following any period of separation. She desperately seeks the type of connection described by Dr. Louise Kaplan, "From the infant's point of view, there are no boundaries between himself and mother. They are one."[9] The Song presents the lovers longing for this degree of closeness. Landy reflects on the fact that each lover brings unique qualities to the relationship:

> The lovers are two persons, with presumably their own separate biographies, but the poem is their composite speech, expressing a common personality to which they both contribute, to which each is opened up, and which is experienced in relation to the other.[10]

Landy acknowledges that the lovers remain separate individuals, and he also comments upon their shared identity,

> ...a flow of identity passes between the lovers; they become one flesh, their personalities merge, and this synthesis has its own character. Within it the lovers...are submerged in their relationship, that defines them as human beings...[11]

This merged personality of the lovers is one aspect of a mature union between adults. Its counterpoint is the separate identities about which Landy also writes. These two elements, shared identity and individuality, exist in tension. This tension enables the lovers to develop both a new relationship and a new augmented sense of self.

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[9] La Leche League, The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding. (New York: Penguin Group, 1997) 172-73.
[10] Landy 315.

To Be Weaned

It is interesting to note that although there are references to conception, birth and nursing, there are no references to weaning in the Song. What might be the significance of this absence? One hypothesis is that this absence highlights the main difference between the relationship of mother and child and that of two lovers. Namely, the structure and content of the Song implies that the lovers continue with their cycle of union and separation in a way very different than that of a weaned child.

Once weaned, although a child subconsciously carries the experience of closeness and protection felt with the mother, the two will never again experience the level of intimacy that they did during pregnancy and nursing. Little by little, the child becomes independent. William and Martha Sears offer insight about what weaning represents:

> Weaning does not mean a loss or detachment from a relationship, but rather a *passage* from one relationship to another...In ancient writings the word 'wean' meant 'to ripen' – like fruit nourished to readiness...weaning was a joyous occasion because a child...graduated to take on the next stage of development more independently.[12]

Weaning symbolizes a readiness to change the relationship permanently. It is a passage into a new stage in life where a child learns how to become intimate with people other than its mother. When weaned, the connection between dependence and independence is explored on new levels.

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[11] Landy 65.

[12] William Sears and Martha Sears, The Baby Book: Everything You Need to Know About Your Baby From Birth to Age Two (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1993) 187. Also, in the Bible, the Hebrew root *g-m-l* גמל means both "wean" and "ripen". References to weaning include: Genesis 21:8, I Samuel 1:23, I Kings 11:20, Hosea 1:8, Isaiah 11:8, 28:9. This same root describes ripening in Numbers 17:23 and Isaiah 18:5.

Although the end of the Song implies a separation of the lovers, the meaning of this separation is very different than with the weaned child. Many Biblical scholars are troubled by this final verse, 8:14:

בְּרַח | דּוֹדִי וּדְמֵה־לְךָ לִצְבִי אוֹ
לְעֹפֶר הָאַיָּלִים עַל הָרֵי בְשָׂמִים׃

[*B'rach*], Flee, my beloved,
swift as a gazelle or a young stag,
to the hills of spices

With this verse, we hear echoes of 2:17:

סֹב דְּמֵה־לְךָ דוֹדִי לִצְבִי אוֹ
לְעֹפֶר הָאַיָּלִים עַל־הָרֵי בָתֶר׃

[*Sov*] Turn, my beloved,
Swift as a gazelle
Or a young stag,
For the hills of spices!

The verses are nearly identical. The important exception is the substitution: the word, "*b'rach* בְּרַח" for the word "*sov* סֹב." Scholars translate the word "*b'rach* בְּרַח," as "come quickly," "hasten," or "flee." Most Biblical uses of this word do not have anything to do with "coming quickly." Yet, many scholars cannot believe after reading the entire Song that she is sending him away. One example is Graham Ogden and Lynell Zogbo who argue,

> The Hebrew imperative used here is generally used for hurrying away from something. Many translations give 'flee,' but it is hard to imagine that the young woman is asking her lover to leave her! So here we assume that she is calling him to hurry away from where he is with his friends, to come and join her.[13]

[13] Graham S. Ogden and Lynell Zogbo, A Handbook on Song of Songs (New York: United Bible Societies, 1998) 247-48.

However, other Bible scholars, like Ariel and Chana Bloch, reject this reading:

> Coming at the end of the Song, this request by the Shulamite – 'Run away' – has caused difficulties for many translators, who prefer to read 'flee with me,' or 'flee to me,' or 'come into the open,' or the like. All these readings are unacceptable, since *barah* can only mean 'to flee away from' someone, or something; nor is it there any textual support for the suggestion that she asks him to run away with her. Rather this final exchange between the two lovers, 8:13-14, evokes a familiar setting...the Song thus ends with the motif of the lovers parting at dawn, as in the aubade of later traditions – an ending that looks forward in anticipation to another meeting.[14]

Bloch and Bloch as well as feminist scholar Marcia Falk note that the lovers are often separated in the countryside. For example, in 1:7 the man tends flocks while the woman looks for him: "Tell me, my only love, where do you pasture your sheep, where will you let them rest in the heat of noon? Why should I lose my way among the flocks of your companions?" In another example, 2:14, she is hidden in the rocks like a dove when he seeks to see her and hear her voice: "My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the shadow of the cliff, let me see you, all of you! Let me hear your voice, your delicious song. I love to look at you." Bible scholar William Whedbee comments on this paradigm of union and separation: "Interpreters have long noted that the oscillating pattern of separation and union functions as a structural hallmark, wherein the call for separation paradoxically represents the last word (8:14)."[15] For these reasons, like the Blochs, Marcia Falk concludes, "reunions are invited and expected."[16]

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[14] Ariel Bloch and Chana Bloch, The Song of Songs: A New Translation with an Introduction and Commentary (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) 221.
[15] Whedbee, J. William, The Bible and the Comic Vision (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 273.
[16] Marcia Falk, Love Lyrics From the Bible: A Translation and Literary Study of the Song of Songs (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1982) 527.

Thus, it seems appropriate to translate the verse "flee" with the anticipation that this is not a permanent separation. We add a layer of meaning by noticing that a few verses before the end, in 8:6, the female lover requests, "Let me be a seal upon your heart like the seal upon your hand." Thus, in this context, it seems that although the word *b'rach* means "flee," we can understand 8:14 as "make me a part of you and then flee, my beloved, go and please integrate me into who you are. But do not lose 'the gazelle' in you, your own unique essence. Carry me with you and go find yourself." This interpretation is supported by the fact that she sends him away with love, calling the man her beloved, her *dodi* דודי. Like an accordion, the lovers will use this space between them to make music.

Connection to Pesach

Continuing the metaphoric power of the Song with its allegorical hints, the Jewish people experience collective moments where we feel union with and separation from God. At Pesach, we celebrate the exodus from Egypt, the moment when the Israelites sing with joy as the Sea of Reeds part:

> Thus YHVH delivered Israel that day from the Egyptians... they had faith in YHVH and God's servant Moses. Then Moses and the Israelites sand this song to YHVH. They said: I will sing to YHVH, for God has triumphed gloriously...God is my strength and my might; God is become my deliverance. This is my God and I will enshrine God; the God of my father, and I will exalt God. YHVH (Exodus 14:30-15:3).

Not long after the people sang with joy at the sea, they felt distance, separation from the God of deliverance. Although the Bible tells a story of a God who remained close with

the people, they nonetheless experienced the feeling of separation. Throughout their journey in the desert, they complained:

> The people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink? (Exodus 15:24).
>
> In the wilderness, the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. They Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of YHVH in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots, when we ate our fill of bread! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to starve this whole congregation to death" (Exodus 16:2-4).
>
> The people quarreled with Moses. "Give us water to drink," they said; and Moses replied, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you try YHVH?" But the people thirsted there for water; and the people grumbled against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us up from Egypt, to kill us, and our children and livestock with thirst?" (Exodus 17:2-4).

After the feeling of separation, the Israelites once again experienced a significant moment of union at Sinai, which is recalled each year on the holiday of Shavuot:

> Moses came and summoned the elders of the people and put before them all that YHVH had commanded him. All the people answered as one, saying, "All that YHVH has spoken we will do!" And Moses brought back the people's words to YHVH. And YHVH said to Moses, "I will come to you in a thick cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you and so trust you ever after (Exodus 19:7-9).

And again, as the Israelites wandered in the desert, even after the seminal Sinai experience, they felt separation from God:

> The whole community broke into loud cries, and the people wept that night. All the Israelites railed against Moses and Aaron. "If only we had died in the land of Egypt," the whole community shouted at them, "or if only we might die in this wilderness! Why is YHVH taking us to that land to fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be carried off? It would be better for us to go back to Egypt!" And

> they said to one another, "Let us head back for Egypt" (Numbers 14:1-4).
>
> The community was without water, and they joined against Moses and Aaron. The people quarreled with Moses, saying, "If only we had perished when our brothers perished at the instance of YHVH! Why have you brought YHVH's congregation into the wilderness for us and our beasts to die there? Why did you make us leave Egypt to bring us to this wretched place, a place with no grain or figs or vines or pomegranates? There is not even water to drink!" (Numbers 20:2-5)

So the cycle continues with the anticipation of union, as the children of the generation of wanderers enter the Promised Land. Although the Bible does not elaborate on this, it is reasonable to assume that there would have been great rejoicing, perhaps singing and dancing, as the Israelites finally reach the land that had been promised.

Our relationship with God is reflected in the relationships we have with other people. Thus, the relationship between the lovers in Song of Songs informs the way we understand God. The woman tells the man to flee, or *b'rach* ברח, at the end of the Song, and does so after telling him a few verses prior, "Let me be a seal upon your heart like the seal upon your hand" (8:6). So too with God, when we experience moments in our lives when we need space from God, we hope that the separation will be temporary and that when we are ready, there will still be a place for us in God's heart.

Even when we feel distance, God is never truly separate from us. Even at those moments when the Israelites felt separate from God as they wandered in the desert, God sent manna from heaven (Exodus 16:4) and a cloud to serve as a sign and guide them on their journey (Numbers 9:15). So too God is with us, even as we cry out, "Where are you! I need you now! Where are you!" We learn from the story of our exodus and our wandering, that even in these moments of desperation we can anticipate a reunion.

We cycle through feeling a sense of union with and separation from God, both personally and collectively. Pesach is the time of year when we collectively recall the moment when Israel, broken by years of slavery, experienced the great meeting at the Sea of Reeds — when Israel and God used the diminished space between them to sing a new song. Pesach also provides us with an opportunity to personally reflect upon the way our journey corresponds with the journey of the Jewish people.

Song of Songs: Applied Learning Pages

For an explanation on how to use the following pages, please refer to the Introduction: How to Use This Book, on Page 7.

What's the Question?
מה קשה לי? *Mah Kasheh Li?*

שיר שירים ח:יד

בְּרַח | דּוֹדִי וּדְמֵה־לְךָ לִצְבִי אוֹ לְעֹפֶר הָאַיָּלִים עַל הָרֵי בְשָׂמִים׃

Song of Songs 8:14

Flee, my lover! Be like a gazelle or a young stag upon the mountains of spices.

In the box below, you will find a list of principles for interpreting Torah. For each category, ask yourself: does this verse present a difficulty, a *koshi* קשׁי? If yes, please describe the *koshi* קשׁי.

1. **Is there superfluous language?**
   The rabbis believe that every word in the Bible is there for a precise purpose. When a word seems repetitive and/or synonymous with another word, the rabbis always justify the existence of each word. In the quote above, do you think any words seem repetitive and/or synonymous?

2. **Are there grammatical curiosities?**
   The rabbis respond to sentences with unexpected or incorrect grammar, such as unusual word order, awkward prepositions, illogical sentences, inconsistent verb tenses, or unclear pronouns. In the quote above, is the grammar problematic?

3. **Are there theological or moral dilemmas?**
   The rabbis identify moments that raise questions about God's characteristics, God's role in the world, and how God is depicted in the Bible. They are also troubled by what seem to be breaches of moral or ethical conduct by God and/or human beings. In the quote above, do you find any theological or moral dilemmas?

4. **Are there gaps in the text?**
   The rabbis are also intrigued by what is not in the text. In other words, when feelings, time spans, physical descriptions, conversations, etc. are not written in the text, they often fill in the gaps. In the quote above, do you find anything missing from the text?

5. **Are there political or sociological issues?**
   The rabbis seek to render power dynamics among nations according to their worldview (e.g. putting Israel or Judaism at the center). Moreover, questions of ethnicity, gender, class, etc. prompt their investigation. In the quote above, are any of these kinds of issues relevant?

6. **Are there any other difficulties, *kushiot* קושיות?**

Write a creative response, a possible answer, to the *koshi* קשׁי that you find most interesting.

What's the Conversation?
מה קשה לנו? *Mah Kasheh Lanu?*

שיר שירים ח:יד

בְּרַח | דּוֹדִי וּדְמֵה־לְךָ לִצְבִי אוֹ לְעֹפֶר הָאַיָּלִים עַל הָרֵי בְשָׂמִים׃

Song of Songs 8:14

Flee, my lover! Be like a gazelle or a young stag upon the mountains of spices.

On this page, several commentators respond to the following difficulty, or קשי: Why, at the end of the book, is the lover told to "flee?"

QUESTIONS

1. How does each commentator resolve the קשי?

2. How do their conclusions differ from one another?

3. How do you resolve the קשי? Add your voice as a "21st Century Commentator."

Targum: "בְּרַח דּוֹדִי" "FLEE, MY LOVE" At that time, the Elders of the Assembly of Israel, shall say: "O my Beloved, Lord of the Universe, flee from this polluted earth, and let Your Presence dwell in the high heavens…until such time when You shall be pleased with us and redeem us…

Bloch and Bloch: "בְּרַח דּוֹדִי" "FLEE, MY LOVE" Like a musical da capo, the parting in 8:14 inevitably implies another meeting. The lack of closure at the end of the poem has the effect of prolonging indefinitely the moment of youth and love, keeping it, in Keats' phrase, "forever warm" (p. 18-19).

Susan Lippe: "בְּרַח דּוֹדִי" "FLEE, MY LOVE" According to Pardes, Whedbee, and other scholars, Song of Songs may reverse the tragic ending of the love story in the Garden of Eden. Perhaps, however, knowing her history, the woman of the Song of Songs is nevertheless doomed to repeat it. She remembers the gardens, and she feels the desire. However, she realistically recognizes her limited status in society in spite of the love they share. The encounter with the watchmen was enough to remind her of the dangers of her strong, active desire. Out of fear or out of realism, maybe she had to say *brach* because that was the only ending she knew (p. 23).

21st Century Commentator:

Robert Alter: "בְּרַח דּוֹדִי" "FLEE, MY LOVE" Translation of 8:14, "Turn, and be you, my love, like a buck, or a young stag on the mountains of spice" (p. 195).

R. Abraham ben Isaacha-Levi (Ta-MaKH): "בְּרַח דּוֹדִי" "FLEE, MY LOVE" She becomes worried over the possibility that his love for her may be turned in other directions. She therefore entreats him to leave their populated area and make for the mountains of spices, where she will join him. There they will not be distracted by other matters and will devote themselves entirely to love's delights.

BIOGRAPHY

Robert Alter: Jewish Professor of Hebrew and Comparative Literature at the University of California at Berkeley.
Ariel Bloch: Jewish Professor Emeritus of Near Eastern Studies at the University of California at Berkeley.
Chana Bloch: Jewish Professor of English and director of the creative writing program at Mills College.
Susan Lippe: Rabbi and Educator at Temple Beth Am in Los Altos Hills, California. Ordained at HUC-JIR.
TaMaKh: R. Abraham ben Isaac ha-Levi — the commentary attributed to this rabbi is a 14th century philosophic work. The identity of the author remains uncertain.
Targum: Literally "translation," refers to the Aramaic paraphrased translation believed to have been composed during the Talmudic era (3rd - 5th century).

What's the Connection?
מה הקשר? *Mah HaKesher?*

Below you will find a song that relates to the theme of differentiation. It is one of many possible ways to encounter the theme in our world.

"Fly Little Bird," or "*Uf Guzal* עוף גוזל" Written by: Arik Einstein

My little birds left the nest
Spread their wings and flew
And I am an old bird I remained in the nest.
I really hope that everything will be okay.
I always knew that the day would come
That he would come to need to part
But now that it's come like this so suddenly
Thus what's the wonder that I'm a little worried.
Fly little bird
Cut through the sky
Go fly that it will come to you
Only don't forget
There are eagles in the sky
You are so young.
Now we have remained by ourselves in the nest
But we are together
Hug me tight, tell me "yes
Don't worry, together it's fun to grow old."
I know that this is how it goes in nature
And I also left the nest
But now that the moment has arrived
So I have a little lump in my throat
A little lump in my throat.

עוף גוזל
שלמה ארצי וגידי גוב

מילים: אריק איינשטיין
לחן: מיקי גבריאלוב
עיבוד: עדי רנרט

הגוזלים שלי עזבו את הקן
פרשו כנפיים ועפו
ואני ציפור זקנה נשארתי בקן
מקווה מאוד שהכל יהיה בסדר

תמיד ידעתי שיבוא היום
שבו צריך להיפרד
אבל עכשיו זה ככה בא לי פתאום
אז מה הפלא שאני קצת דואג

עוף גוזל
חתוך את השמיים
טוס לאן שבא לך
רק אל תשכח
יש נשר בשמיים
גור לך

עכשיו נשארנו לבדנו בקן
אבל אנחנו ביחד
חבקי אותי חזק, תגידי לי כן
אל תדאגי ביחד כיף להזדקן

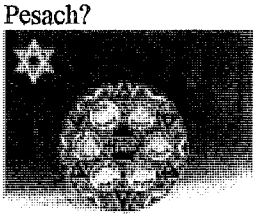
עוף גוזל....

אני יודע שככה זה בטבע
וגם אני עזבתי קן
אבל עכשיו, כשבא הרגע
אז מחניק קצת בגרון
מחניק קצת בגרון

עוצרת הזיברון- 12 בנובמבר 1995

מה הקשר
לשיר השירים?
Mah HaKesher to Song of Songs:
What connections do you find between the song above and Song of Songs?

מה הקשר לחג?
Mah HaKasher to Pesach:
What connections do you find between the song above and Pesach?



Now is your chance to draw from your own experience and identify something you have encountered in your world (a conversation, an article in the newspaper, a story, a road trip, etc.) that connects to Song of Songs? How does your encounter shed light on Song of Songs and the holiday of Pesach?

What's Our Contribution?
Mah Kishut Hechag? מה קישוט החג?

Becoming Whole

The theme of union and separation organically connects to the part of the seder where we hide, seek out, and find the afikoman. As a way to reintroduce Song of Songs into the seder experience, we invite you to share in the following ritual. This ritual will be enhanced by, and perhaps depends upon, a sensitive seder leader providing participants an opportunity to reflect on times when we all feel separation from ourselves, each other, and God.

◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆

The Separation

Before breaking and hiding the middle matzah, the seder participants recite the following verse.

When the day blows gently,
And the shadows flee,
turn, my beloved!
Be like a gazelle, a wild stag
On the jagged mountains.
(Song of Songs 2:17)

While saying these words, we can imagine speaking to ourselves, asking: what part of me do I wish to temporarily hide? Or we may imagine speaking these words to God, for we all have moments when we wish for distance.

◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆

The Search

Like the lovers in Song of Songs, with a bit of distance, we may decide we are ready to search for that which we sent away. Then, we search just as we search for the afikoman. At the end of the meal, before the search begins, the seder participants recite the following verses.

At night in my bed I longed
For my only love.
I sought him, but did not find him.
I must rise and go about the city,
The narrow streets and squares,
Till I find my only love.
I sought him everywhere
But I could not find him.
Song of Songs 3:1-2

◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆

The Union

We rejoice when we find what we are looking for. Once again, we feel whole. But the afikoman will never be the same whole again. It is forever changed. It is new. Each piece stands alone, but we see the places where the two pieces once stood united. When the afikoman is found and returned to the leader, the leader holds the two pieces together and recites the following verse:

I had just passed them
when I found my only love.
I held him, I would not let him go.
Songs of Songs 3:4

Although afikoman means "dessert" and is shared by all, the true dessert comes now, when the group sits together and reads Song of Songs in its entirety.

Introduction

Scroll of Ruth:

מגילת רות

The Book of Ruth is a beautifully crafted short story about a loving Moabite woman, who after the loss of her husband, clings loyally to her mother-in-law. Perhaps the best verse in the book to illustrate Ruth's commitment to Naomi is when she vows,

> Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God (Ruth 1: 16).

This book is a heroine's tale, and not one that glorifies a woman for physical strength, daring militant acts, or even physical beauty. The Book of Ruth sketches the life of a woman whose compassion and care, or *chesed* חסד, brings honor to her person, her chosen family, and most certainly the people of Israel. Ruth models every person's responsibility to show kindness, loyalty, and selflessness. Readers may marvel at Ruth's self-directed journey to a new family and a new people. Daringly, she constructs her own destiny even as she dedicates her life and love to others. But in addition to these virtues, she is important as the great-grandmother of King David.

Literary Aspects

Scholars debate the precise classification of the Book of Ruth. Is it perhaps somewhat of a decorative tale or popular story that was originally oral and then preserved in the written word?[1] Was it first "an old poetic tale, perhaps transmitted in oral form, coming from the days of the judges?" Some suggest that a written version was produced in prose in the eighth or ninth centuries, and finally completed in the "edition of the of its present form after the exile."[2] Some classify Ruth as an "idyll," a term that originates

[1] Frederic Bush, Word Biblical Commentary: Ruth/Esther (Texas: Word Publishers, 1996) 33.
[2] Wesley J. Fuerst, The Books of Ruth, Esther, Ecclesiastes, The Song of Songs, Lamentations. The Five Scrolls (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975) 7.

with Greek literature, the intention of which is to reveal an ideal or perfect state by means of a few intelligible characters. As such it is not "history." There is also a specific suggestion that the tale emerges from women's circles as they share their age-old wisdom. The purpose then for the story of Ruth is to reveal "the duty of loyalty to family and or community, " or חסד *chesed.*[3]

Ruth has also been described as a betrothal narrative[4], and even a "fairy tale."[5] However, the two most convincing designation for the Book of Ruth are the Hebrew short story or the novella. A short story includes, "distinctive literary style,"[6] a combination of typical people and ordinary affairs, its purpose is to entertain and instruct, and it displays the artistry and creativity of the author.[7]

All this is true enough for Ruth, yet in our opinion, Ruth should be classified as a novella because of its character development. A novella "endeavors to relate an incident or occurrence of significant import in a way that gives to us the impression of a factual event"[8] In contrast to a short story, a novella thoroughly develops its characters or situations rather than simply revealing something that was already there. Whereas characters in short stories remain static, in a novella, characters develop throughout the story. Central to the Book of Ruth are the ways in which characters mature, evolve, and are shaped by the events and situations that occur.

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[3] Bush 34, citing Wurthwein.
[4] Robert Alter, The Art of Biblical Narrative (U.S.A: Basic Books, 1981) 58.
[5] This arguement uses the structural analysis of fairy tales developed by the Russian folklorist V. Propp (Bush 36).
[6] Ronald E. Murphy, Wisdom Literature: Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Canticles, Ecclesiastes, and Esther (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981). Murphy argues E.F. Campbell's theory placing Ruth under the genre of "Hebrew historical short story."
[7] Murphy 86.
[8] Bush 33.

It is clear that the Book of Ruth is picturesque, complete, and concise.[9] It is tightly constructed, providing "an amazingly well-rounded unity of narrative, including every essential necessary to the story and ruthlessly excluding any irrelevancies militating against the purpose and plan of the book."[10] In addition, Bush suggests that there are four themes in this narrative.

> (1) The loving loyalty, faithfulness, and obedience of Ruth the Moabitess, expressed in her commitment to her mother-in-law, Naomi, which transcended the claims of religion and national origin; (2) the kindness, graciousness, and sagacity of Boaz, expressed in his benevolence and his faithfulness to family responsibilities, in regard both to marrying Ruth the Moabitess and to redeeming the field of Elimelech on behalf of Naomi, all of which transcended the claims of self-interest; (3) the loving concern of Naomi for the welfare of her daughter-in-law, expressed in her risky schemes to induce Boaz to marry Ruth and (4) YHVH's gracious provision of fruitfulness for field and womb; all have provided a son to restore Naomi's life and provide for her old age, reversing the death and emptiness that had afflicted her.[11]

Historical Aspects

It is difficult to date and assign authorship to the Book of Ruth. Not only is the author of the book anonymous, but the book itself reveals "not the slightest hint directly or indirectly, of the identity of the writer as a historical person."[12] Although this is not uncharacteristic of the biblical narrative, the author's ability to remove him/herself from the text entirely leaves its readers with no precise clues for the time and place of authorship.[13] Yet, there are hints that assist us in establishing the author's "historical

[9] Jacob M. Myers, The Linguistic and Literary Form of The Book of Ruth (Leiden:E.J. Brill, 1955) 4.
[10] Myers 6.
[11] Bush 52.
[12] Bush 17.
[13] Bush 18.

identity." These historical clues include: the theology expressed in the narrative, the nature of the "socio-legal institutions" presented in the text, the intent of the story, the parallel stories found elsewhere throughout the Bible, and the nature of the language used in the book.

The socio-legal institutions acknowledged in the book generate scholarly discussion regarding its date. In chapter 4, we learn that Boaz convenes elders of the city to stand witness to his acquiring Ruth for a wife as well as Naomi's family inheritance. Many scholars believe that this legal transaction is a Levirate Marriage,[14] however, they concede that Ruth and Boaz's union was in fact a Levirate marriage, scholars argue that it was vastly different than the actual levirate law found in Deuteronomy (25:5-10).[15] Therefore what readers find in Ruth must be an expanded understanding of the original law, outdated by the time the author writes Ruth. These scholars date Ruth after Deuteronomy, in the post-exilic era.[16] Bush dates the book not on the basis of marriage, but on a critical evaluation of the dating of the Biblical Hebrew, which suggests the writers lived in the late pre-exilic period.

[14] "The Leverite Law is specified in Deut. 25:5-10. The brother of a man who dies without a son had an obligation to marry the wife who was left, and 'the first son whom she bears shall succeed to the name of his brother who is dead.'" Paul J. Achtemeier and Lawrence H. Schiffman, "Marriage," The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary, ed. Paul J. Achtemeier (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996) 656-657.

[15] Although Boaz was not a "levir" or a brother-in-law, scholars believe it was a levirate marriage "because 4:5,10 specify that the purpose of the marriage to Ruth was "to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance so that the name of the deceased shall not be cut off from his brethren", which is similar to the purpose given for levirate marriage." (Bush 166).

[16] Others challenge the presumption that this was a levirate marriage. Bush for example argues that in the "principles of storytelling" the story must be convincing and plausible: The narrator cannot create situations that his readers know to be legally, or otherwise, impossible (e.g. if widows could not legally inherit or own land, then the narrator cannot depict a widow doing so.). This principle presumes that the narrator and his audience know the legal and social obligations of the time that the story depicts. Second, Bush contends that the Bible's laws cannot be viewed as "comprehensive and all inclusive," as if they regulated every aspect of an individual's life. "On the contrary, legal decisions were made by the town elders on the basis of local legal precedents, preserved primarily orally." (Bush 166-168).

Some of Ruth's themes suggest that portions of the book address a concrete historical situation. For example, some note that the book is universalistic, and advocates tolerance of strangers and intermarriage.

> The attitude in the Book of Ruth of a willing and friendly incorporation of foreigners into Israel argues for a date in the pre-exilic period. In the post-exilic era, such assimilation was a matter of religious commitment, not compassion or cultural assimilation as in Ruth. [17]

Other scholars argue that these very universal tenets that appear to be the backdrop of the plot are precisely evidence for the post-exilic era, thus, the book is "a product of the party favoring such a view and in opposition to the rigorist and exclusionist policies of Ezra and Nehemiah."[18] With all this stated, it remains difficult to pin down a precise date for the Book of Ruth.

[17] Bush 19.
[18] Bush 19.

Introduction to Shavuot

On second day of Shavuot, we read the Book of Ruth. Shavuot falls on the sixth of the Hebrew month of Sivan which falls in May or June, and is one of the three Pilgrimage Festivals, or *shalosh regalim* שלש רגלים. On the second night of Pesach, we begin counting 7 weeks to Shavuot. The English word for Shavuot is "weeks" which is the basis for the English name for Shavuot, "Feast of Weeks." On Pesach, we celebrate our freedom from slavery. The Exodus story brings Israel to the foot of Mount Sinai where the people wait with anticipation for the giving of Torah. Shavuot derives from the seven weeks that pass between God's rescuing Israel, and offering them a covenantal relationship – through Torah.

Shavuot is a spiritual celebration which commemorates the revelation of Torah. At Sinai, the people receive much more than rules or laws. They cemented their commitment to God with appreciation and wonder for having been redeemed from oppression and degradation. Today Shavuot is the opportunity for Jews to continue to re-enact the experience of revelation. Just as the Haggadah calls upon each generation to see itself as if it had been enslaved in Egypt, so too, at Shavuot could Jews aspire to "stand again at Sinai." Shavuot is a celebration of texts that are the source for the festival's themes. Shavuot is also a time to renew one's vows to God, and dedication to the words of Torah. Finally, Shavuot offers an opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to a Jewish life of study, or *talmud Torah* תלמוד תורה, and practice of commandments, or *mitzvah* מצוה.

In the Bible, however, Shavuot is not explicitly connected to Torah, Sinai, or Pesach. Rather, it is agriculturally based and marks the beginning of the harvest season of

In the Bible, however, Shavuot is not explicitly connected to Torah, Sinai, or Pesach. Rather, it is agriculturally based and marks the beginning of the harvest season of wheat and fruit. On this festival, or *chag* חג, Israelites offered choice breads and fruits to God, as part of their pilgrimage to the Temple mount. In the Torah, it was designated as the Harvest Festival, or *chag hakakatsir* חג הקציר (Exodus 23:16) and Festival of First Fruits or *chag habikurim* חג חבכורים (Exodus 34:22). Because Shavuot is a pilgrimage *chag* חג, like Pesach and Sukkot, the Torah prohibits labor and commands the Israelites to feast. Among other requirements, during the Temple days, an Israelite was to bring a new meal offering (Leviticus 23:16), usually consisting of two loaves of bread. In addition, they were to bring First fruits, *bikkurim* בכורים to the temple any time between Shavuot and Sukkot, whenever their first fruits would ripen.[19]

Shavuot's connection with Mt. Sinai and God's revelation of Torah to the people Israel is rendered by rabbinic tradition. One can trace its religious significance to the Talmud, where Shavuot is referred to as the Season of the Giving of Torah, or z'*man matan toratenu* זמן מתן תורתינו. Shavuot, like all Jewish holidays, begins at sunset. Many synagogues begin the celebration of Torah with an all night study session or a "Torah vigil" called "*Tikun Leil Shavuot* תקון ליל שבועות." This is a night dedicated to learning, in which any and all ages are encouraged to engage in significant study of an array of Jewish texts, beginning with Torah and continuing through later sacred texts. Some believe this all night session fosters heightened spiritual and mystical experience due to the hour of study. The *chag* חג continues the next morning, when celebrants recite

[19] Abraham P. Bloch, The Biblical and Historical Background of Jewish Customs and Ceremonies (New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1980) 245-246.

As mentioned the Book of Ruth is read on Shavuot. The scroll has been connected to the festival on account its themes, such as obligation, commitment and peoplehood. Some even relate events of the book to the timing of the festival. Ruth returns to Naomi's homeland around the time of Shavuot. But more significantly for later interpreters, Ruth's acceptance of the Jewish faith serves as a model for Israel receiving Torah at Sinai. Ruth's acceptance of Naomi's people and God involved joy and sacrifice as do Jews' acceptance of God's commandments, or *mitzvot* מצוות. Finally, another Shavuot practice is to hold Yizkor services. Shavuot is one of the four times during the year when we loved ones are communally remembered along with martyrs of the Jewish people. Other customs for Shavuot include decorating homes and synagogues with greens and fresh flowers which recalls the ancient practice of bringing first fruits, or *bikkurim* בכורים, to the Temple. In addition, some families eat dairy dishes on Shavuot. Rabbinic tradition compares the sweetness of milk and honey to the spiritually sweet food for thought we receive in the words of Torah.[20]

Shavuot then, is the anniversary of Sinai. It is a time for personal reflection on the role of Torah in our lives. In addition, Shavuot is a time for communal reaffirmation of spiritual vows to God and God's gift of Torah.

Please refer to the festivals bibliography on page 340 where you will discover a vast array of classical and modern midrashim and commentaries about all aspects — practices, beliefs, and history — of the three pilgrimmage festivals, Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot.

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[20] Peter S. Knobel, ed., Gates of the Seasons: A Guide to the Jewish Year (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1983) 76-78.

The Book of Ruth

Chapter 1

1 In the days when the chieftains ruled, there was a famine in the land; and a man of Bethlehem in Judah, with his wife and two sons, went to reside in the country of Moab. 2 The man's name was Elimelech, his wife's name was Naomi, and his two sons were named Mahlon and Chilion – Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah. They came to the country of Moab and remained there. 3 Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left with her two sons. 4 They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth, and they lived there about ten years. 5 Then those two – Mahlon and Chilion – also died; so the woman was left without her two sons and without her husband. 6 She started out with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab; for in the country of Moab she had heard that YHVH had taken note of YHVH's people and given them food. 7Accompanied by her two daughters-in-law, she left the place where she had been living; and they set out on the road back to the land of Judah. 8 But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Turn back, each of you to her mother's house. May YHVH deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me! 9 May YHVH grant that each of you find security in the house of a husband!" And she kissed them farewell. They broke into weeping 10 and said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people." 11 But Naomi replied, "Turn back, my daughters! Why should you go with me? Have I any more sons in my body who might be husbands for you? 12 Turn back, my daughters, for I am too old to be married. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I were married tonight and I also bore sons, 13 should you wait for them to grow up? Should you on their account debar yourselves from marriage? Oh no, my daughters! My lot is far more bitter than yours, for the hand of YHVH has struck out against me." 14 They broke into weeping again, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law farewell. But Ruth clung to her. 15 So she said, "See, your sister-in-law has returned to her people and her gods. Go follow your sister-in-law." 16 But Ruth replied, "Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. 17 Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus and more may YHVH do to me if anything but death parts me from you." 18 When [Naomi] saw how determined she was to go with her, she ceased to argue with her; 19 and the two went on until they reached Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole city buzzed with excitement over them. The women said, "Can this be Naomi?" 20 "Do not call me Naomi," she replied. "Call me Mara, for Shaddai has made my lot very bitter. 21 I went away full, and YHVH has brought me back empty. How can you call me Naomi, when YHVH has dealt harshly with me, when Shaddai has brought misfortune upon me!" 22 Thus Naomi returned from the country of Moab; she returned with her daughter-in-law Ruth the Moabite. They arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

Chapter 2

1 Now Naomi had a kinsman on her husband' s side, a man of substance, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. 2 Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "I would like to go to the fields and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone who may show me kindness." "Yes, daughter, go," she replied; 3 and off she went. She came and gleaned in a field, behind the reapers; and, as luck would have it, it was the piece of land belonging to Boaz, who was of Elimelech' s family. 4 Presently Boaz arrived from Bethlehem. He greeted the reapers, "YHVH be with you!" And they responded, "YHVH bless you!" 5 Boaz said to the servant who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose girl is that?" 6 The servant in charge of the reapers replied, "She is a Moabite girl who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. 7 She said, ' Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the reapers.' She has been on her feet ever since she came this morning. She has rested but little in the hut." 8 Boaz said to Ruth, "Listen to me, daughter. Don' t go to glean in another field. Don't go elsewhere, but stay here close to my girls. 9 Keep your eyes on the field they are reaping, and follow them. I have ordered the men not to molest you. And when you are thirsty, go to the jars and drink some of [the water] that the men have drawn." 10 She prostrated herself with her face to the ground, and said to him, "Why are you so kind as to single me out, when I am a foreigner?" 11 Boaz said in reply, "I have been told of all that you did for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband, how you left your father and mother and the land of your birth and came to a people you had not known before. 12 May YHVH reward your deeds. May you have a full recompense from YHVH, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have

sought refuge!" 13 She answered, "You are most kind, my lord, to comfort me and to speak gently to your maidservant – though I am not so much as one of your maidservants." 14 At mealtime, Boaz said to her, "Come over here and partake of the meal, and dip your morsel in the vinegar." So she sat down beside the reapers. He handed her roasted grain, and she ate her fill and had some left over. 15 When she got up again to glean, Boaz gave orders to his workers, "You are not only to let her glean among the sheaves, without interference, 16 but you must also pull some [stalks] out of the heaps and leave them for her to glean, and not scold her." 17 She gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned – it was about an *'ephah* of barley – 18 and carried it back with her to the town. When her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned, and when she also took out and gave her what she had left over after eating her fill, 19 her mother-in-law asked her, "Where did you glean today? Where did you work? Blessed be he who took such generous notice of you!" So she told her mother-in-law whom she had worked with, saying, "The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz." 20 Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "Blessed be he of YHVH, who has not failed in kindness to the living or to the dead! For," Naomi explained to her daughter-in-law, "the man is related to us; he is one of our redeeming kinsmen." 21 Ruth the Moabite said, "He even told me, 'Stay close by my workers until all my harvest is finished.'" 22 And Naomi answered her daughter-in-law Ruth, "It is best, daughter, that you go out with his girls, and not be annoyed in some other field." 21 So she stayed close to the maidservants of Boaz, and gleaned until the barley harvest and the wheat harvest were finished. Then she stayed at home with her mother-in-law.

Chapter 3

1 Naomi, her mother-in-law, said to her, "Daughter, I must seek a home for you, where you may be happy. 2 Now there is our kinsman Boaz, whose girls you were close to. He will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor tonight. 3 So bathe, anoint yourself, dress up, and go down to the threshing floor. But do not disclose yourself to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. 4 When he lies down, note the place where he lies down, and go over and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what you are to do." 5 She replied, "I will do everything you tell me." 6 She went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had instructed her. 7 Boaz ate and drank, and in a cheerful mood went to lie down beside the grainpile. Then she went over stealthily and uncovered his feet and lay down. 5 In the middle of the night, the man gave a start and pulled back – there was a woman lying at his feet! 9 "Who are you?" he asked. And she replied, "I am your handmaid Ruth. Spread your robe over your handmaid, for you are a redeeming kinsman." 10 He exclaimed, "Be blessed of YHVH, daughter! Your latest deed of loyalty is greater than the first, in that you have not turned to younger men, whether poor or rich. And now, daughter, have no fear. I will do in your behalf whatever you ask, for all the elders of my town know what a fine woman you are. 12 But while it is true I am a redeeming kinsman, there is another redeemer closer than I. 13 Stay for the night. Then in the morning, if he will act as a redeemer, good! let him redeem. But if he does not want to act as redeemer for you, I will do so myself, as YHVH lives! Lie down until morning." 14 So she lay at his feet until dawn. She rose before one person could distinguish another, for he thought, "Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor." 15 And he said, "Hold out the shawl you are wearing." She held it while he measured out six measures of barley, and he put it on her back. When she got back to the town, 16 she came to her mother-in-law, who asked, "How is it with you, daughter?" She told her all that the man had done for her; 17 and she added, "He gave me these six measures of barley, saying to me, 'Do not go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.'" 18 And Naomi said, "Stay here, daughter, till you learn how the matter turns out. For the man will not rest, but will settle the matter today."

Chapter 4

1 Meanwhile, Boaz had gone to the gate and sat down there. And now the redeemer whom Boaz had mentioned passed by. He called, "Come over and sit down here, So-and-so!" And he came over and sat down. 2 Then [Boaz] took ten elders of the town and said, "Be seated here"; and they sat down. 3 He said to the redeemer, "Naomi, now returned from the country of Moab, must sell the piece of land which belonged to our kinsman Elimelech. 4 I thought I should disclose the matter to you and say: acquire it in the presence of those seated here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you are willing to redeem it, redeem! But if you will not redeem, tell me, that I may know. For there is no one to redeem but you, and I come after you." "I am willing to redeem it," he replied. 5 Boaz continued, "When you acquire the property from Naomi and from Ruth the Moabite, you must also acquire the wife of the deceased, so as to perpetuate the name of the deceased upon his estate." 6 The redeemer replied, "Then I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own estate. You take over my right of redemption, for

I am unable to exercise it." 7 Now this was formerly done in Israel in cases of redemption or exchange: to validate any transaction, one man would take off his sandal and hand it to the other. Such was the practice in Israel. 8 So when the redeemer said to Boaz, "Acquire for yourself," he drew off his sandal. 9 And Boaz said to the elders and to the rest of the people, "You are witnesses today that I am acquiring from Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon. 10 I am also acquiring Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, as my wife, so as to perpetuate the name of the deceased upon his estate, that the name of the deceased may not disappear from among his kinsmen and from the gate of his home town. You are witnesses today." 11 All the people at the gate and the elders answered, "We are. May YHVH make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built up the House of Israel! Prosper in Ephrathah and perpetuate your name in Bethlehem! 12 And may your house be like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah – through the offspring which YHVH will give you by this young woman." 13 So Boaz married Ruth; she became his wife, and he cohabited with her. YHVH let her conceive, and she bore a son. 14 And the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be YHVH, who has not withheld a redeemer from you today! May his name be perpetuated in Israel! 15 He will renew your life and sustain your old age; for he is born of your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons." 16 Naomi took the child and held it to her bosom. She became its foster mother, 17 and the women neighbors gave him a name, saying, "A son is born to Naomi!" They named him Obed; he was the father of Jesse, father of David. 18 This is the line of Perez: Perez begot Hezron, 19 Hezron begot Ram, Ram begot Amminadab, 20 Amminadab begot Nahshon, Nahshon begot Salmon, 21 Salmon begot Boaz, Boaz begot Obed, 22 Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David.

פרק א

א וַיְהִי בִּימֵי שְׁפֹט הַשֹּׁפְטִים וַיְהִי רָעָב בָּאָרֶץ וַיֵּלֶךְ אִישׁ מִבֵּית לֶחֶם יְהוּדָה לָגוּר בִּשְׂדֵי מוֹאָב
הוּא וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וּשְׁנֵי בָנָיו׃ ב וְשֵׁם הָאִישׁ אֱלִימֶלֶךְ וְשֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ נָעֳמִי וְשֵׁם שְׁנֵי־בָנָיו | מַחְלוֹן וְכִלְיוֹן
אֶפְרָתִים מִבֵּית לֶחֶם יְהוּדָה וַיָּבֹאוּ שְׂדֵי־מוֹאָב וַיִּהְיוּ־שָׁם׃ ג וַיָּמָת אֱלִימֶלֶךְ אִישׁ נָעֳמִי וַתִּשָּׁאֵר
הִיא וּשְׁנֵי בָנֶיהָ׃ ד וַיִּשְׂאוּ לָהֶם נָשִׁים מֹאֲבִיּוֹת שֵׁם הָאַחַת עָרְפָּה וְשֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִית רוּת וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׁם
כְּעֶשֶׂר שָׁנִים׃ ה וַיָּמוּתוּ גַם־שְׁנֵיהֶם מַחְלוֹן וְכִלְיוֹן וַתִּשָּׁאֵר הָאִשָּׁה מִשְּׁנֵי יְלָדֶיהָ וּמֵאִישָׁהּ׃ ו וַתָּקָם
הִיא וְכַלֹּתֶיהָ וַתָּשָׁב מִשְּׂדֵי מוֹאָב כִּי שָׁמְעָה בִּשְׂדֵה מוֹאָב כִּי־פָקַד יְהוָה אֶת־עַמּוֹ לָתֵת לָהֶם
לָחֶם׃ ז וַתֵּצֵא מִן־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר הָיְתָה־שָּׁמָּה וּשְׁתֵּי כַלֹּתֶיהָ עִמָּהּ וַתֵּלַכְנָה בַּדֶּרֶךְ לָשׁוּב אֶל־אֶרֶץ
יְהוּדָה׃ ח וַתֹּאמֶר נָעֳמִי לִשְׁתֵּי כַלֹּתֶיהָ לֵכְנָה שֹּׁבְנָה אִשָּׁה לְבֵית אִמָּהּ יַעַשׂ [יַעַשׂ] יְהוָה עִמָּכֶם
חֶסֶד כַּאֲשֶׁר עֲשִׂיתֶם עִם־הַמֵּתִים וְעִמָּדִי׃ ט יִתֵּן יְהוָה לָכֶם וּמְצֶאןָ מְנוּחָה אִשָּׁה בֵּית אִישָׁהּ
וַתִּשַּׁק לָהֶן וַתִּשֶּׂאנָה קוֹלָן וַתִּבְכֶּינָה׃ י וַתֹּאמַרְנָה־לָּהּ כִּי־אִתָּךְ נָשׁוּב לְעַמֵּךְ׃ יא וַתֹּאמֶר נָעֳמִי
שֹׁבְנָה בְנֹתַי לָמָּה תֵלַכְנָה עִמִּי הַעוֹד־לִי בָנִים בְּמֵעַי וְהָיוּ לָכֶם לַאֲנָשִׁים׃ יב שֹׁבְנָה בְנֹתַי לֵכֶן כִּי
זָקַנְתִּי מִהְיוֹת לְאִישׁ כִּי אָמַרְתִּי יֶשׁ־לִי תִקְוָה גַּם הָיִיתִי הַלַּיְלָה לְאִישׁ וְגַם יָלַדְתִּי בָנִים׃ יג הֲלָהֵן |
תְּשַׂבֵּרְנָה עַד אֲשֶׁר יִגְדָּלוּ הֲלָהֵן תֵּעָגֵנָה לְבִלְתִּי הֱיוֹת לְאִישׁ אַל בְּנֹתַי כִּי־מַר־לִי מְאֹד מִכֶּם
כִּי־יָצְאָה בִי יַד־יְהוָה׃ יד וַתִּשֶּׂנָה קוֹלָן וַתִּבְכֶּינָה עוֹד וַתִּשַּׁק עָרְפָּה לַחֲמוֹתָהּ וְרוּת דָּבְקָה בָּהּ׃
טו וַתֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה שָׁבָה יְבִמְתֵּךְ אֶל־עַמָּהּ וְאֶל־אֱלֹהֶיהָ שׁוּבִי אַחֲרֵי יְבִמְתֵּךְ׃ טז וַתֹּאמֶר רוּת
אַל־תִּפְגְּעִי־בִי לְעָזְבֵךְ לָשׁוּב מֵאַחֲרָיִךְ כִּי אֶל־אֲשֶׁר תֵּלְכִי אֵלֵךְ וּבַאֲשֶׁר תָּלִינִי אָלִין עַמֵּךְ עַמִּי
וֵאלֹהַיִךְ אֱלֹהָי׃ יז בַּאֲשֶׁר תָּמוּתִי אָמוּת וְשָׁם אֶקָּבֵר כֹּה יַעֲשֶׂה יְהוָה לִי וְכֹה יֹסִיף כִּי הַמָּוֶת יַפְרִיד
בֵּינִי וּבֵינָךְ׃ יח וַתֵּרֶא כִּי־מִתְאַמֶּצֶת הִיא לָלֶכֶת אִתָּהּ וַתֶּחְדַּל לְדַבֵּר אֵלֶיהָ׃ יט וַתֵּלַכְנָה שְׁתֵּיהֶם
עַד־בֹּאָנָה בֵּית לָחֶם וַיְהִי כְּבֹאָנָה בֵּית לֶחֶם וַתֵּהֹם כָּל־הָעִיר עֲלֵיהֶן וַתֹּאמַרְנָה הֲזֹאת נָעֳמִי׃
כ וַתֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶן אַל־תִּקְרֶאנָה לִי נָעֳמִי קְרֶאןָ לִי מָרָא כִּי־הֵמַר שַׁדַּי לִי מְאֹד׃ כא אֲנִי מְלֵאָה
הָלַכְתִּי וְרֵיקָם הֱשִׁיבַנִי יְהוָה לָמָּה תִקְרֶאנָה לִי נָעֳמִי וַיהוָה עָנָה בִי וְשַׁדַּי הֵרַע לִי׃ כב וַתָּשָׁב נָעֳמִי
וְרוּת הַמּוֹאֲבִיָּה כַלָּתָהּ עִמָּהּ הַשָּׁבָה מִשְּׂדֵי מוֹאָב וְהֵמָּה בָּאוּ בֵּית לֶחֶם בִּתְחִלַּת קְצִיר שְׂעֹרִים׃

פרק ב

א וּלְנָעֳמִי מֹיֵדַע [מוֹדָע] לְאִישָׁהּ אִישׁ גִּבּוֹר חַיִל מִמִּשְׁפַּחַת אֱלִימֶלֶךְ וּשְׁמוֹ בֹּעַז׃ ב וַתֹּאמֶר רוּת

הַמּוֹאֲבִיָּה אֶל־נָעֳמִי אֵלְכָה־נָּא הַשָּׂדֶה וַאֲלַקְטָה בַשִּׁבֳּלִים אַחַר אֲשֶׁר אֶמְצָא־חֵן בְּעֵינָיו וַתֹּאמֶר
לָהּ לְכִי בִתִּי׃ ג וַתֵּלֶךְ וַתָּבוֹא וַתְּלַקֵּט בַּשָּׂדֶה אַחֲרֵי הַקֹּצְרִים וַיִּקֶר מִקְרֶהָ חֶלְקַת הַשָּׂדֶה לְבֹעַז
אֲשֶׁר מִמִּשְׁפַּחַת אֱלִימֶלֶךְ׃ ד וְהִנֵּה־בֹעַז בָּא מִבֵּית לֶחֶם וַיֹּאמֶר לַקּוֹצְרִים יְהוָה עִמָּכֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ
יְבָרֶכְךָ יְהוָה׃ ה וַיֹּאמֶר בֹּעַז לְנַעֲרוֹ הַנִּצָּב עַל־הַקּוֹצְרִים לְמִי הַנַּעֲרָה הַזֹּאת׃ ו וַיַּעַן הַנַּעַר הַנִּצָּב
עַל־הַקּוֹצְרִים וַיֹּאמַר נַעֲרָה מוֹאֲבִיָּה הִיא הַשָּׁבָה עִם־נָעֳמִי מִשְּׂדֵה מוֹאָב׃ ז וַתֹּאמֶר אֲלַקֳטָה־נָּא
וְאָסַפְתִּי בָעֳמָרִים אַחֲרֵי הַקּוֹצְרִים וַתָּבוֹא וַתַּעֲמוֹד מֵאָז הַבֹּקֶר וְעַד־עַתָּה זֶה שִׁבְתָּהּ הַבַּיִת מְעָט׃
ח וַיֹּאמֶר בֹּעַז אֶל־רוּת הֲלוֹא שָׁמַעַתְּ בִּתִּי אַל־תֵּלְכִי לְלַקֵּט בְּשָׂדֶה אַחֵר וְגַם לֹא תַעֲבוֹרִי מִזֶּה
וְכֹה תִדְבָּקִין עִם־נַעֲרֹתָי׃ ט עֵינַיִךְ בַּשָּׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר־יִקְצֹרוּן וְהָלַכְתְּ אַחֲרֵיהֶן הֲלוֹא צִוִּיתִי
אֶת־הַנְּעָרִים לְבִלְתִּי נָגְעֵךְ וְצָמִת וְהָלַכְתְּ אֶל־הַכֵּלִים וְשָׁתִית מֵאֲשֶׁר יִשְׁאֲבוּן הַנְּעָרִים׃ י וַתִּפֹּל
עַל־פָּנֶיהָ וַתִּשְׁתַּחוּ אָרְצָה וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו מַדּוּעַ מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ לְהַכִּירֵנִי וְאָנֹכִי נָכְרִיָּה׃ יא וַיַּעַן
בֹּעַז וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ הֻגֶּד הֻגַּד לִי כֹּל אֲשֶׁר־עָשִׂית אֶת־חֲמוֹתֵךְ אַחֲרֵי מוֹת אישֵׁךְ וַתַּעַזְבִי אָבִיךְ וְאִמֵּךְ
וְאֶרֶץ מוֹלַדְתֵּךְ וַתֵּלְכִי אֶל־עַם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדַעַתְּ תְּמוֹל שִׁלְשׁוֹם׃ יב יְשַׁלֵּם יְהוָה פָּעֳלֵךְ וּתְהִי
מַשְׂכֻּרְתֵּךְ שְׁלֵמָה מֵעִם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר־בָּאת לַחֲסוֹת תַּחַת־כְּנָפָיו׃ יג וַתֹּאמֶר
אֶמְצָא־חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אֲדֹנִי כִּי נִחַמְתָּנִי וְכִי דִבַּרְתָּ עַל־לֵב שִׁפְחָתֶךָ וְאָנֹכִי לֹא אֶהְיֶה כְּאַחַת שִׁפְחֹתֶיךָ׃
יד וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ בֹּעַז לְעֵת הָאֹכֶל גְּשִׁי הֲלֹם וְאָכַלְתְּ מִן־הַלֶּחֶם וְטָבַלְתְּ פִּתֵּךְ בַּחֹמֶץ וַתֵּשֶׁב מִצַּד
הַקּוֹצְרִים וַיִּצְבָּט־לָהּ קָלִי וַתֹּאכַל וַתְּשְׂבַּע וַתּוֹתַר׃ טו וַתָּקָם לְלַקֵּט וַיְצַו בֹּעַז אֶת־נְעָרָיו לֵאמֹר גַּם
בֵּין הָעֳמָרִים תְּלַקֵּט וְלֹא תַכְלִימוּהָ׃ טז וְגַם שֹׁל־תָּשְׁלוּ לָהּ מִן־הַצְּבָתִים וַעֲזַבְתֶּם וְלִקְּטָה וְלֹא
תִגְעֲרוּ־בָהּ׃ יז וַתְּלַקֵּט בַּשָּׂדֶה עַד־הָעָרֶב וַתַּחְבֹּט אֵת אֲשֶׁר־לִקֵּטָה וַיְהִי כְּאֵיפָה שְׂעֹרִים׃
יח וַתִּשָּׂא וַתָּבוֹא הָעִיר וַתֵּרֶא חֲמוֹתָהּ אֵת אֲשֶׁר־לִקֵּטָה וַתּוֹצֵא וַתִּתֶּן־לָהּ אֵת אֲשֶׁר־הוֹתְרָה
מִשָּׂבְעָהּ׃ יט וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ חֲמוֹתָהּ אֵיפֹה לִקַּטְתְּ הַיּוֹם וְאָנָה עָשִׂית יְהִי מַכִּירֵךְ בָּרוּךְ וַתַּגֶּד
לַחֲמוֹתָהּ אֵת אֲשֶׁר־עָשְׂתָה עִמּוֹ וַתֹּאמֶר שֵׁם הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי עִמּוֹ הַיּוֹם בֹּעַז׃ כ וַתֹּאמֶר נָעֳמִי
לְכַלָּתָהּ בָּרוּךְ הוּא לַיהוָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא־עָזַב חַסְדּוֹ אֶת־הַחַיִּים וְאֶת־הַמֵּתִים וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ נָעֳמִי קָרוֹב
לָנוּ הָאִישׁ מִגְּאֲלֵנוּ הוּא׃ כא וַתֹּאמֶר רוּת הַמּוֹאֲבִיָּה גַּם | כִּי־אָמַר אֵלַי עִם־הַנְּעָרִים אֲשֶׁר־לִי
תִּדְבָּקִין עַד אִם־כִּלּוּ אֶת כָּל־הַקָּצִיר אֲשֶׁר־לִי׃ כב וַתֹּאמֶר נָעֳמִי אֶל־רוּת כַּלָּתָהּ טוֹב בִּתִּי כִּי
תֵצְאִי עִם־נַעֲרוֹתָיו וְלֹא יִפְגְּעוּ־בָךְ בְּשָׂדֶה אַחֵר׃ כג וַתִּדְבַּק בְּנַעֲרוֹת בֹּעַז לְלַקֵּט עַד־כְּלוֹת
קְצִיר־הַשְּׂעֹרִים וּקְצִיר הַחִטִּים וַתֵּשֶׁב אֶת־חֲמוֹתָהּ׃

פרק ג

א וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ נָעֳמִי חֲמוֹתָהּ בִּתִּי הֲלֹא אֲבַקֶּשׁ־לָךְ מָנוֹחַ אֲשֶׁר יִיטַב־לָךְ׃ ב וְעַתָּה הֲלֹא בֹעַז
מֹדַעְתָּנוּ אֲשֶׁר הָיִית אֶת־נַעֲרוֹתָיו הִנֵּה־הוּא זֹרֶה אֶת־גֹּרֶן הַשְּׂעֹרִים הַלָּיְלָה׃ ג וְרָחַצְתְּ | וָסַכְתְּ
וְשַׂמְתְּ שִׂמְלֹתַיִךְ עָלַיִךְ [שִׂמְלֹתַיִךְ] וְיָרַדְתְּ [וְיָרַדְתִּי] הַגֹּרֶן אַל־תִּוָּדְעִי לָאִישׁ עַד כַּלֹּתוֹ לֶאֱכֹל
וְלִשְׁתּוֹת׃ ד וִיהִי בְּשָׁכְבוֹ וְיָדַעַתְּ אֶת־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכַּב־שָׁם וּבָאת וְגִלִּית מַרְגְּלֹתָיו וְשָׁכָבְתִּי
[וְשָׁכַבְתְּ] וְהוּא יַגִּיד לָךְ אֵת אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשִׂין׃ ה וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ כֹּל אֲשֶׁר־תֹּאמְרִי_ [אֵלַי] אֶעֱשֶׂה׃
ו וַתֵּרֶד הַגֹּרֶן וַתַּעַשׂ כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־צִוַּתָּהּ חֲמוֹתָהּ׃ ז וַיֹּאכַל בֹּעַז וַיֵּשְׁתְּ וַיִּיטַב לִבּוֹ וַיָּבֹא לִשְׁכַּב בִּקְצֵה
הָעֲרֵמָה וַתָּבֹא בַלָּט וַתְּגַל מַרְגְּלֹתָיו וַתִּשְׁכָּב׃ ח וַיְהִי בַּחֲצִי הַלַּיְלָה וַיֶּחֱרַד הָאִישׁ וַיִּלָּפֵת וְהִנֵּה
אִשָּׁה שֹׁכֶבֶת מַרְגְּלֹתָיו׃ ט וַיֹּאמֶר מִי־אָתְּ וַתֹּאמֶר אָנֹכִי רוּת אֲמָתֶךָ וּפָרַשְׂתָּ כְנָפֶךָ עַל־אֲמָתְךָ כִּי
גֹאֵל אָתָּה׃ י וַיֹּאמֶר בְּרוּכָה אַתְּ לַיהוָה בִּתִּי הֵיטַבְתְּ חַסְדֵּךְ הָאַחֲרוֹן מִן־הָרִאשׁוֹן לְבִלְתִּי־לֶכֶת
אַחֲרֵי הַבַּחוּרִים אִם־דַּל וְאִם־עָשִׁיר׃ יא וְעַתָּה בִּתִּי אַל־תִּירְאִי כֹּל אֲשֶׁר־תֹּאמְרִי אֶעֱשֶׂה־לָּךְ כִּי
יוֹדֵעַ כָּל־שַׁעַר עַמִּי כִּי אֵשֶׁת חַיִל אָתְּ׃ יב וְעַתָּה כִּי אָמְנָם כִּי (כתיב ולא קרי׃) אִם גֹּאֵל אָנֹכִי וְגַם
יֵשׁ גֹּאֵל קָרוֹב מִמֶּנִּי׃ יג לִינִי | הַלַּיְלָה וְהָיָה בַּבֹּקֶר אִם־יִגְאָלֵךְ טוֹב יִגְאָל וְאִם־לֹא יַחְפֹּץ לְגָאֳלֵךְ
וּגְאַלְתִּיךְ אָנֹכִי חַי־יְהוָה שִׁכְבִי עַד־הַבֹּקֶר׃ יד וַתִּשְׁכַּב מַרְגְּלֹתָו [מַרְגְּלוֹתָיו] עַד־הַבֹּקֶר וַתָּקָם
בְּטֶרֶם [בְּטֶרֶם] יַכִּיר אִישׁ אֶת־רֵעֵהוּ וַיֹּאמֶר אַל־יִוָּדַע כִּי־בָאָה הָאִשָּׁה הַגֹּרֶן׃ טו וַיֹּאמֶר הָבִי

הַמִּטְפַּחַת אֲשֶׁר־עָלַיִךְ וְאֶחֱזִי־בָהּ וַתֹּאחֶז בָּהּ וַיָּמָד שֵׁשׁ־שְׂעֹרִים וַיָּשֶׁת עָלֶיהָ וַיָּבֹא הָעִיר׃
טז וַתָּבוֹא אֶל־חֲמוֹתָהּ וַתֹּאמֶר מִי־אַתְּ בִּתִּי וַתַּגֶּד־לָהּ אֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה־לָהּ הָאִישׁ׃ יז וַתֹּאמֶר
שֵׁשׁ־הַשְּׂעֹרִים הָאֵלֶּה נָתַן לִי כִּי אָמַר [אַלַי] אַל־תָּבוֹאִי רֵיקָם אֶל־חֲמוֹתֵךְ׃ יח וַתֹּאמֶר שְׁבִי בִתִּי
עַד אֲשֶׁר תֵּדְעִין אֵיךְ יִפֹּל דָּבָר כִּי לֹא יִשְׁקֹט הָאִישׁ כִּי־אִם־כִּלָּה הַדָּבָר הַיּוֹם׃

פרק ד

א וּבֹעַז עָלָה הַשַּׁעַר וַיֵּשֶׁב שָׁם וְהִנֵּה הַגֹּאֵל עֹבֵר אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר־בֹּעַז וַיֹּאמֶר סוּרָה שְׁבָה־פֹּה פְּלֹנִי
אַלְמֹנִי וַיָּסַר וַיֵּשֵׁב׃ ב וַיִּקַּח עֲשָׂרָה אֲנָשִׁים מִזִּקְנֵי הָעִיר וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁבוּ־פֹה וַיֵּשֵׁבוּ׃ ג וַיֹּאמֶר לַגֹּאֵל
חֶלְקַת הַשָּׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר לְאָחִינוּ לֶאֱלִימֶלֶךְ מָכְרָה נָעֳמִי הַשָּׁבָה מִשְּׂדֵה מוֹאָב׃ ד וַאֲנִי אָמַרְתִּי אֶגְלָה
אָזְנְךָ לֵאמֹר קְנֵה נֶגֶד הַיֹּשְׁבִים וְנֶגֶד זִקְנֵי עַמִּי אִם־תִּגְאַל גְּאָל וְאִם־לֹא יִגְאַל הַגִּידָה לִּי וְאֵדָע
[וְאֵדָעָה] כִּי אֵין זוּלָתְךָ לִגְאוֹל וְאָנֹכִי אַחֲרֶיךָ וַיֹּאמֶר אָנֹכִי אֶגְאָל׃ ה וַיֹּאמֶר בֹּעַז בְּיוֹם־קְנוֹתְךָ
הַשָּׂדֶה מִיַּד נָעֳמִי וּמֵאֵת רוּת הַמּוֹאֲבִיָּה אֵשֶׁת־הַמֵּת קָנִיתָ [קְנִיתָהּ] לְהָקִים שֵׁם־הַמֵּת
עַל־נַחֲלָתוֹ׃ ו וַיֹּאמֶר הַגֹּאֵל לֹא אוּכַל לִגְאָל־ [לְגָאֳלָ] לִי פֶּן־אַשְׁחִית אֶת־נַחֲלָתִי גְּאַל־לְךָ אַתָּה
אֶת־גְּאֻלָּתִי כִּי לֹא־אוּכַל לִגְאָל׃ ז וְזֹאת לְפָנִים בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל עַל־הַגְּאוּלָה וְעַל־הַתְּמוּרָה לְקַיֵּם
כָּל־דָּבָר שָׁלַף אִישׁ נַעֲלוֹ וְנָתַן לְרֵעֵהוּ וְזֹאת הַתְּעוּדָה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל׃ ח וַיֹּאמֶר הַגֹּאֵל לְבֹעַז קְנֵה־לָךְ
וַיִּשְׁלֹף נַעֲלוֹ׃ ט וַיֹּאמֶר בֹּעַז לַזְּקֵנִים וְכָל־הָעָם עֵדִים אַתֶּם הַיּוֹם כִּי קָנִיתִי אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר
לֶאֱלִימֶלֶךְ וְאֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר לְכִלְיוֹן וּמַחְלוֹן מִיַּד נָעֳמִי׃ י וְגַם אֶת־רוּת הַמֹּאֲבִיָּה אֵשֶׁת מַחְלוֹן קָנִיתִי
לִי לְאִשָּׁה לְהָקִים שֵׁם־הַמֵּת עַל־נַחֲלָתוֹ וְלֹא־יִכָּרֵת שֵׁם־הַמֵּת מֵעִם אֶחָיו וּמִשַּׁעַר מְקוֹמוֹ עֵדִים
אַתֶּם הַיּוֹם׃ יא וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל־הָעָם אֲשֶׁר־בַּשַּׁעַר וְהַזְּקֵנִים עֵדִים יִתֵּן יְהוָה אֶת־הָאִשָּׁה הַבָּאָה
אֶל־בֵּיתֶךָ כְּרָחֵל | וּכְלֵאָה אֲשֶׁר בָּנוּ שְׁתֵּיהֶם אֶת־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל וַעֲשֵׂה־חַיִל בְּאֶפְרָתָה וּקְרָא־שֵׁם
בְּבֵית לָחֶם׃ יב וִיהִי בֵיתְךָ כְּבֵית פֶּרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־יָלְדָה תָּמָר לִיהוּדָה מִן־הַזֶּרַע אֲשֶׁר יִתֵּן יְהוָה לְךָ
מִן־הַנַּעֲרָה הַזֹּאת׃ יג וַיִּקַּח בֹּעַז אֶת־רוּת וַתְּהִי־לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה וַיָּבֹא אֵלֶיהָ וַיִּתֵּן יְהוָה לָהּ הֵרָיון וַתֵּלֶד
בֵּן׃ יד וַתֹּאמַרְנָה הַנָּשִׁים אֶל־נָעֳמִי בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא הִשְׁבִּית לָךְ גֹּאֵל הַיּוֹם וְיִקָּרֵא שְׁמוֹ
בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל׃ טו וְהָיָה לָךְ לְמֵשִׁיב נֶפֶשׁ וּלְכַלְכֵּל אֶת־שֵׂיבָתֵךְ כִּי כַלָּתֵךְ אֲשֶׁר־אֲהֵבַתֶךְ יְלָדַתּוּ
אֲשֶׁר־הִיא טוֹבָה לָךְ מִשִּׁבְעָה בָּנִים׃ טז וַתִּקַּח נָעֳמִי אֶת־הַיֶּלֶד וַתְּשִׁתֵהוּ בְחֵיקָהּ וַתְּהִי־לוֹ
לְאֹמֶנֶת׃ יז וַתִּקְרֶאנָה לוֹ הַשְּׁכֵנוֹת שֵׁם לֵאמֹר יֻלַּד־בֵּן לְנָעֳמִי וַתִּקְרֶאנָה שְׁמוֹ עוֹבֵד הוּא אֲבִי־יִשַׁי
אֲבִי דָוִד׃ יח וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת פֶּרֶץ פֶּרֶץ הוֹלִיד אֶת־חֶצְרוֹן׃ יט וְחֶצְרוֹן הוֹלִיד אֶת־רָם וְרָם
הוֹלִיד אֶת־עַמִּינָדָב׃ כ וְעַמִּינָדָב הוֹלִיד אֶת־נַחְשׁוֹן וְנַחְשׁוֹן הוֹלִיד אֶת־שַׂלְמָה׃ כא וְשַׂלְמוֹן הוֹלִיד
אֶת־בֹּעַז וּבֹעַז הוֹלִיד אֶת־עוֹבֵד׃ כב וְעוֹבֵד הוֹלִיד אֶת־יִשָׁי וְיִשַׁי הוֹלִיד אֶת־דָּוִד׃

Ruth's Path: The Choice of Obligation

Sadness, isolation, and despair – three of the many emotions associated with the death of a spouse or a child. The Book of Ruth begins by illustrating the way three women respond to such losses, with the deaths of the men in their lives. Naomi and Orpah respond to their losses in a natural way; each choosing to return home, where her own family, friends, and home community will support her. The fact that the verb "to return" appears eleven times in the first chapter[1] emphasizes how natural is that return to what is familiar after experiencing loss. Ruth responds to her loss differently, in an *extra-ordinary* way. She chooses to obligate herself to a life with Naomi, leaving behind her own biological family, friends, and home community. Ruth's pledge to Naomi[2] expresses her limitless sense of responsibility and commitment to Naomi as a person, to her people, and to her God.

The Ordinary and the Extraordinary

> *"She [Naomi] started out with her daughters-in law to return from the country of Moab; for in Moab she had heard that YHVH had taken note of the people and given them food. Accompanied by her two daughters-in-law, she left the place where she had been living; and they set out on the road back to the land of Judah" (Ruth 1:6-7).*

From the beginning of the story, Naomi is clear about wanting to return home. She had left her home in Bethlehem only because of the famine; now that the famine has ended, her immediate response is to return. Naomi wants Orpah and Ruth to follow her

[1] Ruth: 1:6, 1:7, 1:8, 1:10, 1:11, 1:12, 1:15, 1:16, 1:21, and twice in 1:22.

[2] "Entreat me not to leave you, or to return from following you: for wherever you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people and your God, my God; where you die, I will die and there I will be buried. Thus may YHVH do to me and more if but death part you from me" (1:16-18).

example and return to their homes. As the passage below indicates, Naomi knows that in what we would call their "sociological and cultural framework," where security depends upon marital status, finding another husband is important. Thus, on her journey towards Bethlehem, with her daughters-in-law following behind, she urges them,

> Turn back, each of you to her mother's house. May YHVH deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me! May YHVH grant that each of you find security in the house of a husband! (1:8-9).

Naomi asks God to bless her daughters-in-law with security, or *menucha* מנוחה[3] (1:9), which Kirsten Nielson suggests "...alludes to a home where one can live in peace with the day-to-day essentials taken care of."[4] Naomi urges the women to go home where they can once again marry and therefore survive in the patriarchal world in which they live.

After Naomi first attempts to persuade them to leave, she kisses them both (1:9). With this kiss Naomi shows her love for her two daughters-in-law and her desire to care for them. In response, Orpah and Ruth lift up their voice and weep. They say to her, "No, we will return with you with to people" (1:9-10). In the Bible, the idiom "lift up their voice and weep" usually occurs in the contexts of lamentations and mourning.[5] The women cry for their own loss, and quite possibly for the losses Naomi has suffered. Although we can infer that they understand the practical and emotional importance of returning home, here it seems that Orpah and Ruth both initially wish to remain with

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[3] Literally "rest."
[4] Kirsten Nielson, Ruth: A Commentary (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997) 46.
[5] Robert L Hubbard, The Book of Ruth (Michigan: William B. Eedermans Publishing Company, 1984) 105. Biblical examples include: Genesis 21:16, 27:38; Judges 2:3, 21:2; I Samuel 11:4, 24:17, 30:4; II Samuel 3:32, 13:36; Job 2:12.

Naomi out of loyalty and respect.[6] This reading of the story suggests that they cannot bear the thought of leaving their mother-in-law alone to travel back to Bethlehem.

Not satisfied with their response, Naomi continues appealing to their common sense, reminding them of their need to remarry. After another round of tears, Orpah kisses Naomi and returns home. Frederic Bush responds to Orpah's choice:

> The narrator implies no judgment whatsoever upon her decision to accede to Naomi's importuning and return home. Her decision is the sound and reasonable one: she opts for the possibility of home and husband (1:9a) and for her own community and faith (1:15)."[7]

Ruth, however, opts for the more challenging path by committing herself to Naomi. Moreover, she undertake three levels of obligation she undertakes — first to Naomi herself, then to Naomi's people, and ultimately also to Naomi's God.

Ruth's Obligation to Naomi

"Entreat me not to leave you,
or to return from following you;
for wherever you go, I will go;
where you lodge, I will lodge" (1:16).

In her decision to follow Naomi, Ruth defies customary behavior. Had she chosen to return home, she would have been responsible only to herself. She might have concentrated on healing and on finding a new husband. Instead, Ruth chooses a different path, a path of obligation.

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[6] There are many other ways to interpret Orpah and Ruth's desire to stay with Naomi. Scholars such as Fewell and Gunn argue that they want to stay not because of altruism, but because of their own desperate state of mourning. Donna Fewell and David Gunn, "A Son is Born to Naomi," Journal for the Study of Old Testament 40 (1988) 99-108.

[7] Frederic Bush, Word Biblical Commentary: Ruth/Esther (Texas: Word Publishers, 1996) 54.

Ruth's commitment to Naomi is quite clear. The text states that Ruth clings to Naomi, *v'rut davka ba* ורות דבקה בה (1:14). This verb *d-b-k* ד-ב-ק is often associated with clinging to God. However, in rare instances in the Bible it describes interpersonal relations and has the figurative meaning of loyalty and affection.[8] Genesis 2:24 uses *d-b-k* ד-ב-ק to signify conjugal attachment: "That is why a man leaves his father and his mother and clings [*d-b-k* ד-ב-ק] his wife." Ruth's commitment intensifies as she declares in unmistakable firmness,

> Entreat me not to leave you, or to return from following you: for wherever you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people [will be] my people and your God, my God; where you die, I will die and there I will be buried. Thus may YHVH do to me and more if but death part you from me (1:16-18).

Ruth seems to be motivated by pure love, affection, and loyalty. In fact, the word loving-kindness, or *chesed* חסד, used both by Naomi (1:8) and Boaz (3:10), characterizes her actions. Ruth takes a tremendous risk in committing her life to Naomi. There are no guarantees she will be cared for once they arrive in Bethlehem.

Ruth acts in a courageous way. After all, Naomi does not cling to Ruth, nor does the text suggest that Naomi appreciates Ruth's gesture. In making her pledge, Ruth deliberately disobeys Naomi; Ruth seems to believe that Naomi spoke out of either grief or the desire to do what is best for her daughters-in-law. Ruth's pledge of loyalty to Naomi, made without hesitation, is indeed extraordinary. Feminist, biblical scholar Phyllis Trible compares Ruth's courage to that of Abraham,

> From a cultural perspective, Ruth has chosen death over life. She has disavowed the solidarity of family; she has

[8] Jan De Waard, and Eugene A. Nida, A Translator's Handbook of Ruth (London: United Bible Societies, 1973)16. Biblical examples include: Ruth 2:8, 2:23; II Samuel 20:2; Proverbs 18:24.

> abandoned national identity; and she has renounced religious affiliation. In the entire epic of Israel, only Abraham matches this radicalism, but then he had a call from God (Gen. 12:1-5). Divine promise motivated and sustained his leap of faith. Besides, Abraham was a man, with a wife and other possessions to accompany him. Ruth stands alone; she possesses nothing. No God has called her; no deity has promised her blessing; no human being has come to her aid. She lives and chooses without a support group, and she knows the fruit of her decision may well be the emptiness of rejection, indeed death. Consequently, not even Abraham's leap of faith surpasses this decision of Ruth's.[9]

By choosing to take this extraordinary path, Ruth rejects the cultural norms of her society. She connects her fate with that of a woman, rather than with a man with whom she would play the traditional role of wife and mother. She has risked her own future to help support another human being, an act of exceptional *chesed* חסד.

Ruth's Obligation to Naomi's People

"Your people shall be my people" (1:16)

Ruth pledges herself to Naomi; but this is only the beginning. With this pledge to an individual comes a commitment to her people. Given the cultural realities of the time, it is safe to assume that Ruth knows that, as a foreigner, she may not be readily accepted into Naomi's community. Katharine Sakenfeld supposes that even as she makes her statement to Naomi, Ruth is aware that the people of Judah are unlikely to accept a

[9] Phyllis Trible, "A Human Comedy," God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978) 173. Other similarities between Abraham and Ruth include: both left everything familiar – family, community, and land – to go to an unfamiliar place; both went on this journey with a woman who did not verbally indicate that she supported this decision, both received blessings on their journeys. Another difference is that Ruth was a widow putting her fate with another widow, while Abraham was a man putting his fate with God.

Moabite as one of their own.[10] Nevertheless, Ruth remains committed to becoming part of this people. We know this not because she repeatedly speaks of it throughout the book (she only mentions it once in 1:16), rather because she never mentions the people from whom she came.

In the book, Ruth does mention once that she is a foreigner (2:10), yet Boaz hastens to draw new implications. In his first conversation with Ruth, Boaz acknowledges Ruth's decision to become part of a new community:

> I have been told of all that you did for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband, how you left your father and mother and the land of your birth and came to a people you had not known before. May YHVH reward your deeds (2:11-12).

Boaz reinforces Ruth's decision to join a new people and in doing so he acknowledges that this was a difficult choice.

Ruth's Obligation to Naomi's God

"Your God [shall be] My God" (1:16)

Although in verse 1:13, Naomi proclaims, "The hand of YHVH has gone out against me," Ruth nonetheless places her faith with this God. According to the 19th century rabbinical scholar known as Malbim (Meir Lev ben Yechiel Michael), when she makes her pledge, Ruth has already grasped the Torah of Naomi's God – she considers herself part of the Israelite people, in a time when it was unheard of to change one's identity. The text may not directly state that Ruth's pledge to Naomi's people and to her

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[10] Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, Ruth – Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (John Knox Press: Louisville, 1989) 32. On prohibitions regarding Moabites, see the following in Deuteronomy 23:4, "No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted into the congregation of YHVH; none of their descendants, even in the tenth generation, shall ever be admitted into the congregation of YHVH."

God implies a national or religious conversion; it is noteworthy to see the view of Adele Berlin:

> 'Your people will be my people and your God my God' is radical, because it signals that Ruth is changing her identity in a world where it was inconceivable to do so. In the ancient world there was no mechanism for religious conversion or change of citizenship; the very notion was unthinkable. Religion and peoplehood defined one's ethnic identity, and this could no more be changed than could the color of one's skin. A Moabite was always a Moabite, wherever he or she lived. And, indeed, Ruth is referred to throughout the story as 'the Moabitess.' But from Ruth's point of view, she is becoming an Israelitess. She is joining herself to Naomi not only on the private family level, but also on the larger national level.[11]

Based on Ruth's statement to Naomi "your people [will be] my people, your God my God" (1:16), later rabbinic tradition assumes that Ruth is the first biblical character from another culture to convert, thereby choosing a life of obligation to the Jewish people and to the Jewish God.[12] In fact, most rabbinic commentary on the Book of Ruth focuses exclusively on Ruth's piety and her conversion.

The rabbis even base many of their conversion laws upon Ruth's behavior. For example, Naomi tells Ruth to return home three times[13] and this has served as a model for later conversion ceremonies. Midrash Ruth Rabbah 2:16 comments, "R. Samuel b. Nahmani said in the name of R. Judah b. Hanina: Three times is it written here "turn

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[11] Adele Berlin, "Ruth and the Continuity of Israel," Reading Ruth: Contemporary Women Reclaim a Sacred Story, ed. Judith A. Kates and Gail Twersky Reimer (New York: Ballentine Books, 1994) 257-258.
[12] It is noteworthy that the rabbis work against the Biblical law in Deut. 23:4 forbidding a Moabite from entering the congregation of YHVH. The rabbis create a legal strategy whereby they say that given the masculine form of the word "Moabite," this law only applies to Moabite men and not Moabite women (Yebamot 69a, 76b, 77a; Ketubot 7b; Kedushin 75a).
[13] 1:8, 1:11, 1:15

back," corresponding to the three times that a would-be proselyte is repulsed;[14] but if he persists after that, he is accepted."

Alongside the commentary on Ruth's conversion, the rabbis and later commentators illustrate Ruth's piety by creatively filling in gaps in the story. Here the rabbis, legalists themselves, place Ruth within a context of learning about and accepting a system of religious laws. They recognize that Ruth has chosen a life of commitment and obligation to God and by doing so has also devoted herself to the Jewish legal system. Ruth Rabbah comments on the pledge as follows:

> Naomi told Ruth: 'It is not the way of Jewish women to frequent theaters and circuses of heathens.' To that Ruth replied, 'Where you go, I will go.' Naomi then tells Ruth that a Jew does not lodge in a house that does not bear a mezuzah. Ruth replies, 'Your people shall be my people'. When Naomi informed Ruth that she would have to give up idolatry, Ruth responded, 'And your God shall be my God.'

Ruth is not a born Jew. She is born a Moabitess and is thus described in the book (1:4). However, once she accepts Naomi's people and her God, she is like all converts, "reborn." At least that is the perspective of Ruth Rabbah 3:5: "R. Judah b. Simon commented: Come and see how precious in the eyes of the Omnipresent are converts. Once she [Ruth] decided to become converted, Scripture ranks her equal to Naomi." Once Ruth makes the extraordinary decision to obligate herself to the Jewish people and to God, she is highly esteemed.[15]

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[14] A potential convert is traditionally turned away three times, warned of the difficulties of Judaism, to ensure his or her sincerity in the conversion.

[15] Note that the biblical text is not as clear about such a conversion as the rabbis imply. Ruth is still called "Moabite" after her declaration of commitment (1:22, 2:2, 2:6, 2:21, 4:5, 4:10).

To highlight Ruth's extraordinary choice to convert, one rabbinic tradition contrasts the character with Orpah's.[16] In sharp contrast to the biblical account that is sympathetic to Orpah's choice, the Talmud in general villifies Orpah. A particularly vivid example, Ruth Rabbah 2:20, suggests that Orpah is Goliath's[17] mother. This midrash heightens the contrast between Ruth and Orpah to the extreme: "Rav Isaac said, 'The whole of that night when Orpah separated from her mother, a hundred heathens raped her'." In the Talmud, Sotah 42b, the rabbis continue with such a vilifying portrait when commenting upon her name,

> Rab and Samuel [differ in their interpretation]. One said that her name was *Hafarah* and why was she called *Orpah*? Because all had intercourse with her from the rear [*'orfin*]. The other said: Her name was *Orpah*; and why was she called *Hafarah*? Because all ground her like a bruised Corn [*harifoth*].

Such passages about Orpah condemn her choice and have the additional effect of valorizing Ruth for taking a different path.[18]

Ruth demonstrates that there is valor in joining the Jewish tradition, following Israel's God. Unlike Orpah who was not protected when she separated from Naomi, Ruth does not remain vulnerable. During his first encounter with Ruth, Boaz says to her,

> Listen my daughter. Don't go to glean in another field. Don't go elsewhere, but stay here close to my girls. Keep your eyes on the field they are reaping and follow them. *I have ordered the men not to molest you.* And when you are thirsty, go to the jars to drink some of [the water] that the

[16] Remember that although Naomi and Orpah both choose to return home, the rabbis only condemn Orpah.
[17] Defeated by King David's warrior in II Samuel 21:19, Goliath's physical size represents the great threat the Philistines posed to the small Israelite nation.
[18] It is possible to understand this rabbinic hostility by remembering that many rabbis believed Orpah represented a person who did not have the strength or desire to put her fate with the Jewish people; the rabbinic assumption here is that it was her ethical imperative to do so. Historically speaking, it was not easy for the rabbis to be Jewish and they may have used midrash as an acceptable outlet for their hostility against their oppressors. They connected Orpah with the oppressors. To understand these motives, of course, does not mean to condone them.

> men have drawn...May you have full recompense from YHVH, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have sought refuge (2:8-9; 2:12).

The implicit rationale of the rabbis therefore seems to be that God's protection is a reward for following a Jewish path.

Despite the fact that the Book of Ruth itself does not condemn Orpah's choice to return home, the rabbis use the text as the occasion for contrasting Orpah and Ruth, for they invest their entire conversion system upon Ruth's extraordinary choice. They paint the two women as opposite extremes of righteousness and immorality, interpreting a canonized text, as all generations do, in ways that reflect their own worldview. In modern times, the Biblical neutrality, even sympathy, towards Orpah's choice is recovered by at least some commentators like Cynthia Ozick:

> ...let young, stricken Orpah not be overlooked. She is always overlooked; she is the daughter-in-law who, given the chance, chose not to follow Naomi. She is no one's heroine. Her mark is erased from history; there is no Book of Orpah. And yet Orpah *is* history. Or, rather, she is history's great backdrop. She is the majority of human kind living out its usualness on home ground.[19]

The Book of Ruth helps us recognize that in life we must experience the ordinary, the normal, and the usual in order to recognize the extraordinary. The Book of Ruth itself teaches a lesson in not condemning Orpah for making the "ordinary" choice to return home.

At the same time, Ruth represents the courage to redefine oneself in a completely new manner, both personally and communally. Ruth is a phoenix, rising from the ashes of her dead husband to become a new person; a woman who is able to define herself

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[19] Cynthia Ozick, "Ruth," Reading Ruth: Contemporary Women Reclaim a Sacred Story, ed. Judith A. Kates and Gail Twersky Reimer (New York: Ballentine Books, 1994) 221.

rather than being defined by others, an extraordinary woman making incredible commitments and transformations.

The Reward of Blessing

> *"All the women at the gate and the elders answered, '...May YHVH make the woman who is coming into your house [Ruth] like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built up the house of Israel! Prosper in Ephrathah and perpetuate your name in Bethlehem! And may your house be like the house of Perez whose Tamar bore Judah – through the offspring which YHVH will give you by this young man [Boaz]'"* (4:11-12).

In this novella called "The Book of Ruth," we learn the motivation of all the characters except Ruth's! We know that Elimelech leaves Bethlehem because of a famine and that Naomi returns because the famine ended. Orpah returns to Moab for security, or *menucha* מנוחה. Only Ruth's choice to follow Naomi is left unexplained by the narrator.[20] We learn not from the narrator's direct description of Ruth, rather we learn from her actions throughout the book. This is what critics call showing as opposed to telling.

Ruth's actions are noticed. Her actions result in blessings. In the four short chapters of this novella, Ruth receives four blessings.[21] All the main characters in the story bless her: Boaz (twice), Naomi, and the women and elders of the city. Ruth's

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[20] Gale Twersky Reimer, "Her Mother's House," Reading Ruth: Contemporary Women Reclaim a Sacred Story, ed. Judith A. Kates and Gail Twersky Reimer (New York: Ballentine Books, 1994) 101.
[21] 1:8-9, 2:11-12, 3:10, 4:11-12

character teaches that blessings result from making the extraordinary choice to act in a righteous way.

The reader has the opportunity to see him/herself in each of the story's characters. Through the Book of Ruth, we have the potential to become more aware of when we opt for what is natural and expected and when we take a different, new, extraordinary path. Ruth teaches us that choosing a new path brings with it possibilities for transformation, growth, and blessing.

Connection to Shavuot

Each year, we celebrate Shavuot, at which time we remind ourselves what it means to make an extraordinary choice – to choose a life of Torah. On this festival, or *chag* חג, we remember what it means to stand at Sinai and to respond as one people, "All that YHVH has spoken we will do."[22] Like Ruth, because of our collective memory, Jews understand what it feels like to be foreigners. Like Ruth, throughout history Jews have chosen a life of obligation to each other and to God.

According to the rabbis, Ruth is the first Jew who freely chooses to enter the covenant from the "outside." Perhaps now we are all "Jews by choice." American culture presents us with a unique challenge, where assimilation is the normal, ordinary choice. Jewish values are often praised for their universalism and their consonance with American values. Yet, frequently, we are challenged to make choices between attending soccer practice or Hebrew school, spending Shabbat at synagogue or sleeping in and

[22] Exodus 19:8; 24:3,7

having a fancy pancake breakfast. We can model our decision making process on that of Ruth; we can make *extra-ordinary* choices.

Regarding Ruth's pledge to Naomi, the poet Merle Feld comments,

> So much is contained in this moment at the crossroads. First, it seems like such a gift that Ruth recognizes this as a crossroads that she sees it as a moment of choice, that she sees she has some power to exercise over her future. So much of the time we can't see that about our lives – that in a given moment lies the possibility for change, for taking control, for claiming one's life as one's own.[23]

Imagine if each year at Shavuot, we recognize the holiday as a crossroads, as a moment to choose once again a life of obligation. That choice can then be lived every day that follows. Each day, we can make choices that support our values. We can make time to have dinner with our family on Shabbat and reflect upon the past week; we can actively participate on a committee at the synagogue or local Jewish agency; we can volunteer for a cause that will better our community. We can discover for ourselves what will give our lives meaning. Professor of Religion and Society, Wade Clark Roof comments on the cultural climate regarding meaning:

> These are a generations of seekers...Diverse as they are, [people] have found that they have to discover for themselves what gives their lives meaning, what values to live by. Not since the cataclysm of World War II have most of us been able simply to adopt the meaning and values handed down by our parent's religion, our ethnic heritage, and our nationality. Rather, what really matters became a question of personal choice and experience.[24]

Shavuot provides an opportunity to find renewed meaning in the wisdom of our tradition and to choose actions that will reflect our values.

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[23] Merle Feld, "At the Crossroads," Reading Ruth: Contemporary Women Reclaim a Sacred Story, ed. Judith A. Kates and Gail Twersky Reimer (New York: Ballentine Books, 1994) 167.
[24] Roof, Wade Clark. Generation of Seekers, (Harper: San Fransisco, 1993) 8.

The covenant made at Sinai was timeless. According to Jewish tradition, at that moment, all Jews who ever lived or will live in the future became eternally connected to YHVH, our God. In Deuteronomy 29:13, Moses recalls, "I make this covenant, with its sanctions, not with you alone, but both with those who are standing here with us this day before YHVH our God and with those who are not with us here today." Shavuot provides a moment to relive this Sinai experience. As we stand in synagogue listening to the chanting of the 10 Commandments, we can for the first time or once again, choose to call upon God and commit ourselves to a life of Torah. God will surely greet us at that moment with open arms.

Book of Ruth: Applied Learning Pages

For an explanation on how to use the following pages, please refer to the Introduction: How to Use This Book, on Page 7.

What's the Question?
מה קשה לי? *Mah Kasheh Li?*

רות א:א

וַיְהִי בִּימֵי שְׁפֹט הַשֹּׁפְטִים וַיְהִי רָעָב בָּאָרֶץ וַיֵּלֶךְ אִישׁ מִבֵּית לֶחֶם יְהוּדָה
לָגוּר בִּשְׂדֵי מוֹאָב הוּא וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וּשְׁנֵי בָנָיו׃
וְשֵׁם הָאִישׁ אֱלִימֶלֶךְ וְשֵׁם
אִשְׁתּוֹ נָעֳמִי וְשֵׁם שְׁנֵי־בָנָיו | מַחְלוֹן וְכִלְיוֹן אֶפְרָתִים מִבֵּית לֶחֶם יְהוּדָה
וַיָּבֹאוּ שְׂדֵי־מוֹאָב וַיִּהְיוּ־שָׁם׃ וַיָּמָת אֱלִימֶלֶךְ אִישׁ נָעֳמִי

Ruth 1:1

In the days when the chieftains ruled [lit. judges judged], there was a famine in the land; and a man of Bethlehem in Judah, with his wife and two sons, went to reside in the country of Moab. The man's name was Elimelech, his wife's name was Naomi, and his two sons were named Mahlon and Chilion — Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah. They came to the country of Moab and remained there. Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died...

In the box below, you will find a list of principles for interpreting Torah. For each category, ask yourself: does this verse present a difficulty, a *koshi* קשי? If yes, please describe the *koshi* קשי.

1. **Is there superfluous language?**
   The rabbis believe that every word in the Bible is there for a precise purpose. When a word seems repetitive and/or synonymous with another word, the rabbis always justify the existence of each word. In the quote above, do you think any words seem repetitive and/or synonymous?

2. **Are there grammatical curiosities?**
   The rabbis respond to sentences with unexpected or incorrect grammar, such as unusual word order, awkward prepositions, illogical sentences, inconsistent verb tenses, or unclear pronouns. In the quote above, is the grammar problematic?

3. **Are there theological or moral dilemmas?**
   The rabbis identify moments that raise questions about God's characteristics, God's role in the world, and how God is depicted in the Bible. They are also troubled by what seem to be breaches of moral or ethical conduct by God and/or human beings. In the quote above, do you find any theological or moral dilemmas?

4. **Are there gaps in the text?**
   The rabbis are also intrigued by what is not in the text. In other words, when feelings, time spans, physical descriptions, conversations, etc. are not written in the text, they often fill in the gaps. In the quote above, do you find anything missing from the text?

5. **Are there political or sociological issues?**
   The rabbis seek to render power dynamics among nations according to their worldview (e.g. putting Israel or Judaism at the center). Moreover, questions of ethnicity, gender, class, etc. prompt their investigation. In the quote above, are any of these kinds of issues relevant?

6. **Are there any other difficulties, *kushiot* קושיות?**

Write a creative response, a possible answer, to the *koshi* קשי that you find most interesting.

What's the Conversation?
מה קשה לנו? *Mah Kasheh Lanu?*

רות א:א

וַיְהִי בִּימֵי שְׁפֹּט הַשֹּׁפְטִים וַיְהִי רָעָב בָּאָרֶץ וַיֵּלֶךְ אִישׁ מִבֵּית לֶחֶם יְהוּדָה
לָגוּר בִּשְׂדֵי מוֹאָב הוּא וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וּשְׁנֵי בָנָיו׃
וְשֵׁם הָאִישׁ אֱלִימֶלֶךְ וְשֵׁם
אִשְׁתּוֹ נָעֳמִי וְשֵׁם שְׁנֵי־בָנָיו | מַחְלוֹן וְכִלְיוֹן אֶפְרָתִים מִבֵּית לֶחֶם יְהוּדָה
וַיָּבֹאוּ שְׂדֵי־מוֹאָב וַיִּהְיוּ־שָׁם׃ וַיָּמָת אֱלִימֶלֶךְ אִישׁ נָעֳמִי

Ruth 1:1

In the days when the chieftains ruled [lit. judges judged], there was a famine in the land; and a man of Bethlehem in Judah, with his wife and two sons, went to reside in the country of Moab. The man's name was Elimelech, his wife's name was Naomi, and his two sons were named Mahlon and Chilion — Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah. They came to the country of Moab and remained there. Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died...

On this page, several commentators respond to the following difficulty, or קשי: Why did God punish Elimelech with death?

QUESTIONS

1. **How does each commentator resolve the קשי?**
2. **How do their conclusions differ from one another?**
3. **How do you resolve the קשי? Add your voice as a "21st Century Commentator."**

Rashi: **"וַיֵּלֶךְ אִישׁ"** "AND A [CERTAIN] MAN" He was a very wealthy man and a leader of the generation. And he went forth to outside the land because of narrowness of the eye for he was miserly towards the poor who would come to press him (during the famine); therefore he was punished.

Malbim: **"וַיְהִי רָעָב בָּאָרֶץ"** "AND THERE WAS FAMINE IN THE LAND" A time when the impoverished masses congregated around the wealthy and compelled them to feed them. If they would refuse, they would take the food by force. Therefore, a man went from Bethlehem of Judah to reside in Moab.

21st Century Commentator:

Kimchi: **"וַיֵּלֶךְ אִישׁ"** "AND A [CERTAIN] MAN" He went because of the severity of the famine, in accordance with the teaching, "When there is a famine in the town, withdraw your feet." (B.K. 60b)

BIOGRAPHY

Kimchi: David Kimchi (1160-1265). Commentary attributed to him, though the authorship is disputed.
Malbim: Rabbi Meir Leibush Malbim (1809-1879), Bible commentator born in Russia and later the chief Rabbi of Rumania.
Rashi: Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzhak (1040-1105), Most famous of all commentators on both Bible and Talmud. His commentaries are a fundamental tool to the Jewish method of studying sacred text.

What's the Connection?
מה הקשר? *Mah HaKesher?*

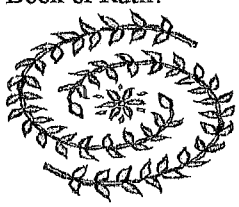
Below you will find a book review that relates to the theme of contradictions. It is one of many possible ways to encounter the theme in our world.

The following is a statement by the great psychologist and Holocaust survivor, Viktor Frankl:

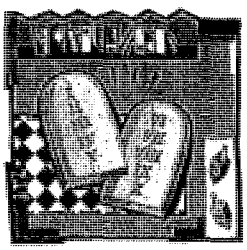
"Freedom is only part of the story and half of the truth. Freedom is but the negative aspect of the whole phenomenon whose positive aspect is responsibleness. In fact, freedom is in danger of degenerating into mere arbitrariness unless it is lived in terms of responsibleness. That is why *I recommend that the Statue of Liberty on the East Coast be supplemented by a Statue of Responsibility on the West Coast.*"

— Viktor Frankl, Man's Search for Meaning.(New York: Touchstone, 1984) 134.

מה הקשר לרות?
Mah HaKesher to Ruth:
What connections do you find between the passage above and the Book of Ruth?



מה הקשר לחג?
Mah HaKesher to Shavuot:
What connections do you find between the passage above and Shavuot?



Now is your chance to draw from your own experience and identify something you have encountered in your world (a conversation, an article in the newspaper, a story, a road trip, etc.) that connects to the Book of Ruth. How does your encounter shed light on the Book of Ruth and the holiday of Shavuot?

What's Our Contribution?
מה קשוט החג? *Mah Kishut HeChag?*

Choosing Judaism

Please reflect upon the following thoughts:

I am a Jew because Judaism demands no abdication of my mind.
I am a Jew because Judaism asks every possible sacrifice of my soul.
I am a Jew because wherever there are tears and suffering, the Jew weeps.
I am a Jew because whenever the cry of despair is heard, the Jew hopes.
I am a Jew because the message of Judaism is the oldest and the newest.
I am a Jew because the promise of Judaism is a universal promise.
I am a Jew because, for the Jew, the world is not finished; human beings will complete it.
I am a Jew because, for the Jew, humanity is not fully created; people are creating it.
I am a Jew because Judaism places humanity above nations and above Judaism itself.
I am a Jew because, above humanity, Judaism places the oneness of God.
(Adapted from a poem by Edmund Fleg)

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How might you reflect upon the question, "Why am I a Jew?"

A Sacred Partnership

It is not easy to hear God's voice in the world today. Or, is it? Might we be able to hear God's voice everywhere? Might we even speak it? "She [Naomi] started out with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab; for in the country of Moab she had heard that that YHVH had taken note of YHVH's people and given them food" (Ruth 1:6). Naomi and her family had left Judah for Moab some years before because a famine plagued their land. While in Moab, Naomi's husband and two sons both die. This verse follows these losses. When the ancient rabbis read it, they wondered how Naomi had heard that the famine in Judah had ended and who had told her. Midrash Ruth Rabbah[1] and the Targum[2] provide the following two answers. Targum renders "she heard" as "it was announced in the field of Moab by an angel,"[3] while midrash explains "she heard" as "she heard from peddlers making their rounds from city to city."[4] At first glance it appears that these two traditions offer different answers: an angel or a peddler. However, it is possible that the two are no different. The peddler was the angel. What is an angel after all? In Hebrew, the word for "angel" is *malach* מלאך. The same word means, simply, a "messenger." A messenger can be an angel, one who does God's work in the world – but so can any human being. The peddler, perhaps without even knowing it, was doing God's work when he passed this message on to Naomi. His words made the rest of the story possible. Throughout the Book of Ruth ordinary people become "angels" through their extraordinary deeds.

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[1] Ruth Rabbah is a 5th to 11th century midrash (rabbinic interpretation). The title derives its name from Rabbi Oshia Rabbah (the Great), to whom the work is partly attributed.
[2] Literally Targum means "translation," referring to the Aramaic paraphrased translation of the Bible believed to have been composed during the Talmudic era (3rd - 5th century).
[3] Etan Levine, The Aramaic Version of Ruth (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973) 20.
[4] Maurice Simon, transl., Ruth Rabbah (London: Soncino Press, 1951) 2:11.

In the Torah, God repeatedly intervenes in the world with speeches and miracles. Not so in the Book of Ruth. Not so in our modern world. In fact, the narrative reports that God acted directly at most only two times in the entire story. Near the beginning, Naomi is told that God ended the famine in Judah, "...in the country of Moab she had heard that that YHVH had taken note of YHVH's people and given food" (1:6). Near the end, God bestows upon Ruth the gift of conception after her marriage to Boaz, "... YHVH let her [Ruth] conceive, and she bore a son" (4:13). Both of these interventions might be termed cosmic, both are about the miracle of life. Neither could be done without God, either then or now. Both remind us that not all is within our control. Human beings cannot end a drought; and, as Phyllis Trible writes, "The gift of life resides neither in male nor in female, but in God."[5] God is necessary in our world. Yet, most of the events of the book happen without God's direct intervention. In the entire book God never speaks directly to the characters, but that does not mean that God is absent from it. In fact, throughout the book, people and God inspire each other and act together to make change. God's presence cannot but be felt as a guiding one throughout. As is true in our own day, however, how God is present requires careful attention.

God's Presence: Behind the Scenes

In The Book of Ruth, God's hand can be perceived behind the scenes, creating sacred opportunities, as in the beginning of chapter 2. The chapter opens with the narrator telling us that Naomi has a kinsman in Judah named Boaz, a man of greatness.

[5] Phyllis Trible, God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978) 193. Note also that this does not necessarily mean that God chooses who will become pregnant and who will remain barren. Rather, it indicates that the fundamental ability of human beings to procreate is a divine gift. See Genesis 1:26-28.

The dialogue then begins with Ruth asking Naomi for permission to go and glean "behind someone who may show me kindness" (2:2). Naomi grants her that permission "and off she went. She came and gleaned in a field, behind the reapers; *vayiker mikreha* ויקר מקרה it was the piece of land belonging to Boaz, who was of Elimelech's family" (2:3). This Hebrew root "*kara* קרה," meaning "to happen," is repeated twice in this phrase, *vayiker mikreha* ויקר מקרה. This implies that Ruth's finding Boaz's field was a chance occurrence, suggests that it was an accident, says that, essentially, she "happened to happen" upon it. However, for the biblical author (and according to later rabbinic interpreters), there are no "accidents."[6] It is entirely too coincidental that Ruth ended up in Boaz's field for it to actually be a coincidence. Ruth and Boaz are destined to meet. As Trible explains, from the biblical author's point of view, "within human luck is divine intentionality."[7] Though from Ruth's perspective it was indeed an accident (i.e. she did not set out to find Boaz's field), the use of the phrase *vayiker mikreha* ויקר מקרה suggests that this "chance happening" was divinely directed.[8]

God's Presence: Working Together

In addition to the phrase "*vayiker mikreha* ויקר מקרה," the use of three other particular words throughout the story – "loving-kindness," or *chesed* חסד; "redeemer," or *goel* גואל; and "wings/robe," or *kenafim* כנפים – are indicators of something else

[6] For many, this would be a difficult argument to make in the modern world, especially in the face of tragedy. However, according to biblical theology, and rabbinic understandings of particular incidents in the Bible, there are times when God is actively involved in something that might otherwise seem coincidental.
[7] Trible 176.
[8] For another example of קרה used similarly, see Genesis 24:12, where Abraham's servant, sent in search of a wife for Isaac, prays, "*hakreh nah* הקרה נא" that God will "make it happen" for him, that he might find

significant about God's role in the Book of Ruth. All three words are commonly used throughout the Bible to refer to God. In the Book of Ruth however, their subject is sometimes a human being, and at other times their subject is not clearly determined. As we will see, the choice of these specific words expresses the idea that there is shared responsibility between God and human beings in the world.

Chesed חסד is one of God's 13 attributes as described in the famous passage in Exodus 34:6-7,

> YHVH passed before him [Moses] and proclaimed: 'YHVH! YHVH! A God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in *chesed* חסד and faithfulness. Extending *chesed* חסד to the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin....

"*Chesed* חסד" appears three times in the Book of Ruth, twice in prayers uttered by Naomi (1:8 and 2:20), and once in a blessing offered by Boaz (3:10). In Naomi's second prayer, she says, "Blessed be he [Boaz] of YHVH, who has not failed in His[9] *chesed* חסד to the living and the dead." The question arises: who has not abandoned "his *chesed* חסד□" – Boaz or YHVH? To whom does the second clause refer? Mordechai Cohen, basing his view on both traditional and modern sources, argues that this verse is "deliberately ambiguous," meaning that the one "who has not abandoned his *chesed* חסד" could be either Boaz or God – or both. Cohen writes,

> Instead of regarding the ambiguity as a stylistic flaw and exegetical nuisance, we can exploit it by viewing Ruth 2:20 as deliberately ambiguous, specifically designed to simultaneously convey both readings.... This ambiguity expresses something that could not be expressed by

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the appropriate woman. In this specific case too, it is intimated that God's hand is involved in answering his prayer.

[9] As will be explained, it is unclear whether this should be translated as "His" meaning God or "his" meaning Boaz.

> unambiguous language... Beyond conveying the complexity of Naomi's emotions, this reading carries a theological significance essential to the book of Ruth, which reflects a synergic relationship between human and divine kindness.... Throughout the story, Ruth, Boaz, and Naomi all manifest genuine kindness toward one another, but God is credited as the ultimate bestower of *chesed* חסד.... Underlying the words of Naomi ... is the belief that people performing kindness strive for the ideal of *imitateo dei*, and are thus agents of God Himself.... [The words], by virtue of their very ambiguity, simultaneously reflect both human and divine kindness.[10]

Human beings can do God's work in the world, can be divine messengers, *malachim* מלאכים, by doing acts of *chesed* חסד. That is to say that one who performs *chesed* חסד is, by definition, a *malach* מלאך. Having been endowed with the capacity to perform *chesed* חסד, people inherit the responsibility to bring it into the world. *Chesed* חסד is not God's responsibility alone, nor does it fall to human beings alone. God and human beings act together.

"Redeemer," or *goel* גואל, is another word that is, to use Cohen's phrase, "deliberately ambiguous." Cohen asserts that for a word or phrase to be "deliberately ambiguous" two criteria must be met: 1) both possible meanings must be plausible and 2) unambiguous language could not have conveyed the same meaning.[11] Both of these criteria are true for the many times variations of the word *goel* גואל[12] appear in the Book of Ruth. First, God is referred to throughout biblical tradition as our Redeemer, as in Exodus 6:6, "Say, therefore, to the Israelite people: I am YHVH. I will free you from the labors of the Egyptians and deliver you from their bondage. I will redeem [*ga'alti*

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[10] Mordechai Cohen, "*Hesed*: Divine or Human? The Syntactic Ambiguity of Ruth 2:20," Hazon Nahum: Studies in Jewish Law, Thought, and History Presented to Dr. Norman Lamm on the Occasion of His Seventiety Birthday, ed. Yaakov Elman and Jeffrey S. Gurock (New York: Yeshivah University Press, 1997) 32-35.
[11] Cohen 32.

וגאלתי] you with an outstretched arm...." Human beings can also be redeemers, as in Leviticus 25:48, when a kinsmen has come under the authority of another, "...he shall have the right of redemption [*geulah* גאלה] even after he has given himself over. One of his kinsmen shall redeem him [*yigalenu* יגאלנו]...." Thus, Cohen's first criterion, that both possible meanings must be plausible, is met – both God and human beings can be redeemers. Cohen's second criterion, that unambiguous language could not communicate the same meaning, is fitting here as well. As was the case with *chesed* חסד, throughout the Book of Ruth, *goel* גואל implies the convergence of human and divine responsibilities. Does Boaz redeem Ruth or does God – or do they both? "And the women said to Naomi, 'Blessed be YHVH, who has not withheld a *goel* גואל from you today!'" (4:14) Rabbi Ruth Sohn, commenting on this verse explains, "On the *pshat* level (plain sense meaning of the text) redeemer refers to the 'redeeming kinsman.' On a deeper level, the word refers to God, the ultimate *Goel*, redeemer."[13] The responsibility of redemption is shared. God works with and through human beings.

"His wings/robe," [14] or *kenafim* כנפים, are mentioned twice in the Book of Ruth, once by Boaz[15] and once by Ruth. When Ruth comes to Boaz on the threshing-floor she says to him, "I am your handmaid Ruth. Spread *kenafecha* כנפך [your wing/robe] over your handmaid, for you are a *goel* גואל" (3:9). Elsewhere in the Bible, in Ezekiel 16:7-8, we read,

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[12] Ruth 2:2, 3:9, 3:12-13, 4:1, 4:3-4, 4:6-8, 4:14

[13] Ruth Sohn, "Verse by Verse: *A Modern Commentary*," Reading Ruth: Contemporary Women Reclaim a Sacred Story, ed. Judith A. Kates and Gail Twersky Reimer (New York: Ballentine Books, 1994) 25.

[14] It should be noted that there is scholarly debate as to whether this word means "wings," indicating protection or "robe," meaning a marriage proposal. The debate arises out of confusion over whether the word is in the plural (wings) or the singular (robe), and out of the general ambiguity of the situation on the threshing floor.

[15] 2:12

> ...you were still naked and bare when I passed by you [again] and saw that your time for love had arrived. So I spread *kenafi* כנפי [my wing/robe] over you and covered your nakedness, and I entered a covenant with you by oath – declares the Lord, YHVH, thus you became Mine.

In one context, Ruth asks Boaz to spread his *kanaf* כנף over her; in Ezekiel, God speaks of spreading God's own *kanaf* כנף over Israel. While it is not significant for the sake of this argument whether *kanaf* כנף means "wing" or "robe," it is notable that the same word can be used in reference to a person and to God – and in both cases, spreading a *kanaf* כנף is an act of redemptive care.[16] [17] As we have seen with *chesed* חסד and with *goel* גואל, in this case the meaning is again "deliberately ambiguous." Human and Divine possibility overlap in language and in responsibility. Both God and Boaz act as redeemers by extending a *kanaf* כנף to care for another.

God's Presence: Human Hands

This reference to *kenafecha* כנפך in 3:9 is intriguing for another reason. Upon their initial meeting in his field, Boaz blesses Ruth by saying, "May YHVH reward your deeds. May you have a full recompense from YHVH, the God of Israel, under whose *kenafim* כנפים you have sought refuge" (2:12). In chapter 3, however, it is actually Boaz who is asked to shelter Ruth under his *kanaf* כנף when, on the threshing floor, Ruth says to him, "Spread your *kanaf* כנף over your handmaid, for you are a redeeming kinsman" (3:9). In other words, Boaz asks that God shelter Ruth (chapter 2), but it is Boaz who actually fulfills his own prayer (chapter 3). Boaz does the work he had assigned to God –

[16] It is clear in this citation that Ezekiel uses the term to indicate marriage. In Ruth, it is not clear whether Ruth is asking for marriage or for some other sort of protection.

and does it at Ruth's urging. Boaz's prayer in chapter 2 is ultimately answered not with God's direct action, but rather in a combined human effort. God's work is done with human hands.

There is another instance in the Book of Ruth where, similarly, human beings act together to do God's work in the world. When Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah set out towards Bethlehem, Naomi petitions God that God act with *chesed* חסד towards Ruth and Orpah, "Turn back, each of you to her mother's house. May YHVH do *chesed* חסד with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me!" (1:8). It is Ruth and Orpah's acts of *chesed* חסד towards Naomi that occasion Naomi's prayer; it is Boaz who at last fulfills Naomi's prayer when he acts with *chesed* חסד towards Ruth.[18] As with Boaz's prayer in chapter 2, Naomi's prayer in chapter 1 is answered by right and generous human conduct.

God's Presence: Called forth by Human Beings

There is another important, shared element in both Boaz's prayer in 2:11-12 and Naomi's in 1:8-9. God responds with kindness to human kindness; human *chesed* חסד inspires Divine *chesed* חסד. In 1:8, Naomi asks that God act with *chesed* חסד towards Ruth and Orpah just as they had acted with *chesed* חסד towards her. Naomi's prayer is grounded in Ruth and Orpah's actions. Since they acted with *chesed* חסד towards Naomi in Moab, she asserts that God should respond with *chesed* חסד to her petition on their behalf. And, as we have noted before, Naomi's prayer is answered for Ruth.

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[17] See also, for example, Deut. 32:11 or Is. 8:8.

[18] Though we do not know what becomes of Orpah from the biblical text, we do know that Naomi's prayer was answered for Ruth.

Likewise, Boaz begins his prayer in chapter 2 by identifying Ruth's previous acts of kindness[19] towards Naomi. He says, "I have been told of all that you did for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband, how you left your father and mother and the land of your birth and came to a people you had not known before" (2:11). He continues by asking God to reward Ruth's actions. As in Naomi's prayer, Boaz calls God to action on account of Ruth's unusually kind conduct. Human actions – human kindness – it seems, can bring about divine response. This is further reiterated in Boaz's statement to Ruth on the threshing floor in 3:10. There, he says that Ruth should be blessed by God because of her previous acts of *chesed* חסד in Moab.

The rabbis expand on this idea in a comment in the midrash, Ruth Rabbah, on 4:1. "Meanwhile, Boaz had gone to the gate and sat down there. And now *ha'goel* הגואל whom Boaz had mentioned passed by..." Wondering how such a "coincidence" could have happened, the rabbis write in Ruth Rabbah,

> Was he [the redeemer] then standing waiting behind the gate? R. Samuel b. Nahman answered: Had he been at the uttermost ends of the earth, the Holy One, blessed by He, would have caused him to fly and would have brought him there in order that the righteous man should not grieve while sitting there. R. Berekiah said: Thus did these great men, R. Eliezer and R. Joshua, expound. R. Eliezer said, Boaz played his part, and Ruth played hers, and Naomi played hers, whereupon the Holy One, blessed by He said, "I too must play Mine."[20]

In this fanciful interpretation, God intervenes directly only after people have done their part. And what is considered "doing one's part?" In the Book of Ruth, it means being

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[19] Boaz could be said here to be identifying Ruth's acts of *chesed* חסד, though the word "*chesed* חסד" itself is not specifically used here. However, as is also noted here, the term "*chesed* חסד" is used by Boaz in 3:10.

[20] Ruth Rabbah 7:7.

kind, loyal, generous. And sometimes it means playing a crucial role in God's world, whether or not one is aware of being an agent of God. This suggests that even without our being aware of it, human behavior can be significant in the divine realm.

The even more extravagant midrash from the later Pesikta d'Rav Kahana also underscores the idea that God responds to human action. It begins,

> *Shall mortal*[21] *act more justly than God? Shall a person outshine his/her Maker?* (Job 4:17) – can a mere mortal be more just than her/his Creator? Shall a person's comforting outshine his/her Maker's? By these words the Holy One meant: Boaz comforted, and shall I not – shall I not, at the very least – comfort as effectively? ...[22] Now does it not follow that if Boaz, speaking kind words, comforting words, to the heart of Ruth succeeded in comforting her, surely when the Holy One comes to comfort Jerusalem [after her destruction], and says *Comfort ye, comfort ye, My people* (Isaiah 40:1), God will succeed in comforting her?[23]

This midrash is exceptional because it shows that what Boaz does for Ruth prompts God to comfort Israel after the destruction of Jerusalem. Human kindness not only inspires God to act with *chesed* חסד in the Book of Ruth itself, but also extends beyond it into the greater realm of Jewish history. One person's goodness at a particular moment in time has the potential to reverberate throughout the centuries. An act of *chesed* חסד today holds within it the potential to affect our descendents many generations from now.

This book might easily be seen as a simple story that promotes the virtue of kindness. After all, that is how the rabbis explain its purpose in midrash.

> R. Zeira said, 'This scroll [of Ruth] tells us nothing either of cleanliness or of uncleanliness, either of prohibition or permission. For what purpose then was it written? To

[21] The translation of this passage has been altered throughout to make it gender neutral.
[22] The middle of the midrash, not included here, traces Boaz's comforting words in the Book of Ruth.
[23] William G. Braude and Israel J. Kapstein, transl., Pesikta de-Rab Kahanah, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1975) *Piska* 16, 287-289.

To receive Torah from Mount Sinai is to renew our commitment to the covenant established between God and Abraham. Yet, at Sinai, according to Torah, God spoke and the people listened; God spoke and the people responded. In the Book of Ruth, the covenant is lived out differently, however: divine actions employ human agency. God does only what we cannot; beyond that, we enable God to speak through our voices and our actions. Throughout the story, God is called forth in the human voice and on account of exemplary and magnanimous human behavior. On Shavuot, when we read the story of Ruth and Naomi and Boaz, we are reminded that our commitment to the covenant – our commitment to God – goes beyond listening and responding. We have to speak and act and bring God into this world. Living Torah means nothing less.

At Sinai, Israel received Torah. After Sinai we had to learn how to live Torah. At Sinai, God gave Israel instructions. After Sinai, we have to choose how to respond to them. At Sinai, God gave Israel a mission. After Sinai, we have to begin to do our work in the world. We have to begin to be God's messengers, God's angels.

Book of Ruth: Applied Learning Pages

For an explanation on how to use the following pages, please refer to the Introduction: How to Use This Book, on Page 7.

What's the Question?
מה קשה לי? *Mah Kasheh Li?*

רות ב:ב-ג

וַתֹּאמֶר רוּת הַמּוֹאֲבִיָּה אֶל־נָעֳמִי אֵלְכָה־נָּא הַשָּׂדֶה וַאֲלַקְּטָה בַשִּׁבֳּלִים
אַחַר אֲשֶׁר אֶמְצָא־חֵן בְּעֵינָיו וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ לְכִי בִתִּי: וַתֵּלֶךְ וַתָּבוֹא וַתְּלַקֵּט
בַּשָּׂדֶה אַחֲרֵי הַקֹּצְרִים וַיִּקֶר מִקְרֶהָ חֶלְקַת הַשָּׂדֶה לְבֹעַז אֲשֶׁר מִמִּשְׁפַּחַת
אֱלִימֶלֶךְ:

Ruth 2:2-3

Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "I would like to go to the fields and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone who may show me kindness." "Yes, daughter, go," she replied; and off she went. She came and gleaned in a field, behind the reapers; and, *vayiker mikreha* ויקר מקרה[1], it was the piece of land belonging to Boaz, who was of Elimelech's family.

In the box below, you will find a list of principles for interpreting Torah. For each category, ask yourself: does this verse present a difficulty, a *koshi* קשי? If yes, please describe the *koshi* קשי.

1. **Is there superfluous language?**
   The rabbis believe that every word in the Bible is there for a precise purpose. When a word seems repetitive and/or synonymous with another word, the rabbis always justify the existence of each word. In the quote above, do you think any words seem repetitive and/or synonymous?

2. **Are there grammatical curiosities?**
   The rabbis respond to sentences with unexpected or incorrect grammar, such as unusual word order, awkward prepositions, illogical sentences, inconsistent verb tenses, or unclear pronouns. In the quote above, is the grammar problematic?

3. **Are there theological or moral dilemmas?**
   The rabbis identify moments that raise questions about God's characteristics, God's role in the world, and how God is depicted in the Bible. They are also troubled by what seem to be breaches of moral or ethical conduct by God and/or human beings. In the quote above, do you find any theological or moral dilemmas?

4. **Are there gaps in the text?**
   The rabbis are also intrigued by what is not in the text. In other words, when feelings, time spans, physical descriptions, conversations, etc. are not written in the text, they often fill in the gaps. In the quote above, do you find anything missing from the text?

5. **Are there political or sociological issues?**
   The rabbis seek to render power dynamics among nations according to their worldview (e.g. putting Israel or Judaism at the center). Moreover, questions of ethnicity, gender, class, etc. prompt their investigation. In the quote above, are any of these kinds of issues relevant?

6. **Are there any other difficulties, *kushiot* קושיות?**

Write a creative response, a possible answer, to the *koshi* קשי that you find most interesting.

[1] This Hebrew phrase comes from the root קרה, meaning "to happen." The uncertainty of the meaning of this phrase (with the doubled root for emphasis) enabled centuries of creative interpretation.

What's the Conversation?
מה קשה לנו? *Mah Kasheh Lanu?*

רות ב:ב-ג

וַתֹּאמֶר רוּת הַמּוֹאֲבִיָּה אֶל־נָעֳמִי אֵלְכָה־נָּא הַשָּׂדֶה וַאֲלַקְטָה בַשִּׁבֳּלִים אַחַר אֲשֶׁר אֶמְצָא־חֵן
בְּעֵינָיו וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ לְכִי בִתִּי: וַתֵּלֶךְ וַתָּבוֹא וַתְּלַקֵּט בַּשָּׂדֶה אַחֲרֵי הַקֹּצְרִים וַיִּקֶר מִקְרֶהָ חֶלְקַת
הַשָּׂדֶה לְבֹעַז אֲשֶׁר מִמִּשְׁפַּחַת אֱלִימֶלֶךְ:

Ruth 2:2-3

Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "I would like to go to the fields and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone who may show me kindness." "Yes, daughter, go," she replied; and off she went. She came and gleaned in a field, behind the reapers; and, *vayiker mikreha* ויקר מקרה, it was the piece of land belonging to Boaz, who was of Elimelech's family.

On this page, several commentators respond to the following difficulty, or קשי:
How do we understand the meaning of the words "*vayiker mikreha* ויקר מקרה?

QUESTIONS

1. **How does each commentator resolve the קשי?**
2. **How do their conclusions differ from one another?**
3. **How do you resolve the קשי? Add your voice as a "21st Century Commentator."**

Salmon ben Yeroham: "וַיִּקֶר מִקְרֶהָ" "HER CHANCE HAPPENED" It happened by chance that she came there, and she did not come there intentionally, for she did not know Boaz, for she was a proselyte and he only met her then, but directed her — and she went — to his field, to give her favor in his eyes, for thus had God promised her, as it is said, "He loves a stranger, etc." (Deut. 10:18).

Translations: "וַיִּקֶר מִקְרֶהָ"
"...And she happened to come..." (Koren)
"...And as luck would have it..." (JPS)
"...And her hap was to light on..." (Bettan)

Abraham ibn Ezra: "וַיִּקֶר מִקְרֶהָ" "AND HER CHANCE HAPPENED" Which means this is the way it happened.

21st Century Commentator:

Rashi: **"וַיִּקֶר מִקְרֶהָ"** "AND HER LOT HAPPENED" To come upon the portion of the field that belonged to Boaz.

BIOGRAPHY & REFERENCE

Abraham ibn Ezra: (1092-1167) Bible commentator, poet, physician, philosopher and astrologer in Spain and Italy.
Rashi: Rabbi Shlomo Itzhaki (1040-1105), most famous of all commentators on both Bible and Talmud. His com-mentaries are a fundamental tool to the Jewish method of studying sacred texts.
Solomon ben Yeroham: member of Karaite group (in favor of literal biblical interpretation) who lived in Jerusalem and wrote from 940-960. The authorship of this commentary is debated and may instead be authored by Yefeth ben Ali.
NJPS: New Jewish Publication Society, 1999.
Koren: Koren Publishers Jerusalem, 1992.
Bettan: *The Jewish Commentary for Bible Readers* by Israel Bettan, 1950.
This Hebrew phrase וַיִּקֶר מִקְרֶהָ comes from the root קרה, meaning "to happen." For an example of similar usage and a textual problem, see Genesis 24:12.

What's the Connection?
מה הקשר? *Mah HaKesher?*

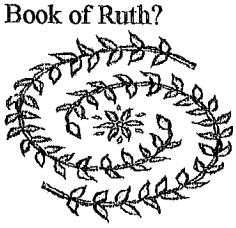
Below you will find a poem that that relates to the theme of divine/human roles. It is one of many possible ways to encounter the theme in our world.

In the final collection of his career titled Open Close Open, the famous Israeli poet Yehudah Amichai wrote:

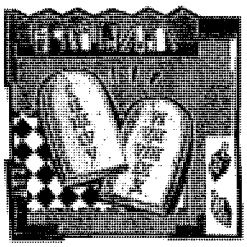
> When God packed up and left the country, He left the Torah
> with the Jews. They have been looking for Him ever since,
> shouting, "Hey, you forgot something, you forgot,"
> and other people think shouting is the prayer of the Jews.
> Since then, they've been combing the Bible for hints of His whereabouts,
> as it says: "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found,
> call ye upon Him while He is near." But He is far away.
> (Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfled, transl., USA: Harcourt, 2000) 12.

כְּשֶׁאֱלֹהִים עָזַב אֶת הָאָרֶץ הוּא שָׁכַח אֶת הַתּוֹרָה
אֵצֶל הַיְּהוּדִים וּמֵאָז הֵם מְחַפְּשִׂים אוֹתוֹ
וְצוֹעֲקִים אַחֲרָיו, שָׁכַחְתָּ מַשֶּׁהוּ, שָׁכַחְתָּ, בְּקוֹל גָּדוֹל
וּבְנֵי אָדָם אֲחֵרִים חוֹשְׁבִים שֶׁזּוֹהִי תְּפִלָּתָם, שֶׁל הַיְּהוּדִים.
וּמֵאָז הֵם טוֹרְחִים לִמְצֹא רְמָזִים בַּתַּנַ"ךְ
עַל מָקוֹם הִמָּצְאוֹ כְּמוֹ שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר, "דִּרְשׁוּ אַדֹנָי בְּהִמָּצְאוֹ,
קָרְאֻהוּ בִּהְיוֹתוֹ קָרוֹב". אֲבָל הוּא רָחוֹק.

מה הקשר לרות?
Mah HaKesher to Ruth:
What connections do you find between the poem above and the Book of Ruth?



מה הקשר לחג?
Mah HaKesher to Shavuot:
What connections do you find between the poem above and Shavuot?



Now is your chance to draw from your own experience and identify something you have encountered in your world (a conversation, an article in the newspaper, a story, a road trip, etc.) that connects to the Book of Ruth. How does your encounter shed light on the Book of Ruth and the holiday of Shavuot?

What's Our Contribution?
מה קישוט החג? *Mah Kishut HeChag?*

Blessings in the Book of Ruth

Ruth 1:8-9

וַתֹּאמֶר נָעֳמִי לִשְׁתֵּי כַלֹּתֶיהָ לֵכְנָה שֹּבְנָה אִשָּׁה לְבֵית אִמָּהּ יַעַשׂ [יַעַשׂ] יְהוָה עִמָּכֶם חֶסֶד כַּאֲשֶׁר עֲשִׂיתֶם עִם־הַמֵּתִים וְעִמָּדִי׃ יִתֵּן יְהוָה לָכֶם וּמְצֶאןָ מְנוּחָה אִשָּׁה בֵּית אִישָׁהּ But Naomi said to her daughters-in-law, "Turn back, each of you to your mother's house. May Adonai deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me! May Adonai grant that each of you find security in the house of a husband!"

Ruth 2:4

וְהִנֵּה־בֹעַז בָּא מִבֵּית לֶחֶם וַיֹּאמֶר לַקּוֹצְרִים יְהוָה עִמָּכֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ יְבָרֶכְךָ יְהוָה׃ Presently Boaz arrived from Bethlehem. He greeted the reapers, "Adonai be with you!" and they responded, "Adonai bless you!"

Ruth 2:11-12

וַיַּעַן בֹּעַז וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ הֻגֹּד הֻגַּד לִי כֹּל אֲשֶׁר־עָשִׂית אֶת־חֲמוֹתֵךְ אַחֲרֵי מוֹת אישֵׁךְ וַתַּעַזְבִי אָבִיךְ וְאִמֵּךְ וְאֶרֶץ מוֹלַדְתֵּךְ וַתֵּלְכִי אֶל־עַם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדַעַתְּ תְּמוֹל שִׁלְשׁוֹם׃ יְשַׁלֵּם יְהוָה פָּעֳלֵךְ וּתְהִי מַשְׂכֻּרְתֵּךְ שְׁלֵמָה מֵעִם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר־בָּאת לַחֲסוֹת תַּחַת־כְּנָפָיו׃ Boaz said in reply, "I have been told of all that you did for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband, how you left your father and mother and the land of your birth and came to a people you had not known before. May Adonai reward your deeds. May you have a full recompense from Adonai under whose wings you have sought refuge!"

Ruth 2:20

וַתֹּאמֶר נָעֳמִי לְכַלָּתָהּ בָּרוּךְ הוּא לַיהוָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא־עָזַב חַסְדּוֹ אֶת־הַחַיִּים וְאֶת־הַמֵּתִים Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "Blessed be he of Adonai, who has not failed in His kindness to the living or to the dead!"

Ruth 3:10

וַיֹּאמֶר בְּרוּכָה אַתְּ לַיהוָה בִּתִּי הֵיטַבְתְּ חַסְדֵּךְ הָאַחֲרוֹן מִן־הָרִאשׁוֹן לְבִלְתִּי־לֶכֶת אַחֲרֵי הַבַּחוּרִים אִם־דַּל וְאִם־עָשִׁיר׃ He exclaimed, "Be blessed of Adonai, daughter! Your latest deed of loyalty is greater than the first, in that you have not turned to younger men whether poor or rich...."

Ruth 4:11-12

וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל־הָעָם אֲשֶׁר־בַּשָּׁעַר וְהַזְּקֵנִים עֵדִים יִתֵּן יְהוָה אֶת־הָאִשָּׁה הַבָּאָה אֶל־בֵּיתֶךָ כְּרָחֵל | וּכְלֵאָה אֲשֶׁר בָּנוּ שְׁתֵּיהֶם אֶת־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל וַעֲשֵׂה־חַיִל בְּאֶפְרָתָה וְקְרָא־שֵׁם בְּבֵית לָחֶם׃ וִיהִי בֵיתְךָ כְּבֵית פֶּרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־יָלְדָה תָמָר לִיהוּדָה מִן־הַזֶּרַע אֲשֶׁר יִתֶּן יְהוָה לְךָ מִן־הַנַּעֲרָה הַזֹּאת׃ All the people at the gate and the elders answered, "We are. May Adonai make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built up the House of Israel! Prosper in Ephrathah and perpetuate your name in Bethlehem! And may your house be like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah – through the offspring which Adonai will give you by this young woman."

Ruth 4:14-15

וַתֹּאמַרְנָה הַנָּשִׁים אֶל־נָעֳמִי בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא הִשְׁבִּית לָךְ גֹּאֵל הַיּוֹם וְיִקָּרֵא שְׁמוֹ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל׃ וְהָיֶה לָךְ לְמֵשִׁיב נֶפֶשׁ וּלְכַלְכֵּל אֶת־שֵׂיבָתֵךְ כִּי כַלָּתֵךְ אֲשֶׁר־אֲהֵבַתְךְ יְלָדַתּוּ אֲשֶׁר־הִיא טוֹבָה לָךְ מִשִּׁבְעָה בָּנִים׃ And the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be Adonai, who has not withheld a redeemer from you today! May his name be perpetuated in Israel! He will renew your life and sustain your old age; for he is born of your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons."

◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆

These seven blessings all come from the Book of Ruth. On Shavuot you might want to ...

- ✡ Write liturgy for the holiday — many Jewish prayers are tapestries of verses and images such as these woven together with words and thoughts of the poet (you!).
- ✡ Use them as daily blessings for a Torah Fest week during Shavuot
- ✡ Use them to receive blessings from elders, as it says in Midrash, "One should never keep back from going to an elder to be blessed" (Ruth Rabbah 6:2).
- ✡ Use them to bless all babies born in your community between the previous Shavuot and this Shavuot — a modern interpretation of the first fruits brought to the Temple on the holiday.
- ✡ Use them to bless community members who have done extraordinary acts of kindness.
- ✡ Discover your own way to bring them into your holiday celebration.
- ✡ Reflect on how and why we bless in public or in private.
- ✡ Compare and contrast these blessings to those in traditional prayer books, liberal prayer books or Marcia Falk's Book of Blessings. (Beacon Press: Boston, 1999).

Public & Private: Dancing at the Boundaries

We learn from our parents and from our society what in our lives constitutes the private realm and what we can share in public. Our work and professional life may be public, but what happens in our family, things like illness or arguments, they are often kept private. In addition, many do not feel obligated to mourn, love or celebrate our personal lives with the community. Yet, in the Book of Ruth, the distinction between the public and private realm differs. Although the protagonists of this novella can distinguish between private and public, the boundaries between them are not so clear. In the Book of Ruth, the community has great expectations for what an individual will share with the community. Protagonists of this book dance at the boundaries of the public and private spheres. In Ruth, the individual is much more exposed to the public eye for her desires and her personal triumphs as well as the customary search for comfort within the public domain. The community stands to witness, assist and bless the characters in this novella as they find comfort after loss, celebrate personal triumphs, and reaffirm communal customs.

Public Engagements

There are four public scenes in the Book of Ruth that take place in the presence of groups of people, including those who are strangers to the principal characters. The characters in the Book of Ruth, all with individual private concerns, must face their loss and celebrate their personal happiness in public. Intense emotions, like those experienced with mourning or love, become a public affair. What might to us seem better managed by individuals privately is lodged within the public sphere, inspiring the community to share in the personal drama.

At the end of chapter 1, a tired and haggard Naomi returns to Bethlehem. After suffering numerous losses, she finds herself surrounded by an excited and buzzing group of women.

> And the two went on until they reached Beth-Lehem. When they arrived in Beth-Lehem, the whole city buzzed with excitement over them. The women said, "Can this be Naomi?" (Ruth 1:19)

Yet, Naomi's return is fraught with sadness, as she remembers a land that she once looked upon with happier eyes. Overwhelmed by a communal welcome, she is not allowed a private and quiet return to her homeland. In addition, the women of the city do not merely greet Naomi, but demand an explanation of the tragedy painted around the rims of her eyes, "Is this really Naomi?" (1:19) The question entreats Naomi to reveal her private loss, and in doing so, she transforms the loss into a public lament for her family.

> "Do not call me Naomi," she replied, "call me (bitterness) *Mara* מרה. For Shaddai has made my life very bitter. I went away full, and YHVH has brought me back empty" (1:20-21).

Did Naomi expect this kind of welcome, to be surrounded by her community and forced to mourn in public? The Book of Ruth challenges our mourning practices and provides Naomi with a community of woman to shoulder some of her grief. The women, by their simple, yet direct question, allow Naomi to give voice to some of her pain and suffering.

In Chapter 2, Boaz and Ruth meet for the first time in his field. From the nature of their personal conversation, we might assume that there are no witnesses within earshot. Yet, Ruth and Boaz have this conversation in a field full of hired hands and gleaners. Their exchange is in an open, public space. Boaz first addresses the reapers or workers, "He greeted the reapers, 'YHVH be with you,' and they replied to him 'YHVH bless you'"(2:4).

In the very next verse, Boaz addresses his overseer adding yet another character to the scene,

> Then Boaz said to the servant who was in charge over the reapers, "whose girl is this?" The servant in charge over the reapers replied, "She is the Moabite girl who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab" (2:5-6).

From this additional inquiry, we may infer that there are a number of regular hired hands, an overseer, and possibly a group of gleaners who regularly take their place behind the reapers. The conversation between Boaz and Ruth in chapter two, while perhaps off to the side with some distance from spectators, is quite public.

The third and most public scene in the Book of Ruth occurs at the city gate (Chapter 4), where the public is deliberately summoned to participate. This gate was a place for meeting, gathering, and at times served as a court of law. Yet, to serve as a court of law, Boaz must summons ten elders: "Then [Boaz] took ten elders of the town and said, 'Be seated here;' and they sat down" (4:2). Boaz convenes this court by asking the men of the town to serve as witnesses for his proposal. Boaz decides that the gate will be the setting for acquiring Naomi's land and assuring that no other kinsman will secure Ruth as a wife, thus carrying on Elimelech's (Naomi's deceased husband,) lineage. According to Bible scholar Kirsten Neilson, the gate was not only a public space but a space to decide on legal issues.

> In the ancient Orient the town gate and the area in front of the gate was the obvious place to gather. Connected to the town gate was a number of gate rooms where there was room for various kinds of transactions, including legal cases that required a settlement. By sitting down at the gate, Boaz has chosen an effective way to have the case discussed in the presence of witnesses.[1]

[1] Kirsten Nielson, Ruth: A commentary (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997) 82.

In this reading, Boaz convenes a legal assembly of 10 elders, and negotiates with the kinsman who is responsible for acquiring the land and Ruth. Boaz engages the elders and publicly announces that they will all serve as witnesses for the agreement he will soon make.

> And Boaz said to the elders and the rest of the people, "You are witnesses today that I am acquiring from Naomi all that was Elimelech's and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon. I am also acquiring Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, as my wife, so as to perpetuate the name of the deceased upon his estate, that the name of the deceased may not disappear from among his kinsmen and from the gate of his hometown. You are witnesses today! (Ruth 4:9-10)

Since in biblical texts, the city gate is equivalent to the court of justice, with elders, (in premonarchic era) as judges, the community is a necessary element in Boaz's plans.[2] By acting as witnesses, they serve to condone or give communal approval for the union of Boaz and Ruth.

The fourth public convocation occurs at the end of Chapter 4 in an unspecified gathering place, whereas other public arenas have been explicitly stated (the return to the town, the field, and the gate). The last scene of the book does not reveal the location of all who come to gather; the text only informs us of the many people who are present for what may be a baby naming.

> So, Boaz married Ruth; she became his wife, and he cohabited with her. YHVH let her conceive and she bore a son. And the women said to Naomi, "Blessed is YHVH who has not withheld a redeemer from you today! May his name be perpetuated in Israel! (Ruth 4:13)

[2] This is also the time of the era after the demise of monarchy. See Ezra 10 for the power of elders in the 5th century BCE.

Naomi's women friends, who are excited and buzzing for a second time, surround her once again. The same women who acted as sounding boards for Naomi's cries of pain, now envelop her with cries of public exuberance and bestow blessing upon her and her future lineage.

> And the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be YHVH who has not withheld a redeemer from you today! May his name be perpetuated in Israel! He shall renew your life, and sustain your old age; for he is born of your daughter-in-law, who loves you, and is better to you than seven sons." And the women neighbors gave him a name, saying, "A son is born to Naomi!" And they named him Obed; he was the father of Jesse, father of David." (4:14-15,17)

Private Encounters

All the characters in the Book of Ruth live in both the public and private realms. As we have seen above, much of what we moderns might keep to ourselves is brought into the public view. In the Book of Ruth, the private encounters between women are more numerous. There are seven such encounters in which Ruth plays a role. Women fashioned their relationships (with both women and men) in private, building a strong foundation for trusting relationships and future protection.

The private encounters between Naomi and Ruth are as significant as they are numerous. Women "lived in two worlds — one private, one public — but, if truth were known, [they] are by and large considered native to only one of them."[3] In other words, although women were quite adept at functioning in the biblical public realm, they were much more comfortable and secure in their private worlds. The common link between

[3] Joan D. Chittister, The Story of Ruth: Twelve Moments in Every Woman's Life (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000) 4.

Ruth and Naomi is their widowed status. Widows were often poorly equipped to care for themselves, and were marginalized by the patriarchal world. Ruth and Naomi, both without husbands, depend on each other for emotional and physical sustenance, much of which is deliberated over in private. Naomi and Ruth have five dialogues in which they privately plot to secure their fate.[4] The first private conversation between Naomi and Ruth takes place in Moab in a warm encounter, which concludes when Ruth commits herself to Naomi. In this touching scene, Ruth selflessly entreats her mother-in-law to accept her pledge: to journey where she journeys, and rest where she rests. The pledge continues when Ruth vows that Naomi's people will be her people, Naomi's God her God and that she will never leave her side until death. (1:16-17) Indeed this commitment includes people, land, deity, and destiny. After Ruth's private vow to cleave to her mother-in-law, Ruth and Naomi return to Bethlehem in silence. The power of her statement, however, is not thrown aside, for her commitment is more powerfully revealed in her second conversation with Naomi. In this brief encounter, Ruth holds fast to her pledge of loyalty and offers to find food for the both of them.

> Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "I would like to go to the field and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone who may show me kindness. "Yes daughter, go," she replied. (2:2)

A third private encounter occurs at the end of Chapter 2, upon Ruth's return from a successful trip to the field. Naomi rejoices, blesses God, and urges Ruth to return to the field where Ruth indeed encountered Naomi's own kinsman. Another private encounter between Ruth and Naomi occurs in Chapter 3. Naomi is determined to find Ruth not

[4] First encounter: 1: 14-18; second encounter: 2:2-3; third encounter: 2:18-21; fourth encounter: 3:1-5; fifth encounter: 3:16-18.

simply a new husband. She devises a plan that will help Ruth secure the protection of a husband and a home.

> Naomi, her mother-in-law, said to her, "Daughter, I must seek a home for you, where you may be happy. Now there is our kinsman Boaz, whose girls you were close to. He will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor tonight. So bathe, anoint yourself, dress up, and go down to the threshing floor. But do not disclose yourself to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, note the place where he lies down, and go over and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what you are to do." She replied, "I will do everything you tell me." (Ruth 3:1-5)

The fifth and final exchange between the women comes after Ruth's night with Boaz. Ruth returns home with yet more barely and Naomi assures her that Boaz will settle the matter of their subsequent union (3:16-18). All of these encounters, while not explicitly revealing the feelings of each woman, certainly reveal their intention to protect and care for one another.

Ruth builds her relationship with her mother-in-law in private encounters. Together they plot to help one another and vow to find themselves safety and sustenance. However, in order for these plans to work, Ruth must fashion one more trusting relationship, and that will be with Boaz. As in their first encounter, the space in which they meet is public. Many of the hired hands and field workers ate, winnowed barley, and slept on the threshing floor. As commentator Phyllis Trible notes, Boaz went to sleep at the end of the heap of grain. This is a very important detail, because, "the phrase suggests an area separate from the other sleepers and accessible to the waiting woman."[5] Thus, if Boaz was sleeping at the end of the heap of grain, perhaps he was more secluded, a necessary element in Naomi's plan, which requires a great deal of privacy. Naomi instructed Ruth to

uncover Boaz's feet and lie down. Some commentators find this request difficult to render. Did Naomi want Ruth to go to Boaz while sleeping, sneak into bed with him and trick him into accepting responsibility for a woman he "slept with?" Or did she hope to repay Ruth for her loyalty, her provisions, and her friendship by devising a plan that would join Boaz and Ruth in marriage?[6] Whatever Naomi's motive, Ruth accepts the task and makes her way to the threshing floor.

The nighttime encounter between Ruth and Boaz, although in a public setting, requires privacy. As mentioned above Boaz was sleeping "at the end of the heap of grain," (3:7) Ruth comes to the threshing floor after Boaz retires for the evening.

> Boaz ate and drank, and in a cheerful mood went to lie down beside the grainpile. Then she went over stealthily, uncovered his feet, and lay down beside the grainpile. In the middle of the night, the man gave a start and pulled back—there was a woman lying at his feet! (3:7-8)

Although many commentators believe this scene carries sexual connotations, the text only says that she lay at his feet.[7] The narrator does not disclose the details of what physically transpired between Ruth and Boaz; we are only privy to an intimate dialogue between the two. Similar to the conversations between Naomi and Ruth, this dialogue offers the same themes of security and protection for the future. When Boaz asks who lies at his feet, Ruth

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[5] Frederic Bush, Word Biblical Commentary: Ruth/Esther (Texas: Word Publishers, 1996) 179.

[6] Naomi most likely means that Ruth should uncover the lower half of Boaz's body and lie down there close beside him. Most commentators have understood that Naomi's primary purpose here was to provide an heir for the family line of Elimelech by engineering marriage for Ruth. Bush rightly notes that Naomi has instructed Ruth to propose a symbolic request for marriage and that Boaz will tell her what to do from there (Bush 154).

[7] "Foot or leg, " or the Hebrew word, *regel* רגל, is often used as a euphemism for the sexual organs for a male or female. Neilson argues for example that Ruth "undresses" at his feet indicating her availability, and other commentators believe the use of the word, *regel* רגל, implies an implicit sexual overtone. Bush does not deny the sexual overtones, but argues that the word used in the text, *margelotav* מרגלתיו, is intentionally ambiguous. In addition, in light of the rest of the book, this scene would not suggest a motive

entreats Boaz to be her redeemer, or *goel* גואל, "I am Ruth, your handmaid, spread *kenafecha* כנפך [your wing/robe] over you handmaid because you are a *goel* גואל" (3:9).[8] Ruth seeks redemption. The kind of redemption she seeks includes enduring sustenance, shelter, and provisions for both she and Naomi, and perhaps a husband. Yet, why does this conversation need to take place in the evening, in the sleeping quarters of someone she barely knows? Perhaps Ruth needs a less public place to continue to work on her relationship with Boaz. Boaz might have honored her request had she approached him in the field a second time, but the conversation on the threshing floor creates the opportunity for a more intimate dialogue of the heart's intention. Boaz's answer to Ruth's inquiry for future protection is much more detailed than a simple "yes." He relays how he feels about her:

> He exclaimed, "Be blessed of YHVH, daughter! Your latest deed of loyalty[9] is greater than the first, in that you have not turned to younger men, whether poor or rich. And now daughter, have no fear. I will do on your behalf whatever you ask, for all the elders of my town know what a fine woman you are" (3:10-11).

In this private space, Boaz can reveal his heart's desire, his admiration, and his more intimate feelings about Ruth without concern that field hands linger in the distance. The private encounter ensures that Ruth and Boaz's hearts and minds are in harmony.[10]

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such as "sexual entrapment," but rather a moment in which Boaz and Ruth act with integrity as they have all along (Bush155-156).

[8] It should be noted that there is scholarly debate as to whether this word means "wings," indicating protection or "robe," meaning a marriage proposal. The debate arises out of confusion over whether the word is in the plural (wings) or the singular (robe), and out of the general ambiguity of the situation on the threshing floor.

[9] The Hebrew word used here is what we translated as "loving kindness" or, *chesed* חסד. For a rigorous look into the Book of Ruth's theme of *chesed* חסד, please see the essay entitled "Sacred Partnership."

[10] According to Bush, the sequence of events of this scene that end with Boaz filling up Ruth's shawl with grain, identify both Ruth and Boaz as having a common cause. Ruth wants protection and sustenance and Boaz shows his intent to fulfill his promise by offering her grain (Bush 183).

Public Expectations

Living in community comes with certain expectations and obligations. Communal norms or behavioral standards are necessary for a decent, functioning society. While the norms for Ruth's time might not have been articulated in a constitution, their standards for behavior were those deemed appropriate by the members of her society. Yet we must ask: "do these communal norms transcend the private thresholds?" In the Book of Ruth, public expectations exist beyond the public sphere; they penetrate private settings. In private dialogue and deed, Ruth's protagonists maintain public protocol and sustain communal standards.

In Chapter 1, Naomi is devastated and feels alone. Perhaps she is terrified at the thought of traveling back to her homeland, empty and ashamed, but she is concerned for her daughters-in-law. Her urging of Orpah and Ruth to stay in their homeland and return unaccompanied is courageous.

> But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Turn back, each of you to her mother's house. May YHVH deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me! May YHVH grant that each of you find security in the house of a husband!" And she kissed them farewell...(1:8-9)

Naomi, who recognizes societal norms for widowed women, begs them to return to their mother's houses to save them from a potentially dangerous scenario. Societal norms suggest women are safe when they are married within the confines of their own homeland. Naomi could have accepted their loyal offer in this private moment. But instead, she upholds the public or societal expectations and urges them to return to their parent's homes.

In Chapter 3, at the threshing floor, Ruth risks her reputation to seek out Boaz and exact redemption. Boaz is kind throughout their encounter, he comments on her kindness to Naomi, and on her bold effort to seek him for sustenance and protection. Yet, Ruth spends the night and the text does not disclose further dialogue or narration until dawn. Boaz continues to speak kindly to Ruth on the threshing floor:

> "Stay for the night. Then in the morning, if he will act as a redeemer, good! Let him redeem. But if he does not want to act as redeemer for you, I will do so myself, as YHVH lives! Lie down until morning." So she lay at his feet until dawn. She rose before one person could distinguish another, for he thought, "Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor." (3:13-14)

Boaz's complimentary words of promise offered in their exchange must then shed light on his actions for the rest of that evening. There is textual evidence that Boaz recognizes societal norms when he tells himself that it should not be known (to outsiders) that Ruth spent the night. Traditional commentators of the midrash offer one possible interpretation of Boaz's intentions on the threshing floor as well. The midrashic authors imagine incredible restraint on Boaz's part in order to keep him from taking advantage of Ruth:

> All that night his Evil Inclination contended with him saying, 'you are unmarried and seek a wife, and she is unmarried and seeks a husband. Arise and have intercourse with her and make her your wife'. And he took an oath to his Evil Inclination saying, 'As the Lord live I will not touch her'.[11]

The rabbis suggest that Boaz is a man who is not only steadfast to communal standards, but who takes seriously his responsibilities, and additionally concerns himself with God's divine standard. Thus, in this reading, Boaz upholds communal expectations in a situation where he could have easily transgressed them. Interestingly, the traditional commentary

reads the text's intent in similar ways that modern commentators do. Boaz's character throughout the book, from the moment we see him greeting his hired hands, suggests a kind individual who acts responsibly in both public and private settings.

As mentioned above, there are few events in the character's personal stories that remain solely private. In the Book of Ruth, there is a public expectation that members of the community will share both personal tragedy and triumph. Individuals must succumb to that expectation. Naomi's mourning, for example, seems more painful while she is in exile, she feels alone and furious with God. When she returns, the community of women encircles her, providing the cushioned walls she needs to "pound her fists of rage." Paltiel Dubin writes:

> Naomi's pain-filled cry is absolutely necessary for the story to proceed: she must vent her sorrow and bitterness, her anger and sense of betrayal, to a group of women who might understand her pain; the women's listening and acknowledgment is a first step in Naomi's gradual recovery, in her eventual return to satisfaction and wholeness. Public acknowledgement of private grief is essential.[12]

Mourning and birth are expected to be publicly shared, to help the individual grieve and to celebrate. As noted before in chapter 4, the women return, this time to help Naomi bless and name her new grandson, to help her reclaim her fullness (4:11-12).

Boaz also labors to support the community's expectations. When Boaz gathers ten elders, he inspires a legal tradition for all time. According to early rabbinic tradition, this becomes the minimal number of persons needed "for worship, public acts, and community

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[11] D.R.G. Beatie, The Targum of Ruth: Translated, with Introduction, Apparatus, and Notes (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1994) 180.
[12] Dubin 136.

resolutions."[13] It seems from Boaz's insistence on a community of elders to witness his transaction, that the community obliged these kinds of unions to have formal, public consent.

> All the people at the gate and the elders answered, "We are. May YHVH make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built up the House of Israel! Prosper in Ephrathah and perpetuate your name in Bethlehem! And may your house be like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah – through the offspring which YHVH will give you by this young woman." (4:11-12).

The community bears witness to the legal transaction, signaling, "the importance of the decision for the entire community and the investment of all its members in the outcome."[14] With their blessing, Boaz and Ruth marry. Public rituals for mourning, marriage, and birth are necessary elements of a cohesive community; for they create an interdependent community, where not one person should feel isolated or left to handle life's most difficult challenges alone. Individuals in this society needed their community to bear witness to marriages and to lend emotional support and affirmation. Each individual understood the power of communal interdependence and likewise was comfortable with what we might today consider a lack of privacy. Yet, in order for these communal expectations to function properly, individuals had to uphold public expectations even while in private.

Private Victory

One might ask why private moments occur in the Book of Ruth, if every moment is available for public consumption. Can the Book of Ruth and its permeable private realm

[13] Etan Levine, The Aramaic Version of Ruth (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973) 99.

offer insight for our lives today? Stephen Covey, a modern organizational theorist, might suggest a response. Covey argues in order for human beings to become fully *inter*dependent, individuals must first look inward, engaging in self-reflection. After this private inventory, they can stretch themselves into the public sphere, for, "private victories precede public victories."[15] The private sphere, although laden with public dialogue and purpose, is just as vital to the character growth in this novella. In private, Naomi and Ruth develop an intimate friendship. In private, Boaz and Ruth learn to trust and believe in the honest motives of one another. While in public the convocations depend on witnesses, the private moments need only the two individuals standing as witnesses to their bond, their loyalty, and their faith in one another.

In chapter 1, Ruth sets an example of private victory. Ruth's extraordinary decision to dedicate her life to her mother-in-law is an intimate example of faith building in friendships. The lifetime commitment of Ruth to her mother-in-law builds Naomi's confidence in Ruth's sincerity. Boaz too, offers Ruth similar promises of survival and protection, assuring Ruth of his loyalty. The privacy of these moments provides trustworthiness. If one offers words of praise or promise only in public, we as individuals might seem skeptical of the motive. Is this person seeking to glorify himself/herself in the eyes of the community? Does she/he sincerely utter words of loyalty, or speak to find favor in the company they keep? Privacy is the nesting ground for honesty, a believable honesty that stirs our faith in people. When we have fully accepted our personal relationships as cohesive and true, we can next share our tragedies and celebrate our

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[14] Katherine Doob Sakenfeld, Ruth - Interpretation: A Bible Comentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1989) 69.

triumphs in the public domain, creating for ourselves a more interdependent Jewish community.

Connection to Shavuot

Judaism adopts avenues of public and private acts of worship and study. Many people believe a person can just as easily worship privately and even choose to live Torah according to his or her personal choices. Modern Jewish author, Jacob Milgrom, suggests, "The Jew who worships privately treads a spiritually lonely road."[16] As in the Book of Ruth, Judaism of the past and present puts great significance on communal participation. Shavuot, the celebration of the giving of Torah, calls on us to reaffirm our commitment to the tradition as individuals and as a community. A commitment to Torah both inward and outward fortifies individual lives and the life of the community.

The Book of Ruth offers us models of men and women who support communal norms in their private relationships. On Shavuot, we vow to uphold the Torah, and we are to pledge ourselves to its precepts and ethical values, as members of a holy community (public) and as individuals (private). Each year we recall the notion that we all stood at Sinai, as a community. Whether in public or in private, we speak Torah's words of love and kindness, or *chesed* חסד, to one another, and we act out Torah's *chesed* חסד, in synagogue and in our living rooms. The importance of accepting and living Torah both publicly and privately seems necessary for maintaining influence on children as well.

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[15] Stephen R. Covey, The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People: Restoring the Character Ethic (New York: Fireside, 1989) 43.
[16] Abraham E. Milgrom, Jewish Worship (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1971) 29.

Ethical norms of a Torah community are learned and practiced by observing parents at home and elders in the community.

Ruth and her story can remind us of the importance of public triumph and tragedy. As Jews, we are expected to share all our life-cycle events with the community. We celebrate marriage with the community, we mourn with the community, and we bring new life into the world with our community. Shavuot recognizes the strength in community as well. On Shavuot, we recall that 600,000 people stood at the foot of Mount Sinai to stand witness to God's word. It was no longer a mere private encounter such as Abraham had with God. In the moments prior to the giving of Torah, Moses and God have their own private encounter.

> Having journeyed from Rephidim, they entered the wilderness of Sinai and encamped in the wilderness. Israel encamped there in front of the mountain, and Moses went up to God (Exodus 19:2-3).

We read about that private giving, God and Moses' moment on the "threshing floor." This mountaintop serves as the threshing floor for Moses and God, where God assures our sustenance, with the words of Torah (19:3-7). In the next moment, we serve as the Elders to witness, receive and publicly affirming the act of giving between God, Moses, and finally the people Israel.

> All the people answered as one, saying, "All that YHVH has spoken we will do!" (19:8)

Shavuot reminds us of the investment the community must have in the act of God's giving us Torah. It is because we are witness to this event; it is because we are present that the Torah can be given. A community standing witness to Torah creates a community of Torah.

As in the Book of Ruth, we must have private victory before public victory. Torah must be received privately and publicly as well. We stood as a community, and we received as individuals. Shavuot reminds us that we must internalize as well as "externalize" the words of Torah. When we live words of Torah in community and at home, we model ourselves after the characters in the Book of Ruth, who uphold public standards in private encounters.

Book of Ruth: Applied Learning Pages

For an explanation on how to use the following pages, please refer to the Introduction: How to Use This Book, on Page 7.

What's the Question?
מה קשה לי? *Mah Kasheh Li?*

רות ג:יד

וַתִּשְׁכַּב מַרְגְּלֹתָו [מַרְגְּלוֹתָיו] עַד־הַבֹּקֶר וַתָּקָם בְּטֶרֶם [בְּטֶרֶם] יַכִּיר
אִישׁ אֶת־רֵעֵהוּ וַיֹּאמֶר אַל־יִוָּדַע כִּי־בָאָה הָאִשָּׁה הַגֹּרֶן׃

Ruth 3:14

So she lay at his feet until dawn. She rose before one person could recognize another, for he thought [literally, "said"], "Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor."

In the box below, you will find a list of principles for interpreting Torah. For each category, ask yourself: does this verse present a difficulty, a *koshi* קשי? If yes, please describe the *koshi* קשי.

1. **Is there superfluous language?**
   The rabbis believe that every word in the Bible is there for a precise purpose. When a word seems repetitive and/or synonymous with another word, the rabbis always justify the existence of each word. In the quote above, do you think any words seem repetitive and/or synonymous?

2. **Are there grammatical curiosities?**
   The rabbis respond to sentences with unexpected or incorrect grammar, such as unusual word order, awkward prepositions, illogical sentences, inconsistent verb tenses, or unclear pronouns. In the quote above, is the grammar problematic?

3. **Are there theological or moral dilemmas?**
   The rabbis identify moments that raise questions about God's characteristics, God's role in the world, and how God is depicted in the Bible. They are also troubled by what seem to be breaches of moral or ethical conduct by God and/or human beings. In the quote above, do you find any theological or moral dilemmas?

4. **Are there gaps in the text?**
   The rabbis are also intrigued by what is not in the text. In other words, when feelings, time spans, physical descriptions, conversations, etc. are not written in the text, they often fill in the gaps. In the quote above, do you find anything missing from the text?

5. **Are there political or sociological issues?**
   The rabbis seek to render power dynamics among nations according to their worldview (e.g. putting Israel or Judaism at the center). Moreover, questions of ethnicity, gender, class, etc. prompt their investigation. In the quote above, are any of these kinds of issues relevant?

6. **Are there any other difficulties, *kushiot* קושיות?**

Write a creative response, a possible answer, to the *koshi* קשי that you find most interesting.

What's the Conversation?
מה קשה לנו? *Mah Kasheh Lanu?*

רות ג:יד
וַתִּשְׁכַּב מַרְגְּלֹתָו [מַרְגְּלוֹתָיו] עַד־הַבֹּקֶר וַתָּקָם בְּטֶרֶם [בְּטֶרֶם] יַכִּיר
אִישׁ אֶת־רֵעֵהוּ וַיֹּאמֶר אַל־יִוָּדַע כִּי־בָאָה הָאִשָּׁה הַגֹּרֶן׃
Ruth 3:14
So she lay at his feet until dawn. She rose before one person could recognize another, for he thought [literally, "said"], "Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor."

On this page, several commentators respond to the following difficulty, or קשי:
Why was it so important to Boaz that nobody knows that Ruth spent the night with him on the threshing floor?

QUESTIONS

1. How does each commentator resolve the קשי?
2. How do their conclusions differ from one another?
3. How do you resolve the קשי? Add your voice as a "21st Century Commentator."

Rashi: "וַיֹּאמֶר אַל־יִוָּדַע" "FOR HE SAID, LET IT NOT BE KNOWN" This refers back to "And she rose before one person could recognize another." He hastened to rise, for he said in his heart, "It is not (befitting) my honor that it should be known that the woman came to the threshing floor."

Ruth **Rabbah:** "וַיֹּאמֶר אַל־יִוָּדַע" "FOR HE SAID, LET IT NOT BE KNOWN" To whom does he say this? Rabbi Meir said: He said it to a member of his household. Rabbi Hunya and Rabbi Jeremiah in the name of Rabbi Samuel the son of Rabbi Isaac: All that night Boaz lay stretched out upon his face, and prayed, "Ruler of the universe, it is revealed and known to You that I did not touch her; so that it may be Your will that it be not known that the woman came to the threshing floor, that the name of Heaven not be profaned through me."

IggeretShmuel:
"וַיֹּאמֶר אַל־יִוָּדַע" "FOR HE SAID, LET IT NOT BE KNOWN" Rabbi Meir felt that Boaz did not conceal Ruth's coming from the members of his household, because they knew his righteousness and would not suspect him of committing a immoral act. The other rabbis felt, that, on the contrary, should he have given such an order to a member of his household, this itself would arouse suspicion. They therefore explained that Boaz prayed to God that it should not be known.

Kluger: "וַיֹּאמֶר אַל־יִוָּדַע" "FOR HE SAID, LET IT NOT BE KNOWN" This apparently is a matter of guarding their reputation, and also a precaution... Symbolically, however, it shows that this occurrence must be kept from public knowledge. As we saw in v.8, it happened "in the middle of the night," that magical momentous time, and he sends her away before it is light; i.e., this meeting took place in the dark, in the unconscious, so to speak. That is where Boaz was faced with his obligations, and where he became, or was made, aware of his feelings. Such may often be the case with anyone; dreams can bring to our attention situations and feelings of which we are not consciously sufficiently aware (p. 80).

BIOGRAPHY

Iggeret Shmuel: Encyclopaedic super-commentary (comments on previous commentaries) on Ruth by Kabbalist Rav Shmuel de Uzeda (1540-1605) in Tzfat; published 1597 in Constantinople.

Yehezkel Kluger: (1911-1995) Jewish Kibbutz farmer, optometrist, and Jungian analyst; taught and prac-ticed as an analyst until his death.

Rashi: Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzhak (1040-1105), most famous of all commentators on both Bible and Talmud. His commentaries are a fundamental tool to the Jewish method of studying sacred text.

Ruth Rabbah: 5th to 11th century midrash. The title derives its name from Rabbi Oshia Rabbah (the Great), to whom the work is partly attributed.

21st Century Commentator:

What's the Connection?
מה הקשר? *Mah HaKesher?*

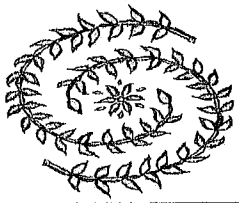
Below you will find a picture that relates to the theme of public/private. It is one of many possible ways to encounter the theme in our world.

Below is a picture by Max Ferguson called *Ralph Lauren's Worst Nightmare.*

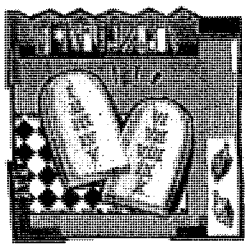
אַ ייִד און אַ הוּיקער גייען אין גאַס. זיי גייען פֿאַרבײ אַ סינאַגאָגע.
זאָגט ריער ייר צום הויקער, „אַ מאָל בין איך געווען אַ ייִד.“
און ריער הויקער זאָגט, „אַ מאָל בין איך געווען אַ הויקער.“

A JEW AND A HUNCHBACK ARE WALKING DOWN THE STREET. THEY GO BY A SYNAGOGUE.
THE JEW SAYS TO THE HUNCHBACK, "I USED TO BE A JEW."
AND THE HUNCHBACK SAYS, "I USED TO BE A HUNCHBACK."

מה הקשר לרות?
Mah HaKesher to Ruth:
What connections do you find between the picture above and the Book of Ruth?



מה הקשר לחג?
Mah HaKesher to Shavuot:
What connections do you find between the picture above and Shavuot?



Now is your chance to draw from your own experience and identify something you have encountered in your world (a conversation, an article in the newspaper, a story, a road trip, etc.) that connects to the Book of Ruth. How does your encounter shed light on the Book of Ruth and the holiday of Shavuot?

What's Our Contribution?
מה קישוט החג? *Mah Kishut HeChag?*

Torah Fest

The three Festivals, or *chagim* חגים, have interesting similarities and differences. The Festivals of Pesach and Sukkot last for seven days, but Shavuot is a one or two-day *chag* חג. Shouldn't Shavuot be a seven-day *chag* חג as well? The rabbis were indeed puzzled by this inconsistency.

In order to prepare spiritually and intellectually for our receiving of Torah, perhaps Shavuot should be seven days. The Torah gives precedence to needing time to prepare for the magnificent and awesome gift:

> And YHVH said to Moses, "Go to the people and warn them to stay pure today and tomorrow. Let them wash their clothes. Let them be ready for the third day; for on the third day YHVH will come down, in the sight of all the people, on Mount Sinai" (Exodus 19:10-11).

The Talmud builds upon this preparation time before receiving Torah, commenting upon the Israelites' arrival at the foot of Mt. Sinai on the first day of the new Hebrew month (*Rosh Chodesh* ראש חדש):

> Our Rabbis taught: On the sixth day of the month [Sivan] were the Ten Commandments given to Israel. R. Jose maintained: On the seventh thereof. Said Raba: All agree that they arrived in the Wilderness of Sinai on the first of the month. [For] here it is written, "on this day they came into the wilderness of Sinai," [Exodus 19:1] whilst elsewhere it is written, "This month shall be unto you the beginning of months." [Exodus 12:2] Just as the first of the month, so here [too] the first of the month [is meant] (Talmud Shabbat 86b).

In the tradition of the Talmud, perhaps we should again argue that Shavuot become a seven day *chag* חג, with five days of preparatory exercises, or classes that inspire and assist us to reaffirm our faith and obligations. The week can culminate with two days of *chag* חג.

The Week of Shavuot could be your synagogue's opportunity to host a "Torah Fest."[1]
Imagine what this might include:

- ✡ Be creative, inventive and inclusive of all age groups: Have Torah Fest classes that help your congregants expand their understanding of Torah (spiritual meditation, yoga prayer sessions, dairy cooking classes, learning Hebrew, Kabbalah, history of Shavuot customs, paper cutting).
- ✡ Encourage the members of your congregation to host classes at their homes during the week.
- ✡ Provide an opportunity for a public act of *tzedakah* (i.e., a car wash to raise money for a local school).
- ✡ Engage in a Preparation for Shavuot, *Tikun leil Shavuot*, תיקון ליל שבועות. This is a traditional practice of staying awake throughout the first night of Shavuot studying Torah. During the Torah Fest week, hold a teach-in where congregants learn how to lead a Torah study. Invite congregants to teach a one-hour Torah study to the rest of the congregation at the *Tikun leil Shavuot*, or תיקון ליל שבועות.
- ✡ Create faith affirmation ceremonies for the last day: adult confirmation ceremonies (like adult b'nei Mitzvah ceremonies), in which congregants affirm their faith in God (and/or Israel) and obligation to Torah.

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[1] Shavuot follows the Omer period. For some Jews, the Omer period is like a mourning time, commemorating the many tragedies of the Jewish people that occurred at this time of year. For those who observe this, there is one exception to this state of mourning, namely Lag B'Omer (33rd day of omer) for according to legend, oppression ceased on this day. However many Jews end their mourning period with the celebration of Lag B'Omer. The ritual we've created on this page assumes mourning ends at Lag B'Omer in this tradition.

From Lack to Abundance: The Space Between

"I went away full, and YHVH has brought me back empty..."
"And [Ruth] added, 'He gave me these six measures of barley,' saying to me, 'Do not go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.'"[1]

Lack is a wheel which comes round to all in the world, like the wheel of a pump[2] *which empties that which is full and fills that which is empty.*[3]

At the end of my suffering
there was a door...
...from the center of my life came
a great fountain, deep blue
shadows on azure seawater.[4]

The Book of Ruth narrates a journey through the cycle of lack and abundance. Whether the cycle is framed in terms of loss and renewal, poverty and wealth, or emptiness and wholeness, and whether the cycle is seen from material or spiritual perspectives, scholars of the Book of Ruth agree that the story moves from some sort of lack to some sort of abundance. Put most generally, the Book of Ruth is "a story beginning in deepest despair [that] work[s] its way to wholeness and well being."[5] Amy-Jill Levine nuances the cycle as follows: "Beginning with a famine, departure from Judah, childless marriages, and the deaths of three men, the text moves from the emptiness of Moab to the renewed fertility of Bethlehem: a good harvest, marriage and security, and the birth of a son."[6]

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[1] The first statement is Naomi's from Ruth 1:21, and the second is Ruth's, in 3:17.
[2] Made of a revolving wheel with buckets attached which alternately fill and empty.
[3] Midrash Rabbah on Ruth, 5.9. Rabbi Dr. L., Rabinowitz transl., Midrash Rabbah: Ruth and Ecclesiastes (London: Soncino, 1939) 67.
[4] Excerpt from poem entitled "The Wild Iris", Louise Gluck, The Wild Iris (Hopewell: The Ecco Press, 1992).
[5] Phyllis Trible, God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978) 195.
[6] Amy-Jill Levine, "Ruth", The Women's Bible Commentary, eds. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (London: SPCK, 1992) 78.

We are also able to identify the specific individual upon whom this cycle of lack and abundance is focused. It is not Ruth, but her mother-in-law, Naomi. Biblical exegete Frederic Bush asserts unequivocally, "...it is supremely important to note that the discourse structure unmistakably and emphatically makes clear that the problem of the story is the death and emptiness that have afflicted the life of *Naomi*...(emphasis added)." Naomi herself speaks of leaving full and returning empty (1:21). "Do not go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed" (3:17), are the final words we hear from Ruth, as she reiterates Boaz' ultimate commitment to *Naomi's* well-being. Moreover, despite the fact that a new child — an ultimate sign of hope, survival, a shift towards abundance — is born of the union between Boaz and Ruth, the text states "a son is born to Naomi" (4:17). Naomi's significance in the story becomes clear when the women of Bethlehem bless God for not having withheld a redeemer *from Naomi* (4:14).

Bush even claims the following: "The resolution devote[s] itself exclusively to depicting the *total reversal* of the death and emptiness without her husband" (emphasis added).[7] The nature of the abundance effected a *total reversal* of such deep and profound lack: How could the death of a husband ever be totally reversed? Or the deaths of both of one's sons? Indeed, can any loss ever truly be *reversed*? As readers of an argument of reversal — from lack to abundance — we seem to know that at no point is the reincarnation of Elimelech implied. Apparently, despite the words "total reversal", we do not expect that anything will end exactly as it had been before the famine, before the leaving, before the death. Rather, as the point is invariably made, "reversal" comes (among other ways) in the ceasing of the famine, in the return to Judah, in the birth of a child to Ruth and Boaz marking hope and a future for Naomi.

But in a more than semantic way, we are still left wondering what "reversal" really means. Phyllis Trible's account of the opening seven verses of the Book of the Ruth hints at an answer:

> The introduction begins with an exodus from Judah; now it ends with the announcement of a return to the land (v.7). It begins with the problem of famine; now it answers with the promise of food. It begins with a man choosing a future for his family; now it ends with a woman — the sole survivor of that family — choosing her own future. Within this ring structure, the themes of land, food, and family have contrasted, crisscrossed, and coalesced as they alternate between life and death. In these ways the conclusion of the introduction completes the beginning, *yet with differences* (emphasis added).[8]

For Trible, these differences prepare for dialogue in the text. For us, Trible's distinctions are the beginning of pointing to a different notion of "reversal"; a notion that recognizes more than the "before and after" pictures; a notion that affirms that there is a middle, and that this middle is the *process* of journeying from lack to abundance. As such, it is less about "reversal," and more about a process of "resolution." Naomi does not get over the losses, she gets *through* them. The distinction is critical since it leads us beyond the knowledge *that* there is a cycle from lack to abundance, to probe *how* Naomi moves through the cycle.

When it comes to describing the "before and after" stages of this cycle, we tend to wax eloquent. Indeed, it is a powerful universal topic of our human condition. But nestled within the poetic passion that rushes to illustrate the dramatic contrast from lack to abundance are any number of the following processes connecting the two: physical, psychological, emotional, social, and from the point of view of text and tradition,

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[7] Bush 51.
[8] Trible 168.

theological. As such, there are many ways in which Naomi experiences her journey from lack to abundance. If it is possible to view many of these instances of lack and abundance as a collection, it might be possible to gain further insight into Naomi's journey. This is the purpose of the following chart, which includes an array of lacks and abundances we were able to glean from the Book of Ruth and from secondary literature on the Book of Ruth. The order in which they appear is roughly the order in which they occur in the text (for textual sources, please see Appendix I).

Between the **Lack** and **Abundance** columns, there are three columns that respond to the following questions:

> *Problem* makes explicit what is missing
> *How to Resolve* How to ameliorate each lack
> *Who Facilitates Resolution* Who facilitates the journey toward abundance?

Lack	*Problem*	*How to Resolve*	*Who Facilitates Resolution*	**Abundance**
Famine	Lack of food	Procure sustenance	Moab/Judah/ Ruth/Boaz	Food/Harvest
Women lack power	Males make the choices	Women empowered to choose	Ruth/Boaz	Females also make choices
Homelessness	Not in spiritual/ cultural center	Move	Moab/ Bethlehem	Return to land
Death of kin/Mourning	Loss	Feel/grieve/ renew life's meaning	Ruth/Boaz/ Women of Bthlhm/Oved	Celebration/ life/birth
Landlessness	No-thing-ness	Acquire	Boaz	Ownership
Barrenness	"Unproductive"	Create	Ruth, Boaz, God	Fertility
No Future	Survival of community (and of individuals) threatened	Beseech help	Loving compassion, or *Chesed* חסד of many, especially Ruth	Redeemer/ Community will survive
Shame/ Humiliation	No persona/ foreignness/ negation of self (and group)	Proclaim worth	Boaz, Women of Bethlehem	Pride and respect
Impassivity/no words of reproach	Preventing expression of anger/outrage	Rebuke/ Indignation	Women of Bethlehem, Ruth, Boaz	Blessings
Unprotected	No support	Find a redeemer, or *go'el* גואל	Ruth (with Boaz and God)	Security

Framed in this way, it is possible to see that in the Book of Ruth, physical, psychological, emotional, and social lacks and abundances are somehow interrelated and intertwined. As one scans vertically the list of "lacks," many lend themselves to multiple categorizations. With the help of the chart, we might even say that "lack and abundance" becomes a sort of merism[9] for life. In addition, the chart also suggests that resolving a lack can never be passive, (from the *Who Facilitates* column we learn) nor can this act of resolving be effected in a vacuum; resolution may occur only in community, only through living *inter*dependently.

At first, some of the words in the *Problem* and *How to Resolve* columns may seem obvious. But when the lacks are distilled, we can identify two interesting lists that begin to reveal how unlikely it is that such a process could produce a "total reversal." After identifying a spectrum of problems and responding to them, how could Naomi ever revert to who she was before? In the course of one chapter she realizes that she is hungry, disempowered, not at home *and* without resources for survival, she wonders about life's worth. She faces the loss of the three men in her life, and also encounters the shame and humiliation of these losses without publicly expressing her outrage of her injustice. Upon returning to Bethlehem, she will find this voice, telling the women of the city not to call her Naomi but *Mara* (meaning bitter), and rebuking God for the first time (1:20).

Naomi's eventual ability to express her outrage and indignation, first to her daughters in law (1:13b), then to the women of Bethlehem and ultimately to God (1:20-1:21), represents a crucial turning point on her path towards abundance. Naomi is actually less vocal (silent even) towards the end of the book. But with the help of the

[9]A merism is a construct that refers to two extreme ends to indicate a totality, and not simply the two items. I.e. "Head to toe" or "Good and evil."

women of Bethlehem as an outlet, and of various individuals reaching out to one another, what she had lacked is now in the process of transforming into abundance. Naomi comes alive in a variety of ways. Using the vocabulary of our chart, she can eat, choose, move, make meaning, feel, beseech help, and ultimately even acquire, create, and assert a (renewed) sense of self. Upon learning of a potential redeemer (Boaz), for example, Naomi is able to utter at last the language of blessing (2:19). Next, in chapter 3, she is able to present a plan to Ruth for how to proceed strategically with Boaz. Taken together this is a powerful collection of verbs that if realized, have the potential to bring wholeness to one's life in virtually every area that counts. But it all begins with the most vital ingredient for basic survival: bread, *lechem* לחם. It took first the courage and desperation of Ruth to venture out to bring bread to Naomi (2:1). The was soon followed by the open generosity of an affluent man like Boaz who responded to Ruth extraordinary commitment. As a result, Naomi and Ruth meet this most essential level of life's needs. Although it is possible to speak of "spiritual hunger" metaphorically, the Book of Ruth depicts first and foremost a reality where hunger was not at all A metaphor. Boaz literally saves lives by stepping up to the ethical obligation to provide for these widows' physical nourishment. With the provision of physical sustenance, it becomes possible to address psychological and emotional nourishment.

A glimpse of Louise Gluck's poem, *The Wild Iris* opens this section. To echo the first line of the poem, a door gradually appears at the end of Ruth and Naomi's suffering. The full text of the poem, like the Book of Ruth, relates both the suffering of physical as well as emotional dying. Also like the Book of Ruth, it culminates in a burst of abundance.

The Wild Iris

At the end of my suffering
there was a door.

Here me out: that which you call death
I remember.

Overhead, noises, branches of the pine shifting.
Then nothing. The weak sun
flickered over the dry surface.

It is terrible to survive
as consciousness
buried in the dark earth.

Then it was over: that which you fear, being
a soul and unable
to speak, ending abruptly, the stiff earth
bending a little. And what I took to be
birds darting in low shrubs.

You who do not remember
passage from the other world
I tell you I could speak again: whatever
returns from oblivion returns
to find a voice:

from the center of my life came
a great fountain, deep blue
shadows on azure seawater.

-Louise Gluck[10]

Gluck's poem also shares a key-word with the Book of Ruth: "return"; that is, the process from lack towards abundance (the middle three columns on our chart). "Whatever returns from oblivion, returns to find a voice," says Gluck, as if commenting upon all eleven instances of the Hebrew root for "return" in the first chapter of Ruth (see below). "Return" in Gluck's poem sheds light on the purpose of the root's repetition in

[10] Louise Gluck, The Wild Iris (Hopewell: The Ecco Press, 1992).

Ch.1 of Ruth. Beyond a negotiation of who is coming and going, we also notice Naomi's struggle "to return from oblivion to find a voice."

Naomi wrestles between a version of Gluck's suffering as "consciousness buried in the dark earth," and "returning" to find a great deep blue fountain at the center of her life. At times, Naomi's "other world" seems collapsed with this world. Thus we can read on two levels the following series of repetitions. Naomi *returns* (she returned, *vatashav* ותשב) from the country of Moab" (1:6), with her two daughters, she set out *to return* (*lashuv* לשוב) to Judah (1:7), then in 1:8 Naomi's tells the two to *turn back* (same Hebrew root as *return*, *shovnah* שבנה). But in 1:10, they respond to Naomi, insisting "*we will return*" (*nashuv* נשוב) with you. Again 1:11, Naomi tells the two women "*turn back* my daughters" (*shovnah* שבנה). She urges others to return back to life, but we do not know if she herself is willing to be hopeful in the future. Here, she also conveys the conviction that her presence will taint the possibility of others returning. In this vein, in 1:12, yet again she repeats "*turn back* my daughters" (*shovnah* שבנה). When Orpah reluctantly leaves, in 1:15 Naomi points out to Ruth, "see, your sister-in-law *has returned*" (*shavah* שבה). But in 1:16 Ruth says "don't urge me *to turn back*" (*lashuv* לשוב). In 1:21, to the women of Bethlehem who wonder if this is the Naomi they once knew, she explains, "I went away full but God *returned* me empty" (*heshivani* השיבני). The final two instances of the Hebrew root meaning "return" in the chapter are both found in 1:22. And Naomi *returned* (*vatashav* ותשב) from Moab, and she *returned* (*hashavah* השבה) with her daughter-in-law, Ruth. A great struggle of return has taken place, and it seems that, with the help of Ruth, the tiny bud of a new Wild Iris — a new Naomi — may yet bloom.

Whereas a vertical reading of the chart reveals content, a horizontal reading reveals process. Beginning our reading from left to right, the field of psychology alerts us that there is a column even to the left of "Lack." In order to assess the potential extent of damage that a given lack can cause, we need to try to understand the original attachment to the person or object. We will not delve into Attachment Theory here.[11] But we can at least ask in general terms: of what value was the item that is now lacking to Naomi, who is missing it? In other words, what *had been* Naomi's relationships to all the things she lost?

On this question, our text is virtually silent. Naomi's bitter despair does not indicate the exact nature of her losses. With the Lack called "Death of kin/Mourning", for example, was it Elimelech's or her sons' companionship that Naomi most felt lacking? Was losing him/them painful primarily because of the security he/they provided her? Was it a profound combination of both? In the language of Naomi's hope for her daughters-in-law we find an important clue. In 1:9 she declares, "May Adonai grant that each of you find security in the house of a husband." Security and its lack are the biblical author's primary focus. Although we are not able to answer all the attachment questions from the text, it is nonetheless an important step in a horizontal reading. Attachment is the "invisible" column to the left of Lack. We may not see it, but it always exists and is presupposed.

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[11] Attachment theory would ask, for example, about Naomi's own early attachments to her parents and the extent to which her parents' behavior towards her facilitated healthy, secure attachments to people and things. John Bowlby (1907-1990) initiated the foundational work in Attachment Theory. He wrote, for example, Attachment, Vol. 1 of Attachment and Loss and Separation, Anxiety & Anger, Vol. 2 of Attachment and Loss (London: Hogarth Press, 1971) Also see, for example, Robert Karen, "Becoming Attached," The Atlantic Monthly February (1990): 35-70. For more exploration of attachment themes, see *The Accordion of Relationships*, p. __.

Continuing our horizontal reading, we are now able to move across the chart towards the right. Although we will provide some suggested textual references for the progressions from each lack to its corresponding abundance,[12] one example will serve to illustrate in detail the notion of its process.

In locating a shift in the text from lack to abundance, we might ask if Naomi's movement in each row is inevitable. In other words, is there a sense in the development of the story that Naomi's losses must necessarily get resolved? From the sustained drama and suspense, and the roles other characters play in the resolution, the answer appears to be "no." Yet, a horizontal reading suggests that while the shift from lack to abundance is never inevitable, it *is* possible. As such, the Book of Ruth presents a tremendously hopeful view of human suffering (without being unrealistic). This is one of the major distinctions between the Book of Ruth and the Biblical account of another individual's suffering, Job, a distinction noted in several studies.[13]

A Sample of a Horizontal Reading: Famine to Food

We learn of the famine from the sixth word into the book: "...there was a famine in the land" (1:1). As we saw in the chart, the *problem* Naomi must identify is that she is hungry, and it can only be resolved by finding food. Where does she find relief from the famine? The fantastic irony lies in the name of Naomi's own hometown Bethlehem or *Beit lechem* בית לחם, meaning "House of Bread." And it is to this House of Bread, at the beginning of the barley harvest (1:22), that Naomi and Ruth eventually return.

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[12] Please see Appendix I- note also what transpires *between* the textual references.

[13] See, for example, Reuven Hammer, "Two Approaches to Suffering," Judaism 35,3 (1986): 300-305, and Nehama Aschkenasy, "Language as Female Empowerment in Ruth," Reading Ruth , ed's. Judith A. Kates and Gail Twersky Reimer (New York: Ballantine, 1994) 114.

There in Beit Lechem, House of Bread, food will become available once Ruth takes the initiative to go out to glean. Ruth's *chesed* חסד and bold initiative trigger Boaz' *chesed* חסד: first Ruth gets bread for Naomi, and only then does Boaz become intrigued by Ruth's sense of commitment and loyalty (possibly also her physical appeal, but it is not clear). Boaz insists that she be permitted to glean in his field and protected there (2:8-9) and invites her to a meal with him from which there is even food left over to take home to Naomi (2:14).

Perhaps the scene that most richly counters the image of famine is that intimate evening shared by Ruth and Boaz on the threshing floor. Threshing floors were flat, open surfaces where bushels of freshly cut grain were spread to dry. It was the picture of harvest success and fertility. Therefore, the provider/redeemer, the *go'el* גואל who lies down beside the grain pile as Boaz does (3:7), is the embodiment of abundance. That Boaz and Ruth lie *together* further implies potential for union, for child, for future.

As if this were not enough, the very next morning we witness an outpouring of grain — an additional example of an abundance of food. Boaz gives Ruth six measures of barley saying, " '...Hold out the shawl you are wearing.' She held it while he measured out six measures of barley, and he put it on her back'" (3:15). If we assume, as Patricia Karlin-Neumann has, that seven is the number of ultimate wholeness, then perhaps this last act of Boaz' foretells the imminent celebration of Naomi's return to wholeness.[14] She is only one measure away, and she seems to know it. In any case, Ruth presents Naomi with extra barley and the intimate story. Ruth adds that Boaz had not wanted her to go back to her mother-in-law "empty" (3:17). A cycle beginning with emptiness at 1:1, now

[14] Patricia Karlin-Neumann, "The Journey Toward Life," Reading Ruth ed's. Judith A. Kates and Gail Twersky Reimer (New York: Ballantine, 1994) 125-126.

culminates in fullness. But Boaz never actually said this, at least, it is not in our text. Rather, Ruth interprets his actions — and her own — as a response of abundance to Naomi's earlier devastating lack. Ruth has given her mother-in-law great hope. Naomi concludes her response by saying, "the man will not rest, but will settle the matter today" (3:18).

Gradually, Naomi returns from famine to food. With Ruth's help, she transforms her hunger into a healthy appetite for life. In order to do this she had to address simultaneously her ability to choose, to grieve, to regain both her sense of self and trust. It is apparent, therefore, how intertwined each lack is with another. By extension, this also suggests how particularly interconnected people become on the way towards abundance. Once Naomi is able to face her lacks directly, she could begin to refill her voids, *yet with differences*. Perhaps most importantly, Naomi needed help and support from other people around her. New interdependencies created new opportunities. Consequently, the cycle from lack to abundance is not completed by replacement, but by resolution.

Naomi's grief, at least according to our chart, was ten-fold. She had to grieve for each "lack" before it was possible for her to move *horizontally* further towards "abundance." The Book of Ruth does not represent its story in "real time." In reality, healing from such deep losses would take years. But we know that "Biblical time" often has its own clock.

Having engaged in a horizontal reading, one might think that the process is linear. Does the cycle end at chapter 4, where the Book of Ruth does? As our opening Midrash asserts, the rotating wheel of life is ever filling and ever emptying. The cycle repeats,

reaching every individual at some point, in some way. But the human cycle can never return to chapter 1. Indeed, for Naomi, life continues in a "Chapter 5" that does not appear in the Bible.

Perhaps along with Naomi, the Book of Ruth leaves us with a sort of checklist for wholeness, for fullness. If we are like Naomi, we too are capable of growing, feeling, healing, getting stuck, and dislodging again. From dependence we grow to independence. But we must not stop there. For if the Book of Ruth is clear about anything, it is that independence alone cannot lead to abundance. Only with the offering and accepting of *chesed* to and from each other, do we learn to live *interdependently*; that is, in community.[15] It seems that the rabbis were long ago able to read Ruth "horizontally," to see its inner processes. "Lack works like a wheel which comes round to all in the world," Midrash Ruth Rabbah states. It is "like the wheel of a pump which empties that which is full and fills that which is empty." Through this metaphor, the rabbis recognized the dynamic nature of moving *between* Lack and Abundance. However, they forgot to mention an additional dynamic to this process: every time a bucket is refilled, it changes.

[15] For more about the role of interdependence in the Book of Ruth, see *Private/Public*, p.___.

Connection to Shavuot

The rabbis ascribe no ethical mitzvah to Shavuot. However, explicated in rabbinic sources in connection with each festival, both Sukkot and Pesach boast, for example, the important ethical mitzvah of welcoming guests into our sukkot and to our seder tables. If we think carefully about Shavuot, though, it becomes clear that there is no shortage of ethical imperatives. For on this festival we read none other than the decalogue, *aseret hadibrot* עשרת הדברות — the 10 commandments! Just as Ruth chooses to be in covenant with the Jewish people and the Jewish God (Ruth 1:16), so do we renew our Jewish choices at Shavuot.

From both our vertical and horizontal readings of Ruth, however, we know that the book suggests that it takes the collective efforts of individuals — one with material means (Boaz) but also one with very little (Ruth) — to help refill Naomi's emptiness. As Rachel Adler gleans from the Book of Ruth, the following are "two gifts that even the destitute can bestow": *chesed* חסד and "blessing," or *beracha* ברכה.[16] As we have seen, *chesed* חסד in particular, is necessary for the journey between lack and abundance. Adler's description of *chesed* חסד goes far deeper than what "lovingkindness" might initially imply:

> Variously translated as goodness, lovingkindness, piety, fidelity, generosity, or righteousness, *chesed* is a feeling, a character trait, a mode of relation. Directed toward the other, it is, nevertheless, independent of the other's response. Like a plant adapted to drought, *chesed* can sustain itself when the other is too empty, too bitter, or too grieved to reciprocate. Subsisting on its stores of loving-kindnesses received and its hopes of mutuality reawakened,

[16] Rachel Adler, Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics (Philadelphia: JPS, 1998) 149.

patiently, tenaciously, it guesses and meets the other's loneliness and need.[17]

From our close reading of Ruth, our practice could be inspired by the sort of selfless giving that is *chesed* חסד. It is a forbidable challenge, indeed, to give without any expectation or need for something in return! Through Naomi's struggle we learn just how vital *chesed* חסד is. It can save lives, rebuild lives, and restore dignity. But it must not remain "out there" somewhere in someone else's time and space, or between the pages of books. What the book of Deuteronomy says of *Torah* applies equally to *chesed* חסד; both Torah and *chesed* חסד are the cornerstones of Shavuot.

> It is not too baffling for you, nor is it beyond reach. It is not in the heavens, that you should say, 'Who among us can go up to the heavens and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who among us can cross to the other side of the sea and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it? No, the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it.[18]

We are the vehicles for *chesed* חסד. With our acts of *chesed* חסד, each can aspire to earn the reputation of "soul restorer," or *meshiv nefesh* משיב נפש. This striking phrase is applied to Boaz in 4:15. A *meshiv nefesh* משיב נפש is someone who helps restore or return to someone his/her sense of self – through economic, spiritual, and emotional means. After all, who knows how many people's acts of *chesed* חסד ultimately helped our poet Louise Gluck to emerge with the triumphant words

from the center of my life came
a great fountain, deep blue
shadows on azure seawater.

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[17] Adler 149.
[18] Deuteronomy 30:11-14.

Appendix I: Suggested Texts Indicating the Shifts from Lack to Abundance

Lack[19]	Problem	How to Resolve	Who Facilitates Resolution	Abundance
Famine	*Lack of food*	*Procure sustenance*	*Moab/Judah/ Boaz*	*Food/Harvest*
Women lack power: 1:1[20]	Males make the choices	Women empowered to choose	Ruth/Boaz	Females also make choices: 1:6, 3:1-4 (Naomi's plan), 4:17 (the women name the child)
Homelessness: 1:1[21]	Not in spiritual/cultural center	Move	Moab/ Bethlehem	Return to land: 1:6-7
Death of Kin: 1:3, 5 and Mourning: not explicit in the text[22]	Loss	Feel/grieve/ renew life's meaning	Ruth/Boaz/ Women of Bethlehem/ Oved	Life/birth: 4:16-17 and Celebration: 3:18 (private), 4:11-12 (public)
Landlessness: 1:21[23]	No-thing-ness	Acquire	Boaz	Ownership: 4:8-4:10
Barrenness: Ch.1 (No children to Ruth or Orpah)	"Unproductive"	Create	Ruth, Boaz, God	Fertility:4:13
No Future: 1:11-1:13	Survival of community (and of individuals) threatened	Beseech help	Loving compassion, or *chesed* חסד of many, especially Ruth	Redeemer/ Future: 2:12, 4:10, 4:14-4:15
Shame/ Humiliation: 1:19b[24]	No persona/ foreignness/neg-ation of self (and	Proclaim worth	Boaz, Women of Bethlehem	Pride and respect: 2:9-11 (through Ruth)

[19] Note: the word "empty", itself, becomes a key word in chapters 1 and 3.
[20] See Trible 168.
[21] Trible 168.
[22] Karlin-Neumann 125. She states, "While Judaism has developed clear and helpful rituals to move us from [death and mourning back to life] and inform our understanding of mourning, the Book of Ruth offers a different kind of guidance. Naomi, the primary mourner, experiences most of her mourning outside of a communal context. She begins her mourning as an individual, and her path back to the community — to hope and to life — charts the emotional terrain that may accompany an overwhelming experience of loss." We also point to Naomi's finding her voice to express rebuke and indignation as part of her mourning process.
[23] See Avivah Zornberg, "The Concealed Alternative," Reading Ruth ed's. Judith A. Kates and Gail Twersky Reimer (New York: Ballantine, 1994) 67-68. Zornberg discusses the lack of property as something that "fills one up in the world," that they are not "extraneous things, something out there, apart from the self." She also cites the midrash in Ruth Rabbah that God first struck down Elimlech's *property* (their camels and their sheep), before taking their lives (Ruth Rabbah 2.10).

	group)			
Impassivity/no words of reproach: 1:13b, 1:20-21[25]	Preventing expression of anger/outrage	Rebuke/ Indignation	Women (as outlet), Ruth, Boaz	Blessings: 2:19 (Naomi blesses)
Unprotected (1:5, 1:9, 11-13)	No support	Find a redeemer, or *go'el* גואל	Ruth (with Boaz and God)	Security (2:1, 8-9, 20, 3:18, 4:14)

[24] See how Zornberg discusses Naomi's shame and humiliation by including the guilt incurred by suffering itself. Zornberg 68.

[25] See Nehama Aschkenasy, "Language as Female Empowerment in Ruth," Reading Ruth ed's. Judith A. Kates and Gail Twersky Reimer (New York: Ballantine, 1994) 114ff.

Book of Ruth: Applied Learning Pages

For an explanation on how to use the following pages, please refer to the Introduction: How to Use This Book, on Page 7.

What's the Question?
מה קשה לי? *Mah Kasheh Li?*

רות א:יט

וַתֵּלַכְנָה שְׁתֵּיהֶם עַד־בֹּאָנָה בֵּית לָחֶם וַיְהִי כְּבֹאָנָה בֵּית לֶחֶם וַתֵּהֹם
כָּל־הָעִיר עֲלֵיהֶן וַתֹּאמַרְנָה הֲזֹאת נָעֳמִי׃

Ruth 1:19

And the two went on until they reached Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem [house of bread], the whole city buzzed with excitement over them. The women said, "Can this be Naomi?"

In the box below, you will find a list of principles for interpreting Torah. For each category, ask yourself: does this verse present a difficulty, a *koshi* קשׁי? If yes, please describe the *koshi* קשׁי.

1. **Is there superfluous language?**
   The rabbis believe that every word in the Bible is there for a precise purpose. When a word seems repetitive and/or synonymous with another word, the rabbis always justify the existence of each word. In the quote above, do you think any words seem repetitive and/or synonymous?

2. **Are there grammatical curiosities?**
   The rabbis respond to sentences with unexpected or incorrect grammar, such as unusual word order, awkward prepositions, illogical sentences, inconsistent verb tenses, or unclear pronouns. In the quote above, is the grammar problematic?

3. **Are there theological or moral dilemmas?**
   The rabbis identify moments that raise questions about God's characteristics, God's role in the world, and how God is depicted in the Bible. They are also troubled by what seem to be breaches of moral or ethical conduct by God and/or human beings. In the quote above, do you find any theological or moral dilemmas?

4. **Are there gaps in the text?**
   The rabbis are also intrigued by what is not in the text. In other words, when feelings, time spans, physical descriptions, conversations, etc. are not written in the text, they often fill in the gaps. In the quote above, do you find anything missing from the text?

5. **Are there political or sociological issues?**
   The rabbis seek to render power dynamics among nations according to their worldview (e.g. putting Israel or Judaism at the center). Moreover, questions of ethnicity, gender, class, etc. prompt their investigation. In the quote above, are any of these kinds of issues relevant?

6. **Are there any other difficulties, *kushiot* קושיות?**

Write a creative response, a possible answer, to the *koshi* קשׁי that you find most interesting.

What's the Conversation?
מה קשה לנו? *Mah Kasheh Lanu?*

רות א:יט

וַתֵּלַכְנָה שְׁתֵּיהֶם עַד־בֹּאָנָה בֵּית לָחֶם וַיְהִי כְּבֹאָנָה בֵּית לֶחֶם וַתֶּהֱם כָּל־הָעִיר עֲלֵיהֶן וַתֹּאמַרְנָה הֲזֹאת נָעֳמִי׃

Ruth 1:19

And the two went on until they reached Bethlehem [house of bread]. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole city buzzed with excitement over them. The women said, "Can this be Naomi?"

On this page, several commentators respond to the following difficulty, or קשי:
Why did the people of the city ask "Is this Naomi?" when they seem to recognize her?

QUESTIONS

1. **How does each commentator resolve the קשי?**
2. **How do their conclusions differ from one another?**
3. **How do you resolve the קשי? Add your voice as a "21st Century Commentator."**

Ruth Rabbah: "הֲזֹאת נָעֳמִי" "CAN THIS BE NAOMI?" Is the one whose actions are beautiful and pleasant? In the past she used to travel in covered wagons (lavishly) but now she walks barefoot, and you say that this is Naomi? In the past she wore silk garments, and now she is dressed in rags, and you say that this is Naomi? In the past her face was rosy from food and drink, and now her face is sickly from hunger, and yet you say, *Can this be Naomi?*

Ruth Sohn: "הֲזֹאת נָעֳמִי" "CAN THIS BE NAOMI?" "Naomi, is it really you?" her friends cry when they see her. They hug her fiercely amid laughter and tears, touching the lines on her face with tenderness. "I am not the same woman as when I left," she answers, seeming to take no pleasure in their recognition and loving welcome. "They're gone. Elimelech, Machlon, Chilion, all gone. And no grandchildren" (Kates and Reimer 21).

21st Century Commentator:

Etan Levine: "הֲזֹאת נָעֳמִי" "CAN THIS BE NAOMI?" Whereas the Hebrew verb *vatehom* ותהום clearly signifies excitement, the Aramaic verb *v'argishu* וארגשו may signify either recognition or excitement, which Targum translates as such. Similarly, the reaction of the townsfolk (in both Hebrew and Aramaic) may be interrogative, viz. "Is this Naomi," or emphatic, viz. "This is Naomi." Either is in keeping with Naomi's rejoinder in the following verse, [And she said to them, do not call me Naomi; call me *Mara*, meaning "bitter"] and with the various legends concerning their reception in Bethlehem [see Ruth Rabbah as an example].

BIOGRAPHY & REFERENCE

Ruth Rabbah: 5th to 11th century midrash. The title derives its name from Rabbi Oshia Rabbah (the Great), to whom the work is partly attributed.
Etan Levine: Modern Jewish scholar who authored critical analysis on the Targum (Levine, 1973).
Ruth Sohn: Rabbi ordained from HUC-JIR, she currently teaches commentary, midrash and Talmud in Los Angeles
Targum: Literally means "translation," refers to the Aramaic paraphrased translation believed to have been composed during the Talmudic era (3rd - 5th century).
***Vatehom* ותהום:** "Buzzed", comes from the Hebrew root *hmh* המה, to be noisy or excited.

What's the Connection?
מה הקשר? *Mah HaKesher?*

Below you will find a poem that that relates to the theme of lack and abundance. It is one of many possible ways to encounter the theme in our world.

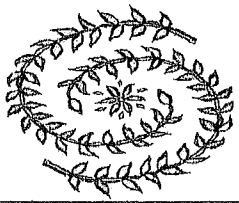
In the final collection of his career titled Open Close Open, the famous Israeli poet Yehudah Amichai wrote:

Straight from the fear of loss I plunged
into the fear of being lost.
I couldn't stay long enough between them
In the sweet little no man's land of my
everlasting passing days.
My hands are the hands of search and test,
hands of hope, hands of gloom,
always fumbling among papers on tables
or in drawers, in closets
and in my clothes which have seen their share of loss.
With hands that search for what is already lost,
I caress your face,
and with hands afraid of loss I hold you close
and like a blind man feel my way around your eyes,
your mouth,
wandering, wondering, wandering, wondering.
Because hands afraid of loss are the only hands for love.
Once I saw a violinist playing and I thought:
Between his right hand and his left —
only the violin, but what a between, what music!

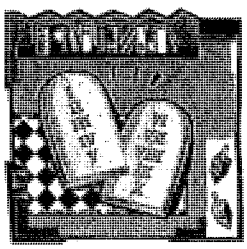
יָשָׁר מִן הַפַּחַד לְאַבֵּד קָפַצְתִּי לְפַחַד לֵאָבֵד בְּעַצְמִי.
לֹא יָכֹלְתִּי לִשְׁהוֹת דַּי זְמַן בֵּינֵיהֶם, בְּשֶׁטַח הַהֶפְקֵר
הַקָּטָן וְהַמָּתוֹק שֶׁל נֶצַח חַיַּי הַחוֹלְפִים.
יָדַי חִפּוּשׂ הֵן יָדַי, יָדַי בְּדִיקָה, יָדַי תִּקְוָה וְיָדַי יֵאוּשׁ
הַמְפַשְׁפְּשׁוֹת תָּמִיד עַל שֻׁלְחָנוֹת, בֵּין נְיָרוֹת וּבְמְגֵרוֹת
וּבַאֲרוֹנוֹת וּבְבִגְדֵי יוֹדְעֵי הָאָבְדָן.
בְּיָדַיִם הַמְחַפְּשׂוֹת אֶת אֲשֶׁר אָבַד אֲנִי מְלַטֵּף אֶת פָּנַיִךְ
וּבְיָדַיִם הַמְפֻחָדוֹת לְאַבֵּד אֲנִי מְחַבֵּק אוֹתָךְ
וְנוֹגֵעַ סָבִיב עֵינַיִךְ, סָבִיב פִּיךְ, כְּמוֹ עִוֵּר
כְּמוֹ לְמַדֵּד כְּמוֹ לְנַדֵּד, לְמַדֵּד וְלְנַדֵּד.
כִּי יָדַיִם מְפֻחָדוֹת לְאַבֵּד הֵן הַיָּדַיִם הַיְחִידוֹת לְאַהֲבָה.
רָאִיתִי פַּעַם כַּנָּר מְנַגֵּן וְחָשַׁבְתִּי שֶׁבֵּין
יָדוֹ הַיְמָנִית וְיָדוֹ הַשְּׂמָאלִית מַפְרִיד רַק הַכִּנּוֹר,
אֲבָל אֵיזֶה מֶרְחָק וְאֵיזוֹ גְּזִירָה נִפְלָאָה!

(Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfled, transl.,USA: Harcourt, 2000) 13.

מה הקשר לרות?
Mah HaKesher to Ruth:
What connections do you find between the poem above and the Book of Ruth?



מה הקשר לחג?
Mah HaKesher to Shavuot:
What connections do you find between the poem above and Shavuot?



Now is your chance to draw from your own experience and identify something you have encountered in your world (a conversation, an article in the newspaper, a story, a road trip, etc.) that connects to the Book of Ruth. How does your encounter shed light on the Book of Ruth and the holiday of Shavuot?

Introduction:

Scroll of Ecclesiastes

מגילת קהלת

What's Our Contribution?
מה קישוט החג? *Mah Kishut Hechag?*

A Rising Abundance

The excerpts below represent a cross-section of texts from the Book of Ruth about bread as life-sustaining symbol, about the process of preparing it (gleaning, reaping, gathering, carrying), and about how with acts of deep kindness, or *chesed* חֶסֶד, there was even abundance. Those who were hungry could now eat their fill, with some left over.

We can recall these important acts of providing for physical, emotional, and spiritual sustenance of the Book of Ruth by baking bread and bringing it to others for Shavuot. In fact, this act represents the very transformation from Lack to Abundance throughout the 49-day journey we call the *Omer*: from Pesach to Shavuot, from Egypt to Sinai, from no Torah to Torah, from Matzah to Leavened Bread. By Shavuot, the bread, like Ruth and Naomi, has risen from Lack to Abundance. As a permanent symbol of this beautiful giving, a Shavuot Bread Basket, or *sal lechem* **סַל לֶחֶם**, could become a meaningful way to enhance Shavuot's ritual repertoire. Either by making or decorating any kind of basket, the object could become a centerpiece for meals, which play a central role in the Book of Ruth. In order to distinguish the **סַל לֶחֶם** for this purpose, in particular, we suggest artistically integrating the blessing over bread:

Blessed are You, Adonai, Ruler of the universe,
Who causes bread to come forth from the earth.
Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha'olam
Hamotzi lechem min ha'aretz.
בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם הַמּוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ.

1:1 In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land; and a man of Bethlehem… (Beit**lechem** literally, "house of **bread**")

וַיְהִי בִּימֵי שְׁפֹּט הַשֹּׁפְטִים וַיְהִי רָעָב בָּאָרֶץ וַיֵּלֶךְ אִישׁ מִבֵּית **לֶחֶם**...

1:6 […for Naomi] had heard in the country of Moab that Adonai had taken note of [His] people and given them **bread** (food).

...כִּי שָׁמְעָה בִּשְׂדֵה מוֹאָב כִּי־פָקַד יְהוָה אֶת־עַמּוֹ לָתֵת לָהֶם **לָחֶם**.

2:2-2:9 (gleaning, reaping, and gathering in Elimelech's field)

2:14 At mealtime, Boaz said to [Ruth], "come over here and partake of the **bread**, and dip your morsel"…he handed her roasted grain, and **she ate her fill and had some left over**.

וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ בֹּעַז לְעֵת הָאֹכֶל גְּשִׁי הֵלֹם וְאָכַלְתְּ מִן־**הַלֶּחֶם** וְטָבַלְתְּ פִּתֵּךְ
בַּחֹמֶץ וַתֵּשֶׁב מִצַּד הַקֹּצְרִים וַיִּצְבָּט־לָהּ קָלִי **וַתֹּאכַל וַתְּשַׂבַּע וַתֹּתַר**.

2:17-2:19 She gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned — it was about an *ephah* of barley (2:18) — **and carried it back with her** to the town. When her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned, and when she had **left over after eating her fill** (2:19), her mother-in-law asked her, "Where did you glean today…Blessed be he who took such generous notice of you!"

[יז] וַתְּלַקֶּט בַּשָּׂדֶה עַד־עֶרֶב וַתַּחְבֹּט אֵת אֲשֶׁר־לִקָּטָה וַיְהִי כְּאֵיפָה שְׂעֹרִים׃
[יח] **וַתִּשָּׂא וַתָּבוֹא** הָעִיר וַתֵּרֶא חֲמוֹתָהּ אֵת אֲשֶׁר־לִקָּטָה וַתּוֹצֵא
וַתִּתֶּן־לָהּ אֵת **אֲשֶׁר־הוֹתְרָה מִשָּׂבְעָהּ**׃ [יט] וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ חֲמוֹתָהּ אֵיפֹה
לָקַטְתְּ הַיּוֹם וְאָנָה עָשִׂית יְהִי מַכִּירֵךְ בָּרוּךְ

3:15 And [Boaz] said [to Ruth]: "Hold out the shawl you are wearing." **She held it** while he measured out six measures of barley, and he **put it on her back**…

וַיֹּאמֶר הָבִי הַמִּטְפַּחַת אֲשֶׁר־עָלַיִךְ וְאֶחֱזִי־בָהּ **וַתֹּאחֶז בָּהּ** וַיָּמָד
שֵׁשׁ־שְׂעֹרִים **וַיָּשֶׁת עָלֶיהָ** ...

Kohelet does not tell a story. Rather than narrative, the book presents a panoply of "scientific-like" observations to express its conflicted worldview. The author (whom scholars sometimes refer to as the teacher, preacher, or even professor) struggles to make meaning as he reflects upon the vagaries of life's existence. "Mist," or *hevel* הבל, is frequently the metaphor he uses to lament (or perhaps affirm) this reality. Everything evaporates, Kohelet proclaims. It is possible that he ultimately exhorts his readers to enjoy life to its potential. But we never determine with any degree of certitude whether this optimistic conclusion actually depicts the "professor's" ultimate existential orientation, or whether it simply represents fleeting moments of clarity in his on-going struggle with the fact of *hevel* הבל. Either way, the scroll is an "ethical will" of sorts, a legacy of values and convictions, hopes and warnings that have been recorded and passed down through the generations.

Literary Aspects

The literary tone and style of theBook of Kohelet are relatively clear. Even though it was likely composed around the 3rd century B.C.E., the book belongs to a genre known as Wisdom Literature that dates back to approximately 3000 B.C.E. Mesopotamian wisdom writing originated with the Sumerians. Human experiences and character were portrayed in adages, parables, and anecdotes.[1] The Wisdom books in the Hebrew Bible include Proverbs, Job and, our present focus, Kohelet. Some major Jewish examples of Wisdom books outside of the Hebrew canon (i.e. now also included Roman Catholic

[1] "Wisdom Literature," Encyclopedia Judaica CD ROM edition.

Bibles) include the following: the Wisdom of Ben Sira, the Wisdom of Solomon, and Tobit.

The Wisdom tradition emphasizes a way of thinking and an attitude to life that focus on experience, reasoning, morality, and other universal concerns of human beings. It is interested in the individual and his/her social relationships rather than in the distinctive national religion and its cult. Although in this biblical book Kohelet claims to be a king, we label and regard him as *sage*. Instead of appealing to sacred tradition, Kohelet, like Wisdom Literature in general, appeals to experience as a source of knowledge, not to spread divine revelation. The author of Kohelet points to events which commonly and empirically occur in the context of our own lives and experiences. Consider some of those famous "times" listed in chapter 3. There are, for example, times for planting and uprooting, tearing down and building up, weeping and laughing, wailing and dancing, seeking and losing, silence and speaking, war and peace. This mode of inquiry which features reason that is based on empirical evidence rather than on divine revelation, certainly marks Kohelet. Contemporary biblical scholar Michael Fox elucidates this point in the following way:

> Kohelet's epistemology is essentially (though not consistently) empirical. His procedure is to deliberately seek experience as his primary source of knowledge and to use experiential argumentation in testifying for his claims.[2]

That Kohelet belongs to the genre of Wisdom Literature is apparent from the very beginning of the book. In verses 1:5-7, the author cites empirical evidence from the natural world to describe human reality as fleeting, ephemeral, mist, *hevel* הבל. A few

[2] Roland Murphy, "Qoheleth The Skeptic?" The Tree of Life (New York: Doubleday, 1990) 84.

verses later, he employs observations of cosmic and natural phenomena that come and go (the sun, wind, and rivers) as "prooftexts" for his conclusion. It is endless repetition that seems to bother him existentially.

This conclusion, like many in the book, is phrased as a pithy saying, "There is no remembrance of former times, also there is no remembrance for them of latter times, among those who come after" (1:11).[3] The use of pithy formulations in Kohelet parallels the litany of sayings found in the book of Proverbs, though with the following significant exception: Proverbs accepts a "conventional" worldview. But Kohelet challenges the accepted order. Indeed, it was almost certainly due to Kohelet's lack of connection to tradition that the final three verses of the book bearing reference both to God and the commandments (12:12-12:14) were later added. Otherwise the Book of Kohelet does not rely upon divine revelation to prove theories.

Another mode of describing the personality of a biblical book is to examine its placement in the larger canonical setting. Doing so can sometimes help unlock what editors felt were the main message(s) of the book. In non-Jewish Biblical versions such as the New Revised Study Bible (NRSV) or King James Version (KJV), Kohelet is placed between Proverbs and Song of Songs. In this location, contemporary Biblical scholar Phyllis Trible suggests, Kohelet "temper[s] assured optimism and correct[s]

[3] At the end of the book, we find that the narrator was conscious of this very mode: "A further word: Because Kohelet was a sage...He listened to and tested the soundness of many maxims. Kohelet sought to discover useful sayings and recorded genuninely truthful sayings. The sayings of the wise are like goads, like nails fixed in and prodding sticks..." (12:9-11)

deficient theology," and coming before the playful love poetry of Song of Songs, Kohelet's "somber tone is lightened and its joyous notes are expanded."[4]

In contrast, in the Hebrew Bible, Kohelet is now placed in its liturgical order, according to the autumn season in which it is read, during the harvest festival of Sukkot, as follows:

SPRING	Song of Songs→	Ruth→	Lamentations→	**Ecclesiastes→**	Esther	WINTER
	(Pesach)	(Shavuot)	(Tisha B'Av)	**(Sukkot)**	(Purim)	

It is found after Lamentations (read on Tisha B'av in the summer, which commemorates major destructions in Jewish history) and before Esther (read during Purim in late winter). As such, contemporary biblical scholar James Crenshaw asserts that the tragic book of Lamentations provides "mounting evidence that injustice prevails."[5] Religious and intellectual crisis emerged from the fact that it was no longer clear whether or not God turned benevolently towards humans.[6] Kohelet may function as a response to such an existential crisis.

In terms of living this order, Kohelet places the individual and the community at a stage in their spiritual journey that is past immediate crisis, but now surveying the landscape of life, asking, What does it all mean?[7] The journey will eventually move upwards towards the playful celebration of Esther. Consequently, Kohelet's placement

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[4] Phyllis Trible, "Ecclesiastes," The Books of the Bible Ed. Bernhard W. Anderson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1989) 238.
[5] James Crenshaw, "Ecclesiastes," Anchor Bible Dictionary, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 276.
[6] Crenshaw 276.
[7] From lecture by contemporary Biblical scholar, Tamara Eskenazi, Bible class lecture, March 25, 1999. See her forthcoming work, The Bible and the Seasons of our Life.

can be understood as the "middle point amidst an upward swing from tragedy to celebration."[8]

Still, the meaning of Kohelet in this liturgical setting is unclear. Trible cites the fact that while some scholars hold that the book "injects a melancholy note into a festive occasion," others maintain that it "sounds joy for a happy feast."[9] Sukkot is this happy feast, often referred to as "the season of our joy." Determining this depends upon how one understands the overall message of the Book of Kohelet and in particular, of the elusive word *hevel* הבל, which the author asserts everything to be.

The precise "shape" of the Book of Kohelet itself- that is, the internal logic of how the work is organized- is disputed among scholars. Structurally, the clearest aspect of the book is its outer frame including the introduction and the two concluding epilogues, which enclose the book in a kind of envelope.[10] James Crenshaw further cites various attempts to discern the book's structure. Perhaps the most elaborate speculation is that the book adopts the Greek rhetorical device known as palindrome (such as the word "madam", which can be read the same way forwards or backwards). As such, the book would bear a complete balancing of material so that one could read forward or backward and still achieve the same result![11] Such a reading does seem appropriate in light of Kohelet's descriptions of wearisome cycles and the ephemerality of life, coming and going, always achieving that same result, *hevel* הבל. Still, attempts to discern the book's structure remain inconclusive,[12] and Trible's conclusion seems appropriate once

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[8] Eskenazi *lecture.*
[9] Trible 238.
[10] Crenshaw "Ecclesiastes" 273.
[11] James Crenshaw, Ecclesiastes: A Commentary (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987) 38-39.
[12] Crenshaw "Ecclesiastes" 274 .

more. "Again, the sage confounds; indeterminate meaning prevails." As such, the book's structure — or lack of it — corresponds to important messages of the book.

Historical Aspects

We can also explore the social, philosophical world from which the book likely emerged. Most commentators on the Book of Kohelet agree that it is quite difficult to situate it in a particular time and place. Biblical scholars have attempted to discern the book's historical setting by its language. Crenshaw notes that the book "employs an Aramaizing Hebrew, a language with strong Mishnaic characteristics" which places the book alongside other late canonical books such as Daniel, Esther and Song of Songs.[13] Early Greek (the Septuagint) and Latin (the Vulgate) translations of the Bible suggest that the Hebrew text has sustained little corruption and has reached us basically in its original form.[14]

Specific language and linguistic style suggests that the book is relatively late by biblical standards. This is assessed by the use of the rhetorical question, mainly a post-exilic style; the use of participles accompanying personal pronouns; and the high frequency of the relative pronoun *sheh* שׁ.[15] Also, words are borrowed from Persian, such as *pardesim* פרדסים ("groves" 2:5) and *pitgam* פתגם ("legal sentence" 8:11). Persian had barely begun to influence biblical Hebrew by the middle of the sixth century B.C.E.

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[13] Crenshaw Ecclesiastes 49.
[14] William Anderson, Qohelet and its Pessimistic Theology: Hermeneutical Struggles in Wisdom Literature (Lewiston: Mellen Biblical Press, 1997) 7.
[15] Crenshaw Ecclesiastes 50.

Scholars also point to the albeit limited political information in the book which points to a period prior to the Maccabean revolt.[16] Gordis[17] and Hertzberg date the book prior to 200 B.C.E, while Crenshaw narrows the date to most likely between 250 and 225 B.C.E.[18]

It is important to note that the author describes himself as "king in Jerusalem"(1:12). In the introductory sentence he is designated as "Kohelet, son of David, king in Jerusalem" (1:1). "Son" could mean someone from any generation belonging to the house of David, not limited to Solomon's. However, there is no known descendant of David named *Kohelet* anywhere else in ancient sources. Traditionally, though, Kohelet is identified with Solomon, perhaps contributing to its eligibility for the Hebrew canon. However, from an academic and linguistic point of view, Solomonic authorship is ruled out. Since the Hebrew of the book represents the latest stage in the development of biblical Hebrew, borrowing many words from Aramaic,[19] it cannot be dated before the seventh century B.C.E.[20]

Crenshaw summarizes some important conclusions. "The meager political data that scholars have detected in the book point to a period prior to the Maccabean revolt in 164 B.C.E.,"[21] so Kohelet does not wrestle with political issues ripping the country apart during the time of the Maccabean revolt. In fact, there is nothing distinctly Jewish in the Book of Kohelet. Some commentators, such as Gordis, contend that Kohelet belonged to the privileged class. Evidence in the book suggests that his students were also well to do,

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[16] "Ecclesiastes," Encyclopedia Judaica, 1973 ed.
[17] Robert Gordis, Koheleth: The Man and His World (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1951).
[18] Crenshaw Ecclesiastes 50.
[19] See for example the verb meaning attack or triumph over, in 4:12 and 6:10.

enabling them to "act on their teacher's advice about wearing fine clothes and anointing themselves with expensive oils."[22]

Given the probable date of the book, Kohelet may also have been influenced by the various schools of Hellenistic thought; a discourse alive by the 4th century B.C.E. In particular, Kohelet seems to wrestle with the philosophical assumptions of the Greek philosophies Cynics, Epicureans, and Stoics. Cynics advocated the doctrines that virtue is the only good, and that the essence of virtue is self-control. Both Epicureans and Stoics "offered a way of life leading to complete inward detachment, but with an emphasis on overcoming anxiety and the fear of death, fate, and injurious divine intervention."[23] Part of Kohelet's ambiguity stems from his acceptance of aspects of these teachings in some places, but rejection of them in others.

Similarly, Kohelet might also have been influenced by the Hellenistic/Greek worldview of chance. Some argue that Kohelet struck a compromise, expanding Hebrew wisdom with input from Greek thinkers, especially Homer, Sophocles, Plato, Aristotle, and other contemporary philosophers.[24] But Kohelet's parallels also extend milennia beyond the time and culture of Hellenism. Commentators are sure of Kohelet's thematic similarities with late Egyptian texts. Kohelet's references to the hiddenness of God and divine determination of fate, coupled with his use of the phrase "house of eternity" echoes ancient Egyptian texts as the Papyrus Insinger and The Instructions of "Onkhsheshonqy." At the same time, Kohelet also appears to have been influenced by the

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[20] "Ecclesiastes," Encyclopedia Judaica, 1973 ed.
[21] Crenshaw Ecclesiastes 50.
[22] Ecclesiastes 7:8, "Let your garments always be white, and your head never lack oil."
[23] Robert M. Seltzer, Jewish People, Jewish Thought (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc, 1980) 200.

very ancient Mesopotamian Gilgamesh Epic; both texts deal with themes of death, life's ephemeral nature, the importance of one's name, and the memory of a person after death.[25]

Overall, the book might be understood as a sort of "self help" or "how to" book for existential angst of Late Antiquity.

[24]Crenshaw citing Lohfink Ecclesiastes 51.
[25] Crenshaw Ecclesiastes 51.

Introduction to Sukkot

The Book of Kohelet is read during the festival of Sukkot. Whereas the other two of the three major pilgrimmage festivals – Pesach and Shavuot – occur in spring and summer, Sukkot comes in autumn. This seasonal placement becomes extremely significant to the spiritual, historical, agricultural, and religious aspects of the holiday.

In the Jewish calendar, Sukkot commences on the 15th of Tishrei, and lasts for eight days, as follows:[26]

Chag: **Days 1 & 2**
Chol Ha'moed: **Days 3,4,5,6,7**
Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah: **Day 8** (for Reform Jews and Jews in Israel)
Simchat Torah: **The following day** (Conservative and Orthodox Jews outside Israel)

A great part of Sukkot's spiritual significance lies in its placement in the rhythm of Jewish year; specifically as a culmination to the highly reflective period including Selichot, Rosh Hashanah, the 10 Days of Repentance, and of course, Yom Kippur. Having engaged in the year's most important re-examination of ourselves and reconciliation with God, with the people in our lives, we hope to have returned to our true path. Sukkot celebrates the relief and achievement of the preceding days of difficult spiritual and religious work. We have tried to reflect upon the core meanings of our lives. Therefore, one of the most common explanations for why we read the Scroll of Kohelet during Sukkot (traditionally on the Shabbat of Chol Ha'moed) is for its message that worldly possessions are transitory. As such, the act of eating, drinking, and celebrating outdoors in a sukkah — with its open roof and precarious nature — may remind us

[26] The first two of these days bear the technical status of *chag* חג, which affects what level of work and from which sort of regular activites one may refrain; which is in turn determined by the ideology of one's Jewish

simultaneously of our dependence upon and gratitude for God's protection. This is also how Sukkot earns another of its names, "Season of our Joy," or "Z'*man Simchateinu* זמן שמחתינו."

The historical aspect of the festival is related to the most common name for the holiday which is *Sukkot* סוכות, meaning booths or huts, and is the source for the English name, "Feast of Tabernacles." Indeed, the key ritual characteristic of the festival is building a sukkah, and dwelling in it. Sukkot is also counted as the third pilgrimmage festival. We began with the Exodus from Egypt (Pesach) and then received the Torah at Sinai (Shavuot), and Sukkot marks the period of wandering in the desert. The source of the *mitzvah* to build a sukkah and then celebrate in it lies in Leviticus 23:42-43 which reads, "You shall live in booths seven days in order that the future generations may know that I made the Israelite people live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt." Another *mitzvah* of Sukkot is the welcoming of guests, *hachnasat orechim* הכנסת אורחים. In fact, there is a kabbalistic ceremony known as *ushpizin* אשפיזין, where the patriarchs and matriarchs are invited to be our spiritual companions in the Sukkah.

Sukkot's agricultural origins and ritual aspects are better attested than any other commemoration of a biblical harvest. In Leviticus 23:29, we encounter a Sukkot with agricultural themes, where we read "When you have gathered in the yield of your land, you shall observe the festival of Adonai seven days." Also related to the agricultural theme is the identification of the four species which are as follows: citron, or *etrog*

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practice. The next 5 days of the festival have the status of intermediate days known as *chol ha'moed* חול המועד, during which most regular activities occur, though still retain some indications of the festival.

אתרוג; palm, or *lulav* לולב; myrtle, or *hadas* הדס, and willow, or *aravah* ערבה. They are based on the rabbinic interpretation of Leviticus 23:40, "On the first day you shall take the product of the *hadar* הדר trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook," with the *etrog* אתרוג separate from these three. On this harvest celebration, it is a mitzvah to gather the Four Species and shake them, as we rejoice and give thanks for the bounty of our efforts. For all these levels of gleaning, Sukkot is also called the "Festival of Gathering," or "C*hag Ha'asif* חג האסיף."

Please refer to the festivals bibliography on page 340 where you will discover a vast array of classical and modern midrashim and commentaries about all aspects — practices, beliefs, and history — of the three pilgrimmage festivals, Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot.

The Book of Kohelet

Chapter 1

1 The words of Koheleth son of David, king in Jerusalem. 2 Utter futility! – said Koheleth – Utter futility! All is futile! 3 What real value is there for humanity in all the gains it makes beneath the sun? 4 One generation goes, another comes, but the earth remains the same forever. 5 The sun rises, and the sun sets – and glides back to where it rises. 6 Southward blowing, turning northward, ever turning blows the wind; on its rounds the wind returns. 7 All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full; to the place [from] which they flow the streams flow back again. 8 All such things are wearisome: no man can ever state them; the eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear enough of hearing. 9 Only that shall happen which has happened, only that occur which has occurred; there is nothing new beneath the sun! 10 Sometimes there is a phenomenon of which they say, "Look, this one is new!" – it occurred long since, in ages that went by before us. 11 The earlier ones are not remembered; so too those that will occur later will no more be remembered than those that will occur at the very end. 12 I, Koheleth, was king in Jerusalem over Israel. 13 I set my mind to study and to probe with wisdom all that happens under the sun – an unhappy business, that, which God gave humanity to be concerned with! 14 I observed all the happenings beneath the sun, and I found that all is futile and pursuit of wind: a twisted thing that cannot be made straight, a lack that cannot be made good. 16 I said to myself: "Here I have grown richer and wiser than any that ruled before me over Jerusalem, and my mind has zealously absorbed wisdom and learning." 17 And so I set my mind to appraise wisdom and to appraise madness and folly. And I learned – that this too was pursuit of wind: 18 For as wisdom grows, vexation grows; to increase learning is to increase heartache.

Chapter 2

1 I said to myself, "Come, I will treat you to merriment. Taste mirth!" That too, I found, was futile. 2 Of revelry I said, "It's mad!" Of merriment, "What good is that?" 3 I ventured to tempt my flesh with wine, and to grasp folly, while letting my mind direct with wisdom, to the end that I might learn which of the two was better for people to practice in their few days of life under heaven. 4 I multiplied my possessions. I built myself houses and I planted vineyards. 5 I laid out gardens and groves, in which I planted every kind of fruit tree. 6 I constructed pools of water, enough to irrigate a forest shooting up with trees. 7 I bought male and female slaves, and I acquired stewards. I also acquired more cattle, both herds and flocks, than all who were before me in Jerusalem. 8 I further amassed silver and gold and treasures of kings and provinces; and I got myself male and female singers, as well as the luxuries of commoners – coffers and coffers of them. 9 Thus, I gained more wealth than anyone before me in Jerusalem. In addition, my wisdom remained with me: 10 I withheld from my eyes nothing they asked for, and denied myself no enjoyment; rather, I got enjoyment out of all my wealth. And that was all I got out of my wealth. 11 Then my thoughts turned to all the fortune my hands had built up, to the wealth I had acquired and won – and oh, it was all futile and pursuit of wind; there was no real value under the sun! 12 For what will the person be like who will succeed the one who is ruling over what was built up long ago? My thoughts also turned to appraising wisdom and madness and folly. 13 I found that wisdom is superior to folly as light is superior to darkness; 14 The wise

man has eyes in his head, whereas a fool walks in darkness but I also realized that the same fate awaits them both. 15 So I reflected: "The fate of the fool is also destined for me; to what advantage, then, have I been wise?" And I came to the conclusion that that too was futile, 16 because the wise one, just like the fool, is not remembered forever; for, as the succeeding days roll by, both are forgotten. Alas, the wise one dies, just like the fool! 17 And so I loathed life. For I was distressed by all that goes on under the sun, because everything is futile and pursuit of wind. 18 So, too, I loathed all the wealth that I was gaining under the sun. For I shall leave it to the one who will succeed me – 19 and who knows whether this person will be wise or foolish? – and control all the wealth that I gained by toil and wisdom under the sun. That too is futile. 20 And so I came to view with despair all the gains I had made under the sun. 21 For sometimes one whose fortune was made with wisdom, knowledge, and skill must hand it on to be the portion of somebody who did not toil for it. That too is futile, and a grave evil. 22 For what does a person get for all the toiling and worrying done under the sun? 23 All the days a person's thoughts are grief and heartache, and even at night the mind has no respite. That too is futile! 24 There is nothing worthwhile for humanity but to eat and drink and afford enjoyment with means. And even that, I noted, comes from God. 25 For who eats and who enjoys but myself? 26 To the person, namely, who pleases God who has given the wisdom and shrewdness to enjoy oneself; and to the one who displeases, God has given the urge to gather and amass – only for handing on to one who is pleasing to God. That too is futile and pursuit of wind.

Chapter 3

1 A season is set for everything, a time for every experience under heaven: 2 a time for being born and a time for dying, a time for planting and a time for uprooting the planted; 3 a time for slaying and a time for healing, a time for tearing down and a time for building up; 4 a time for weeping and a time for laughing, a time for wailing and a time for dancing; 5 A time for throwing stones and a time for gathering stones, a time for embracing and a time for shunning embraces; 6 a time for seeking and a time for losing, a time for keeping and a time for discarding; 7 a time for ripping and a time for sewing, a time for silence and a time for speaking; 8 a time for loving and a time for hating; a time for war and a time for peace. 9 What value, then, can the person of affairs get from what is earned? I have observed the business that God gave humanity to be concerned with: 11 God brings everything to pass precisely at its time; God also puts eternity in their mind, but without humanity ever guessing, from first to last, all the things that God brings to pass. 12 Thus I realized that the only worthwhile thing there is for them is to enjoy themselves and do what is good in their lifetime; 13 also, that whenever one does eat and drink and get enjoyment out of all of one's wealth, it is a gift of God. 14 I realized, too, that whatever God has brought to pass will recur evermore: nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it – and God has brought to pass that people revere God. 15 What is occurring occurred long since, and what is to occur occurred long since: and God seeks the pursued. 16 And, indeed, I have observed under the sun: alongside justice there is wickedness, alongside righteousness there is wickedness. 17 I mused: "God will doom both righteous and wicked, for there is a time for every experience and for every happening." 18 So I decided, as regards humanity, to dissociate them [from] the divine beings and to face the fact that they are beasts. 19 For in respect of the fate of humanity and the fate of beast, they have one and the same fate: as the one dies so dies the other, and both have the same lifebreath; humanity has no superiority over beast, since both amount to nothing. 20 Both go to the same place; both came from dust and both return to dust. 21 Who knows if a person's lifebreath does rise upward and if

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a beast's breath does sink down into the earth? 22 I saw that there is nothing better for a person than to enjoy possessions, since that is a person's portion. For who can enable a person to see what will happen afterward?

Chapter Four

1 I further observed all the oppression that goes on under the sun: the tears of the oppressed, with none to comfort them; and the power of their oppressors – with none to comfort them. 2 Then I accounted those who died long since more fortunate than those who are still living; 3 and happier than either are those who have not yet come into being and have never witnessed the miseries that go on under the sun. 4 I have also noted that all labor and skillful enterprise come from men's envy of each other – another futility and pursuit of wind! 5 [True,] the fool folds his hands together and has to eat his own flesh. 6 [But no less truly,] better is a handful of gratification than two fistfuls of labor which is pursuit of wind. 7 And I have noted this further futility under the sun: 8 the case of one who is alone, with no companion, who has neither son nor brother; yet amasses wealth without limit, and whose eye is never sated with riches. For whom, now, is the one amassing it while denying himself enjoyment? That too is a futility and an unhappy business. 9 Two are better off than one, in that they have greater benefit from their earnings. 10 For should they fall, one can raise the other; but woe betide the one who is alone and falls with no companion to raise him! 11 Further, when two lie together they are warm; but how can one who is alone get warm? 12 Also, if one attacks, two can stand up to the attacker. A threefold cord is not readily broken! 13 Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer has the sense to heed warnings. 14 For the former can emerge from a dungeon to become king; while the latter, even if born to kingship, can become a pauper. 15 [However,] I reflected about all the living who walk under the sun with that youthful successor who steps into his place. 16 Unnumbered are the multitudes of all those who preceded them; and later generations will not acclaim the person either. For that too is futile and pursuit of wind. 17 Be not overeager to go to the House of God: more acceptable is obedience than the offering of fools, for they know nothing [but] to do wrong.

Chapter 5

1 Keep your mouth from being rash, and let not your throat be quick to bring forth speech before God. For God is in heaven and you are on earth; that is why your words should be few. 2 Just as dreams come with much brooding, so does foolish utterance come with much speech. 3 When you make a vow to God, do not delay to fulfill it. For God has no pleasure in fools; what you vow, fulfill. 4 It is better not to vow at all than to vow and not fulfill. 5 Don't let your mouth bring you into disfavor, and don't plead before the messenger that it was an error, but fear God; else God may be angered by your talk and destroy your possessions. 6 For much dreaming leads to futility and to superfluous talk. 7 If you see in a province oppression of the poor and suppression of right and justice, don't wonder at the fact; for one high official is protected by a higher one, and both of them by still higher ones. 8 Thus the greatest advantage in all the land is humanity's: it controls a field that is cultivated. 9 A lover of money never has his fill of money, nor a lover of wealth her fill of income. That too is futile. 10 As one substance increases, so do those who consume it; what, then, does the success of its owner amount to but feasting one's eyes? 11 A worker's sleep is sweet, whether she has much or little to eat; but the rich man's abundance doesn't let him sleep. 12 Here is a grave evil I have observed under the sun: riches

hoarded by their owner to his misfortune, 13 in that those riches are lost in some unlucky venture; and if he begets a son, he has nothing in hand. 14 Another grave evil is this: one must depart just as one came. As a person came out of the mother's womb, so must a person depart at last, naked as the person came. A Person can take no wealth with him. 15 So what is the good of toiling for the wind? 16 Besides, all the days the person eats in darkness, with much vexation and grief and anger. 17 Only this, I have found, is a real good: that one should eat and drink and get pleasure with all the gains one makes under the sun, during the numbered days of life that God has given; for that is humanity's portion. 18 Also, whenever a person is given riches and property by God, and is also permitted by God to enjoy them and to take the portion and get pleasure for one's gains – that is a gift of God. 19 For [humanity] will not brood much over the days of life, because God keeps humanity busy enjoying itself.

Chapter 6

1 There is an evil I have observed under the sun, and a grave one it is for humanity: 2 that God sometimes grants a man riches, property, and wealth, so that he does not want for anything his appetite may crave, but God does not permit him to enjoy it; instead, a stranger will enjoy it. That is futility and a grievous ill. 3 Even if a man should beget a hundred children and live many years – no matter how many the days of his years may come to, if his gullet is not sated through his wealth, I say: the stillbirth, though it was not even accorded a burial, is more fortunate than he. 4 Though it comes into futility and departs into darkness, and its very name is covered with darkness, 5 though it has never seen or experienced the sun, it is better off than he – 6 yes, even if the other lived a thousand years twice over but never had his fill of enjoyment! For are not both of them bound for the same place! 7 All of humanity's earning is for the sake of its mouth, yet its gullet is not sated. 8 What advantage then has the wise person over the fool, what advantage has the pauper who knows how to get on in life? 9 Is the feasting of the eyes more important than the pursuit of desire? That, too, is futility and pursuit of wind. 10 Whatever happens, it was designated long ago and it was known that it would happen; as for humanity, it cannot contend with what is stronger. 11 Often, much talk means much futility. How does it benefit humanity! 12 Who can possibly know what is best for humanity to do in life – the few days of fleeting life! For who can tell humanity what the future holds for him under the sun?

Chapter 7

1 A good name is better than fragrant oil, and the day of death than the day of birth. 2 It is better to go to a house of mourning than to a house of feasting; for that is the end of every person, and a living one should take it to heart. 3 Vexation is better than revelry; for though the face be sad, the heart may be glad. 4 The wise are drawn to a house of mourning, and fools to a house of merrymaking. 5 It is better to listen to a wise man's reproof than to listen to the praise of fools. 6 For the levity of the fool is like the crackling of nettles under a kettle. But that too is illusory; 7 for cheating may rob the wise one of reason and destroy the prudence of the cautious. 8 The end of a matter is better than the beginning of it. Better a patient spirit than a haughty spirit. 9 Don't let your spirit be quickly vexed, for vexation abides in the breasts of fools. 10 Don't say, "How has it happened that former times were better than these?" For it is not wise of you to ask that question. 11 Wisdom is as good as a patrimony, and even better, for those who behold the sun. 12 For to be in the shelter of wisdom is to be also in the shelter of money, and the advantage of intelligence is that wisdom preserves the life of the person who possesses it. 13 I consider God's doing! Who can straighten what God has twisted? 14 So in a time of good

fortune enjoy the good fortune; and in a time of misfortune, reflect: the one no less than the other was God's doing; consequently, humanity may find no fault with God. 15 In my own brief span of life, I have seen both these things: sometimes a good person perishes in spite of his goodness, and sometimes a wicked one endures in spite of her wickedness. 16 So don't overdo goodness and don't act the wise one to excess, or you may be dumfounded. 17 Don't overdo wickedness and don't be a fool, or you may die before your time. 18 It is best that you grasp the one without letting go of the other, for one who fears God will do his duty by both. 19 Wisdom is more of a stronghold to a wise person than ten magnates that a city may contain. 20 For there is not one good person on earth who does what is best and doesn't err. 21 Finally, don't pay attention to everything that is said, so that you may not hear your slave reviling you; 22 for well you remember the many times that you yourself have reviled others. 23 All this I tested with wisdom. I thought I could fathom it, but it eludes me. 24 [The secret of] what happens is elusive and deep, deep down; who can discover it? 25 I put my mind to studying, exploring, and seeking wisdom and the reason of things, and to studying wickedness, stupidity, madness, and folly. 26 Now, I find woman more bitter than death; she is all traps, her hands are fetters and her heart is snares. He who is pleasing to God escapes her, and he who is displeasing is caught by her. 27 See, this is what I found, said Koheleth, item by item in my search for the reason of things. 28 As for what I sought further but did not find, I found only one human being in a thousand, and the one I found among so many was never a woman. 29 But, see, this I did find: God made humanity plain, but they have engaged in too much reasoning.

Chapter 8

1 Who is like the wise person, and who knows the meaning of the adage: "A humanity's wisdom lights up the face, so that deep discontent is dissembled"? 2 I do! "Obey the king's orders – and don't rush into uttering an oath by God." 3 Leave his presence; do not tarry in a dangerous situation, for he can do anything he pleases; 4 inasmuch as a king's command is authoritative, and none can say to him, "What are you doing?" 5 One who obeys orders will not suffer from the dangerous situation. A wise person, however, will bear in mind that there is a time of doom. 6 For there is a time for every experience, including the doom; for humanity's calamity overwhelms him. 7 lndeed, one does not know what is to happen; even when it is on the point of happening, who can tell? 8 Humanity has no authority over the lifebreath – to hold back the lifebreath; there is no authority over the day of death. There is no mustering out from that war; wickedness is powerless to save its owner. 9 All these things I observed; I noted all that went on under the sun, while humanity still had authority over itself to treat itself unjustly. 10 And then I saw scoundrels coming from the Holy Site and being brought to burial, while such as had acted righteously were forgotten in the city. And here is another frustration: 11 the fact that the sentence imposed for evil deeds is not executed swiftly, which is why humanity is emboldened to do evil – 12 the fact that a sinner may do evil a hundred times and his [punishment] still be delayed. For although I am aware that "It will be well with those who revere God since they revere God, 13 and it will not be well with the scoundrel, and he will not live long, because he does not revere God" – 14 here is a frustration that occurs in the world: sometimes the upright are requited according to the conduct of the scoundrel; and sometimes the scoundrel is requited according to the conduct of the upright. I say all that is frustration. 15 I therefore praised enjoyment. For the only good humanity can have under the sun is to eat and drink and enjoy himself. That much can accompany it, in exchange for his wealth, through the days of life that God has granted him under the sun. 16 For I have set my mind to learn wisdom and to observe

the business that goes on in the world – even to the extent of going without sleep day and night – 17 and I have observed all that God brings to pass. Indeed, humanity cannot guess the events that occur under the sun. For humanity tries strenuously, but fails to guess them; and even if a sage should think to discover them he would not be able to guess them.

Chapter 9

1 For all this I noted, and I ascertained all this: that the actions of even the righteous and the wise are determined by God, even love! Even hate! Humanity knows none of these in advance – 2 None! For the same fate is in store for all: for the righteous, and for the wicked; for the good and pure, and for the impure; for the one who sacrifices, and the one who does not; for the one who is pleasing, and for the one who is displeasing; and for the one who swears, and for the one who shuns oaths. 3 That is the sad thing about all that goes on under the sun: that the same fate is in store for all. (Not *only* that, but people's hearts are full of sadness, and their minds of madness, while they live; and then – to the dead!) 4 For the one who is reckoned among the living has something to look forward to – even a live dog is better than a dead lion – 5 since the living know they will die. But the dead know nothing; they have no more recompense, for even the memory of them has died. 6 Their loves, their hates, their jealousies have long since perished; and they have no more share till the end of time in all that goes on under the sun. 7 Go, eat your bread in gladness, and drink your wine in joy; for your action was long ago approved by God. 8 Let your clothes always be freshly washed, and your head never lack ointment. 9 Enjoy happiness with a woman you love all the fleeting days of life that have been granted to you under the sun – all your fleeting days. For that alone is what you can get out of life and out of the means you acquire under the sun. 10 Whatever it is in your power to do, do with all your might. For there is no action, no reasoning, no learning, no wisdom in Sheol, where you are going. 11 I have further observed under the sun that the race is not won by the swift, nor the battle by the valiant; nor is bread won by the wise, nor wealth by the intelligent, nor favor by the learned. For the time of mischance comes to all. 12 And humanity cannot even know its time. As fishes are enmeshed in a fatal net, and as birds are trapped in a snare, so humanity is caught at the time of calamity when it comes upon them without warning. 13 This thing too I observed under the sun about wisdom, and it affected me profoundly. 14 There was a little city, with few people in it; and to it came a great king, who invested it and built mighty siege works against it. 15 Present in the city was a poor wise man who might have saved it with his wisdom, but nobody thought of that poor man. 16 So I observed: wisdom is better than valor; but a poor man's wisdom is scorned, and his words are not heeded. 17 Words spoken softly by the wise are heeded sooner than those shouted by a lord in folly. 18 Wisdom is more valuable than weapons of war, but a single error destroys much of value.

Chapter 10

1 Dead flies turn the perfumer's ointment fetid and putrid; so a little folly outweighs massive wisdom. 2 A wise person's mind tends toward the right hand, a fool's toward the left. 3 A fool's mind is also wanting when he travels, and he lets everybody know he is a fool. 4 If the wrath of a lord flares up against you, don't give up your post; for when wrath abates, grave offenses are pardoned. 5 Here is an evil I have seen under the sun as great as an error committed by a ruler: 6 folly was placed on lofty heights, while the rich sat in low estate. 7 I have seen slaves on horseback, and nobles walking on the ground like slaves. 8 The one who digs a pit will fall into it; the one who breaches a stone fence will be bitten by a snake. 9 The one who quarries

stones will be hurt by them; the one who splits wood will be harmed by it. 10 If the ax has become dull and one has not whetted the edge, one must exert more strength. Thus the advantage of a skill [depends on the exercise of prudence. 11 If the snake bites because no spell was uttered, no advantage is gained by the trained charmer. 12 A wise man's talk brings him favor, but a fool's lips are his undoing. 13 Her talk begins as silliness and ends as disastrous madness. 14 Yet the fool talks and talks! A man cannot know what will happen; who can tell him what the future holds? 15 A fool's exertions tire him out, for he doesn't know how to get to a town. 16 Alas for you, O land whose king is a lackey and whose ministers dine in the morning! 17 Happy are you, O land whose king is a master and whose ministers dine at the proper time – with restraint, not with guzzling! 18 Through slothfulness the ceiling sags, through lazy hands the house caves in. 19 They make a banquet for revelry; wine makes life merry, and money answers every need. 20 Don't revile a king even among your intimates! Don't revile a rich man even in your bedchamber; for a bird of the air may carry the utterance, and a winged creature may report the word.

Chapter 11

1 Send your bread forth upon the waters; for after many days you will find it. 2 Distribute portions to seven or even to eight, for you cannot know what misfortune may occur on earth. 3 If the clouds are filled, they will pour down rain on the earth; and if a tree falls to the south or to the north, the tree will stay where it falls. 4 If one watches the wind, one will never sow; and if one observes the clouds, one will never reap. 5 Just as you do not know how the lifebreath passes into the limbs within the womb of the pregnant woman, so you cannot foresee the actions of God, who causes all things to happen. 6 Sow your seed in the morning, and don't hold back your hand in the evening, since you don't know which is going to succeed, the one or the other, or if both are equally good. 7 How sweet is the light, what a delight for the eyes to behold the sun! 8 Even if one lives many years, let one enjoy oneself in all of them, remembering how many the days of darkness are going to be. The only future is nothingness! 9 O youth, enjoy yourself while you are young! Let your heart lead you to enjoyment in the days of your youth. Follow the desires of your heart and the glances of your eyes – but know well that God will call you to account for all such things – 10 and banish care from your mind, and pluck sorrow out of your flesh! For youth and black hair are fleeting.

Chapter 12

1 So appreciate your vigor in the days of your youth, before those days of sorrow come and those years arrive of which you will say, "I have no pleasure in them"; 2 before sun and light and moon and stars grow dark, and the clouds come back again after the rain: 3 when the guards of the house become shaky, and the men of valor are bent, and the maids that grind, grown few, are idle, and the ladies that peer through the windows grow dim, 4 and the doors to the street are shut – with the noise of the hand mill growing fainter, and the song of the bird growing feebler, and all the strains of music dying down; 5 when one is afraid of heights and there is terror on the road. – For the almond tree may blossom, the grasshopper be burdened, and the caper bush may bud again; but humanity sets out for its eternal abode, with mourners all around in the street. – 6 Before the silver cord snaps and the golden bowl crashes, the jar is shattered at the spring, and the jug is smashed at the cistern. 7 And the dust returns to the ground as it was, and the lifebreath returns to God who bestowed it. 8 Utter futility—said Koheleth— All is futile! 9 A further word: because Koheleth was a sage, he continued to instruct the people. He listened to

and tested the soundness of many maxims. 10 Koheleth sought to discover useful sayings and recorded genuinely truthful sayings. 11 The sayings of the wise are like goads, like nails fixed in prodding sticks. They were given by one Shepherd. 12 A further word: against them, my son, be warned! The making of many books is without limit and much study is wearying of the flesh. 13 The sum of the matter, when all is said and done: revere God and observe God's commandments! For this applies to all humanity: that God will call every creature to account for everything unknown, be it good or bad.

פרק א

א דִּבְרֵי קֹהֶלֶת בֶּן־דָּוִד מֶלֶךְ בִּירוּשָׁלָם׃ ב הֲבֶל הֲבָלִים אָמַר קֹהֶלֶת הֲבֶל הֲבָלִים הַכֹּל הָבֶל׃
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וְהַיָּם אֵינֶנּוּ מָלֵא אֶל־מְקוֹם שֶׁהַנְּחָלִים הֹלְכִים שָׁם הֵם שָׁבִים לָלָכֶת׃ ח כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים יְגֵעִים
לֹא־יוּכַל אִישׁ לְדַבֵּר לֹא־תִשְׂבַּע עַיִן לִרְאוֹת וְלֹא־תִמָּלֵא אֹזֶן מִשְּׁמֹעַ׃ ט מַה־שֶּׁהָיָה הוּא שֶׁיִּהְיֶה
וּמַה־שֶּׁנַּעֲשָׂה הוּא שֶׁיֵּעָשֶׂה וְאֵין כָּל־חָדָשׁ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ׃ י יֵשׁ דָּבָר שֶׁיֹּאמַר רְאֵה־זֶה חָדָשׁ הוּא
כְּבָר הָיָה לְעֹלָמִים אֲשֶׁר הָיָה מִלְּפָנֵנוּ׃ יא אֵין זִכְרוֹן לָרִאשֹׁנִים וְגַם לָאַחֲרֹנִים שֶׁיִּהְיוּ לֹא־יִהְיֶה
לָהֶם זִכָּרוֹן עִם שֶׁיִּהְיוּ לָאַחֲרֹנָה׃ יב אֲנִי קֹהֶלֶת הָיִיתִי מֶלֶךְ עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל בִּירוּשָׁלָם׃ יג וְנָתַתִּי
אֶת־לִבִּי לִדְרוֹשׁ וְלָתוּר בַּחָכְמָה עַל כָּל־אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמָיִם הוּא | עִנְיַן רָע נָתַן אֱלֹהִים
לִבְנֵי הָאָדָם לַעֲנוֹת בּוֹ׃ יד רָאִיתִי אֶת־כָּל־הַמַּעֲשִׂים שֶׁנַּעֲשׂוּ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ וְהִנֵּה הַכֹּל הֶבֶל וּרְעוּת
רוּחַ׃ טו מְעֻוָּת לֹא־יוּכַל לִתָקֵן וְחֶסְרוֹן לֹא־יוּכַל לְהִמָּנוֹת׃ טז דִּבַּרְתִּי אֲנִי עִם־לִבִּי לֵאמֹר אֲנִי
הִנֵּה הִגְדַּלְתִּי וְהוֹסַפְתִּי חָכְמָה עַל כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־הָיָה לְפָנַי עַל־יְרוּשָׁלָם וְלִבִּי רָאָה הַרְבֵּה חָכְמָה
וָדָעַת׃ יז וָאֶתְּנָה לִבִּי לָדַעַת חָכְמָה וְדַעַת הוֹלֵלוֹת וְשִׂכְלוּת יָדַעְתִּי שֶׁגַּם־זֶה הוּא רַעְיוֹן רוּחַ׃ יח כִּי
בְּרֹב חָכְמָה רָב־כָּעַס וְיוֹסִיף דַּעַת יוֹסִיף מַכְאוֹב׃

פרק ב

א אָמַרְתִּי אֲנִי בְּלִבִּי לְכָה־נָּא אֲנַסְּכָה בְשִׂמְחָה וּרְאֵה בְטוֹב וְהִנֵּה גַם־הוּא הָבֶל׃ ב לִשְׂחוֹק
אָמַרְתִּי מְהוֹלָל וּלְשִׂמְחָה מַה־זֹּה עֹשָׂה׃ ג תַּרְתִּי בְלִבִּי לִמְשׁוֹךְ בַּיַּיִן אֶת־בְּשָׂרִי וְלִבִּי נֹהֵג בַּחָכְמָה
וְלֶאֱחֹז בְּסִכְלוּת עַד אֲשֶׁר־אֶרְאֶה אֵי־זֶה טוֹב לִבְנֵי הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשׂוּ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם מִסְפַּר יְמֵי
חַיֵּיהֶם׃ ד הִגְדַּלְתִּי מַעֲשָׂי בָּנִיתִי לִי בָּתִּים נָטַעְתִּי לִי כְּרָמִים׃ ה עָשִׂיתִי לִי גַּנּוֹת וּפַרְדֵּסִים וְנָטַעְתִּי
בָהֶם עֵץ כָּל־פֶּרִי׃ ו עָשִׂיתִי לִי בְּרֵכוֹת מָיִם לְהַשְׁקוֹת מֵהֶם יַעַר צוֹמֵחַ עֵצִים׃ ז קָנִיתִי עֲבָדִים
וּשְׁפָחוֹת וּבְנֵי־בַיִת הָיָה לִי גַּם מִקְנֶה בָקָר וָצֹאן הַרְבֵּה הָיָה לִי מִכֹּל שֶׁהָיוּ לְפָנַי בִּירוּשָׁלָם׃
ח כָּנַסְתִּי לִי גַּם־כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב וּסְגֻלַּת מְלָכִים וְהַמְּדִינוֹת עָשִׂיתִי לִי שָׁרִים וְשָׁרוֹת וְתַעֲנֻגוֹת בְּנֵי
הָאָדָם שְׁדָּה וּשְׁדוֹת׃ ט וְגָדַלְתִּי וְהוֹסַפְתִּי מִכֹּל שֶׁהָיָה לְפָנַי בִּירוּשָׁלָם אַף חָכְמָתִי עָמְדָה לִי׃
י וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר שָׁאֲלוּ עֵינַי לֹא אָצַלְתִּי מֵהֶם לֹא־מָנַעְתִּי אֶת־לִבִּי מִכָּל־שִׂמְחָה כִּי־לִבִּי שָׂמֵחַ
מִכָּל־עֲמָלִי וְזֶה־הָיָה חֶלְקִי מִכָּל־עֲמָלִי׃ יא וּפָנִיתִי אֲנִי בְּכָל־מַעֲשַׂי שֶׁעָשׂוּ יָדַי וּבֶעָמָל שֶׁעָמַלְתִּי
לַעֲשׂוֹת וְהִנֵּה הַכֹּל הֶבֶל וּרְעוּת רוּחַ וְאֵין יִתְרוֹן תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ׃ יב וּפָנִיתִי אֲנִי לִרְאוֹת חָכְמָה
וְהוֹלֵלוֹת וְסִכְלוּת כִּי | מָה הָאָדָם שֶׁיָּבוֹא אַחֲרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֵת אֲשֶׁר־כְּבָר עֲשׂוּהוּ׃ יג וְרָאִיתִי אֲנִי
שֶׁיֵּשׁ יִתְרוֹן לַחָכְמָה מִן־הַסִּכְלוּת כִּיתְרוֹן הָאוֹר מִן־הַחֹשֶׁךְ׃ יד הֶחָכָם עֵינָיו בְּרֹאשׁוֹ וְהַכְּסִיל
בַּחֹשֶׁךְ הוֹלֵךְ וְיָדַעְתִּי גַּם־אֲנִי שְׁמִקְרֶה אֶחָד יְקָרֶה אֶת־כֻּלָּם׃ טו וְאָמַרְתִּי אֲנִי בְּלִבִּי כְּמִקְרֵה
הַכְּסִיל גַּם־אֲנִי יִקְרֵנִי וְלָמָּה חָכַמְתִּי אֲנִי אָז יֹתֵר וְדִבַּרְתִּי בְלִבִּי שֶׁגַּם־זֶה הָבֶל׃ טז כִּי אֵין זִכְרוֹן
לֶחָכָם עִם־הַכְּסִיל לְעוֹלָם בְּשֶׁכְּבָר הַיָּמִים הַבָּאִים הַכֹּל נִשְׁכָּח וְאֵיךְ יָמוּת הֶחָכָם עִם־הַכְּסִיל׃

יז וְשָׂנֵאתִי אֶת־הַחַיִּים כִּי רַע עָלַי הַמַּעֲשֶׂה שֶׁנַּעֲשָׂה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ כִּי־הַכֹּל הֶבֶל וּרְעוּת רוּחַ׃
יח וְשָׂנֵאתִי אֲנִי אֶת־כָּל־עֲמָלִי שֶׁאֲנִי עָמֵל תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ שֶׁאַנִּיחֶנּוּ לָאָדָם שֶׁיִּהְיֶה אַחֲרָי׃ יט וּמִי
יוֹדֵעַ הֶחָכָם יִהְיֶה אוֹ סָכָל וְיִשְׁלַט בְּכָל־עֲמָלִי שֶׁעָמַלְתִּי וְשֶׁחָכַמְתִּי תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ גַּם־זֶה הָבֶל׃
כ וְסַבּוֹתִי אֲנִי לְיַאֵשׁ אֶת־לִבִּי עַל כָּל־הֶעָמָל שֶׁעָמַלְתִּי תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ׃ כא כִּי־יֵשׁ אָדָם שֶׁעֲמָלוֹ
בְּחָכְמָה וּבְדַעַת וּבְכִשְׁרוֹן וּלְאָדָם שֶׁלֹּא עָמַל־בּוֹ יִתְּנֶנּוּ חֶלְקוֹ גַּם־זֶה הֶבֶל וְרָעָה רַבָּה׃ כב כִּי
מֶה־הָוֹה לָאָדָם בְּכָל־עֲמָלוֹ וּבְרַעְיוֹן לִבּוֹ שֶׁהוּא עָמֵל תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ׃ כג כִּי כָל־יָמָיו מַכְאֹבִים
וְכַעַס עִנְיָנוֹ גַּם־בַּלַּיְלָה לֹא־שָׁכַב לִבּוֹ גַּם־זֶה הֶבֶל הוּא׃ כד אֵין־טוֹב בָּאָדָם שֶׁיֹּאכַל וְשָׁתָה
וְהֶרְאָה אֶת־נַפְשׁוֹ טוֹב בַּעֲמָלוֹ גַּם־זֹה רָאִיתִי אֲנִי כִּי מִיַּד הָאֱלֹהִים הִיא׃ כה כִּי מִי יֹאכַל וּמִי
יָחוּשׁ חוּץ מִמֶּנִּי׃ כו כִּי לְאָדָם שֶׁטּוֹב לְפָנָיו נָתַן חָכְמָה וְדַעַת וְשִׂמְחָה וְלַחוֹטֶא נָתַן עִנְיַן לֶאֱסוֹף
וְלִכְנוֹס לָתֵת לְטוֹב לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים גַּם־זֶה הֶבֶל וּרְעוּת רוּחַ׃

פרק ג

א לַכֹּל זְמָן וְעֵת לְכָל־חֵפֶץ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמָיִם׃ ב עֵת לָלֶדֶת וְעֵת לָמוּת עֵת לָטַעַת וְעֵת לַעֲקוֹר
נָטוּעַ׃ ג עֵת לַהֲרוֹג וְעֵת לִרְפּוֹא עֵת לִפְרוֹץ וְעֵת לִבְנוֹת׃ ד עֵת לִבְכּוֹת וְעֵת לִשְׂחוֹק עֵת סְפוֹד וְעֵת
רְקוֹד׃ ה עֵת לְהַשְׁלִיךְ אֲבָנִים וְעֵת כְּנוֹס אֲבָנִים עֵת לַחֲבוֹק וְעֵת לִרְחֹק מֵחַבֵּק׃ ו עֵת לְבַקֵּשׁ וְעֵת
לְאַבֵּד עֵת לִשְׁמוֹר וְעֵת לְהַשְׁלִיךְ׃ ז עֵת לִקְרוֹעַ וְעֵת לִתְפּוֹר עֵת לַחֲשׁוֹת וְעֵת לְדַבֵּר׃ ח עֵת לֶאֱהֹב
וְעֵת לִשְׂנֹא עֵת מִלְחָמָה וְעֵת שָׁלוֹם׃ ט מַה־יִּתְרוֹן הָעוֹשֶׂה בַּאֲשֶׁר הוּא עָמֵל׃ י רָאִיתִי
אֶת־הָעִנְיָן אֲשֶׁר נָתַן אֱלֹהִים לִבְנֵי הָאָדָם לַעֲנוֹת בּוֹ׃ יא אֶת־הַכֹּל עָשָׂה יָפֶה בְּעִתּוֹ גַּם אֶת־הָעֹלָם
נָתַן בְּלִבָּם מִבְּלִי אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִמְצָא הָאָדָם אֶת־הַמַּעֲשֶׂה אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה הָאֱלֹהִים מֵרֹאשׁ וְעַד־סוֹף׃
יב יָדַעְתִּי כִּי אֵין טוֹב בָּם כִּי אִם־לִשְׂמוֹחַ וְלַעֲשׂוֹת טוֹב בְּחַיָּיו׃ יג וְגַם כָּל־הָאָדָם שֶׁיֹּאכַל וְשָׁתָה
וְרָאָה טוֹב בְּכָל־עֲמָלוֹ מַתַּת אֱלֹהִים הִיא׃ יד יָדַעְתִּי כִּי כָּל־אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה הָאֱלֹהִים הוּא יִהְיֶה
לְעוֹלָם עָלָיו אֵין לְהוֹסִיף וּמִמֶּנּוּ אֵין לִגְרֹעַ וְהָאֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה שֶׁיִּרְאוּ מִלְּפָנָיו׃ טו מַה־שֶּׁהָיָה כְּבָר
הוּא וַאֲשֶׁר לִהְיוֹת כְּבָר הָיָה וְהָאֱלֹהִים יְבַקֵּשׁ אֶת־נִרְדָּף׃ טז וְעוֹד רָאִיתִי תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ מְקוֹם
הַמִּשְׁפָּט שָׁמָּה הָרֶשַׁע וּמְקוֹם הַצֶּדֶק שָׁמָּה הָרָשַׁע׃ יז אָמַרְתִּי אֲנִי בְּלִבִּי אֶת־הַצַּדִּיק וְאֶת־הָרָשָׁע
יִשְׁפֹּט הָאֱלֹהִים כִּי־עֵת לְכָל־חֵפֶץ וְעַל כָּל־הַמַּעֲשֶׂה שָׁם׃ יח אָמַרְתִּי אֲנִי בְּלִבִּי עַל־דִּבְרַת בְּנֵי
הָאָדָם לְבָרָם הָאֱלֹהִים וְלִרְאוֹת שְׁהֵם־בְּהֵמָה הֵמָּה לָהֶם׃ יט כִּי מִקְרֶה בְּנֵי־הָאָדָם וּמִקְרֶה
הַבְּהֵמָה וּמִקְרֶה אֶחָד לָהֶם כְּמוֹת זֶה כֵּן מוֹת זֶה וְרוּחַ אֶחָד לַכֹּל וּמוֹתַר הָאָדָם מִן־הַבְּהֵמָה אָיִן
כִּי הַכֹּל הָבֶל׃ כ הַכֹּל הוֹלֵךְ אֶל־מָקוֹם אֶחָד הַכֹּל הָיָה מִן־הֶעָפָר וְהַכֹּל שָׁב אֶל־הֶעָפָר׃ כא מִי
יוֹדֵעַ רוּחַ בְּנֵי הָאָדָם הָעֹלָה הִיא לְמָעְלָה וְרוּחַ הַבְּהֵמָה הַיֹּרֶדֶת הִיא לְמַטָּה לָאָרֶץ׃ כב וָרָאִיתִי כִּי
אֵין טוֹב מֵאֲשֶׁר יִשְׂמַח הָאָדָם בְּמַעֲשָׂיו כִּי־הוּא חֶלְקוֹ כִּי מִי יְבִיאֶנּוּ לִרְאוֹת בְּמֶה שֶׁיִּהְיֶה אַחֲרָיו׃

פרק ד

א וְשַׁבְתִּי אֲנִי וָאֶרְאֶה אֶת־כָּל־הָעֲשֻׁקִים אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשִׂים תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ וְהִנֵּה | דִּמְעַת הָעֲשֻׁקִים וְאֵין
לָהֶם מְנַחֵם וּמִיַּד עֹשְׁקֵיהֶם כֹּחַ וְאֵין לָהֶם מְנַחֵם׃ ב וְשַׁבֵּחַ אֲנִי אֶת־הַמֵּתִים שֶׁכְּבָר מֵתוּ
מִן־הַחַיִּים אֲשֶׁר הֵמָּה חַיִּים עֲדֶנָה׃ ג וְטוֹב מִשְּׁנֵיהֶם אֵת אֲשֶׁר־עֲדֶן לֹא הָיָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא־רָאָה
אֶת־הַמַּעֲשֶׂה הָרָע אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ׃ ד וָרָאִיתִי אֲנִי אֶת־כָּל־עָמָל וְאֵת כָּל־כִּשְׁרוֹן
הַמַּעֲשָׂה כִּי הִיא קִנְאַת־אִישׁ מֵרֵעֵהוּ גַּם־זֶה הֶבֶל וּרְעוּת רוּחַ׃ ה הַכְּסִיל חֹבֵק אֶת־יָדָיו וְאֹכֵל
אֶת־בְּשָׂרוֹ׃ ו טוֹב מְלֹא כַף נָחַת מִמְּלֹא חָפְנַיִם עָמָל וּרְעוּת רוּחַ׃ ז וְשַׁבְתִּי אֲנִי וָאֶרְאֶה הֶבֶל תַּחַת
הַשָּׁמֶשׁ׃ ח יֵשׁ אֶחָד וְאֵין שֵׁנִי גַּם בֵּן וָאָח אֵין־לוֹ וְאֵין קֵץ לְכָל־עֲמָלוֹ גַּם־עֵינוֹ [עֵינו] לֹא־תִשְׂבַּע
עֹשֶׁר וּלְמִי | אֲנִי עָמֵל וּמְחַסֵּר אֶת־נַפְשִׁי מִטּוֹבָה גַּם־זֶה הֶבֶל וְעִנְיַן רָע הוּא׃ ט טוֹבִים הַשְּׁנַיִם

מִן־הָאֶחָד אֲשֶׁר יֵשׁ־לָהֶם שָׂכָר טוֹב בַּעֲמָלָם׃ י כִּי אִם־יִפֹּלוּ הָאֶחָד יָקִים אֶת־חֲבֵרוֹ וְאִילוֹ הָאֶחָד
שֶׁיִּפּוֹל וְאֵין שֵׁנִי לַהֲקִימוֹ׃ יא גַּם אִם־יִשְׁכְּבוּ שְׁנַיִם וְחַם לָהֶם וּלְאֶחָד אֵיךְ יֵחָם׃ יב וְאִם־יִתְקְפוֹ
הָאֶחָד הַשְּׁנַיִם יַעַמְדוּ נֶגְדּוֹ וְהַחוּט הַמְשֻׁלָּשׁ לֹא בִמְהֵרָה יִנָּתֵק׃ יג טוֹב יֶלֶד מִסְכֵּן וְחָכָם מִמֶּלֶךְ
זָקֵן וּכְסִיל אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדַע לְהִזָּהֵר עוֹד׃ יד כִּי־מִבֵּית הָסוּרִים יָצָא לְמֶלֶךְ כִּי גַּם בְּמַלְכוּתוֹ נוֹלַד
רָשׁ׃ טו רָאִיתִי אֶת־כָּל־הַחַיִּים הַמְהַלְכִים תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ עִם הַיֶּלֶד הַשֵּׁנִי אֲשֶׁר יַעֲמֹד תַּחְתָּיו׃
טז אֵין־קֵץ לְכָל־הָעָם לְכֹל אֲשֶׁר־הָיָה לִפְנֵיהֶם גַּם הָאַחֲרוֹנִים לֹא יִשְׂמְחוּ־בוֹ כִּי־גַם־זֶה הֶבֶל
וְרַעְיוֹן רוּחַ׃ יז שְׁמֹר רַגְלְךָ [רַגְלֶךָ] כַּאֲשֶׁר תֵּלֵךְ אֶל־בֵּית הָאֱלֹהִים וְקָרוֹב לִשְׁמֹעַ מִתֵּת הַכְּסִילִים
זָבַח כִּי־אֵינָם יוֹדְעִים לַעֲשׂוֹת רָע׃

פרק ה

א אַל־תְּבַהֵל עַל־פִּיךָ וְלִבְּךָ אַל־יְמַהֵר לְהוֹצִיא דָבָר לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים כִּי הָאֱלֹהִים בַּשָּׁמַיִם וְאַתָּה
עַל־הָאָרֶץ עַל־כֵּן יִהְיוּ דְבָרֶיךָ מְעַטִּים׃ ב כִּי בָּא הַחֲלוֹם בְּרֹב עִנְיָן וְקוֹל כְּסִיל בְּרֹב דְּבָרִים׃
ג כַּאֲשֶׁר תִּדֹּר נֶדֶר לֵאלֹהִים אַל־תְּאַחֵר לְשַׁלְּמוֹ כִּי אֵין חֵפֶץ בַּכְּסִילִים אֵת אֲשֶׁר־תִּדֹּר שַׁלֵּם׃
ד טוֹב אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תִדֹּר מִשֶּׁתִּדּוֹר וְלֹא תְשַׁלֵּם׃ ה אַל־תִּתֵּן אֶת־פִּיךָ לַחֲטִיא אֶת־בְּשָׂרֶךָ וְאַל־תֹּאמַר
לִפְנֵי הַמַּלְאָךְ כִּי שְׁגָגָה הִיא לָמָּה יִקְצֹף הָאֱלֹהִים עַל־קוֹלֶךָ וְחִבֵּל אֶת־מַעֲשֵׂה יָדֶיךָ׃ ו כִּי בְרֹב
חֲלֹמוֹת וַהֲבָלִים וּדְבָרִים הַרְבֵּה כִּי אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים יְרָא׃ ז אִם־עֹשֶׁק רָשׁ וְגֵזֶל מִשְׁפָּט וָצֶדֶק תִּרְאֶה
בַּמְּדִינָה אַל־תִּתְמַהּ עַל־הַחֵפֶץ כִּי גָבֹהַּ מֵעַל גָּבֹהַּ שֹׁמֵר וּגְבֹהִים עֲלֵיהֶם׃ ח וְיִתְרוֹן אֶרֶץ בַּכֹּל הִיא
[הוּא] מֶלֶךְ לְשָׂדֶה נֶעֱבָד׃ ט אֹהֵב כֶּסֶף לֹא־יִשְׂבַּע כֶּסֶף וּמִי־אֹהֵב בֶּהָמוֹן לֹא תְבוּאָה גַּם־זֶה הָבֶל׃
י בִּרְבוֹת הַטּוֹבָה רַבּוּ אוֹכְלֶיהָ וּמַה־כִּשְׁרוֹן לִבְעָלֶיהָ כִּי אִם־רְאִיַּת [רְאוּת] עֵינָיו׃ יא מָתוֹק שְׁנַת
הָעֹבֵד אִם־מְעַט וְאִם־הַרְבֵּה יֹאכֵל וְהַשָּׂבָע לָעָשִׁיר אֵינֶנּוּ מַנִּיחַ לוֹ לִישׁוֹן׃ יב יֵשׁ רָעָה חוֹלָה
רָאִיתִי תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ עֹשֶׁר שָׁמוּר לִבְעָלָיו לְרָעָתוֹ׃ יג וְאָבַד הָעֹשֶׁר הַהוּא בְּעִנְיַן רָע וְהוֹלִיד בֵּן וְאֵין
בְּיָדוֹ מְאוּמָה׃ יד כַּאֲשֶׁר יָצָא מִבֶּטֶן אִמּוֹ עָרֹם יָשׁוּב לָלֶכֶת כְּשֶׁבָּא וּמְאוּמָה לֹא־יִשָּׂא בַּעֲמָלוֹ
שֶׁיֹּלֵךְ בְּיָדוֹ׃ טו וְגַם־זֹה רָעָה חוֹלָה כָּל־עֲמֹת שֶׁבָּא כֵן יֵלֵךְ וּמַה־יִּתְרוֹן לוֹ שֶׁיַּעֲמֹל לָרוּחַ׃ טז גַּם
כָּל־יָמָיו בַּחֹשֶׁךְ יֹאכֵל וְכָעַס הַרְבֵּה וְחָלְיוֹ וָקֶצֶף׃ יז הִנֵּה אֲשֶׁר־רָאִיתִי אֲנִי טוֹב אֲשֶׁר־יָפֶה
לֶאֱכוֹל־וְלִשְׁתּוֹת וְלִרְאוֹת טוֹבָה בְּכָל־עֲמָלוֹ | שֶׁיַּעֲמֹל תַּחַת־הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ מִסְפַּר יְמֵי־חַיָּו [חַיָּיו]
אֲשֶׁר־נָתַן־לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים כִּי־הוּא חֶלְקוֹ׃ יח גַּם כָּל־הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר נָתַן־לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים עֹשֶׁר וּנְכָסִים
וְהִשְׁלִיטוֹ לֶאֱכֹל מִמֶּנּוּ וְלָשֵׂאת אֶת־חֶלְקוֹ וְלִשְׂמֹחַ בַּעֲמָלוֹ זֹה מַתַּת אֱלֹהִים הִיא׃ יט כִּי לֹא הַרְבֵּה
יִזְכֹּר אֶת־יְמֵי חַיָּיו כִּי הָאֱלֹהִים מַעֲנֶה בְּשִׂמְחַת לִבּוֹ׃

פרק ו

א יֵשׁ רָעָה אֲשֶׁר רָאִיתִי תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וְרַבָּה הִיא עַל־הָאָדָם׃ ב אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִתֶּן־לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים עֹשֶׁר
וּנְכָסִים וְכָבוֹד וְאֵינֶנּוּ חָסֵר לְנַפְשׁוֹ | מִכֹּל אֲשֶׁר־יִתְאַוֶּה וְלֹא־יַשְׁלִיטֶנּוּ הָאֱלֹהִים לֶאֱכֹל מִמֶּנּוּ כִּי
אִישׁ נָכְרִי יֹאכְלֶנּוּ זֶה הֶבֶל וָחֳלִי רָע הוּא׃ ג אִם־יוֹלִיד אִישׁ מֵאָה וְשָׁנִים רַבּוֹת יִחְיֶה וְרַב | שָׁנָיו
יָמֵי־שְׁנָיו וְנַפְשׁוֹ לֹא־תִשְׂבַּע מִן־הַטּוֹבָה וְגַם־קְבוּרָה לֹא־הָיְתָה לוֹ אָמַרְתִּי טוֹב מִמֶּנּוּ הַנֶּפֶל׃
ד כִּי־בַהֶבֶל בָּא וּבַחֹשֶׁךְ יֵלֵךְ וּבַחֹשֶׁךְ שְׁמוֹ יְכֻסֶּה׃ ה גַּם־שֶׁמֶשׁ לֹא־רָאָה וְלֹא יָדָע נַחַת לָזֶה מִזֶּה׃
ו וְאִלּוּ חָיָה אֶלֶף שָׁנִים פַּעֲמַיִם וְטוֹבָה לֹא רָאָה הֲלֹא אֶל־מָקוֹם אֶחָד הַכֹּל הוֹלֵךְ׃ ז כָּל־עֲמַל
הָאָדָם לְפִיהוּ וְגַם־הַנֶּפֶשׁ לֹא תִמָּלֵא׃ ח כִּי מַה־יּוֹתֵר לֶחָכָם מִן־הַכְּסִיל מַה־לֶּעָנִי יוֹדֵעַ לַהֲלֹךְ נֶגֶד
הַחַיִּים׃ ט טוֹב מַרְאֵה עֵינַיִם מֵהֲלַךְ־נָפֶשׁ גַּם־זֶה הֶבֶל וּרְעוּת רוּחַ׃ י מַה־שֶּׁהָיָה כְּבָר נִקְרָא שְׁמוֹ
וְנוֹדָע אֲשֶׁר־הוּא אָדָם וְלֹא־יוּכַל לָדִין עִם שֶׁהַתַּקִּיף [שֶׁתַּקִּיף] מִמֶּנּוּ׃ יא כִּי יֵשׁ־דְּבָרִים הַרְבֵּה
מַרְבִּים הָבֶל מַה־יֹּתֵר לָאָדָם׃ יב כִּי מִי־יוֹדֵעַ מַה־טּוֹב לָאָדָם בַּחַיִּים מִסְפַּר יְמֵי־חַיֵּי הֶבְלוֹ וְיַעֲשֵׂם
כַּצֵּל אֲשֶׁר מִי־יַגִּיד לָאָדָם מַה־יִּהְיֶה אַחֲרָיו תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ׃

פרק ז

א טוֹב שֵׁם מִשֶּׁמֶן טוֹב וְיוֹם הַמָּוֶת מִיּוֹם הִוָּלְדוֹ׃ ב טוֹב לָלֶכֶת אֶל־בֵּית־אֵבֶל מִלֶּכֶת אֶל־בֵּית
מִשְׁתֶּה בַּאֲשֶׁר הוּא סוֹף כָּל־הָאָדָם וְהַחַי יִתֵּן אֶל־לִבּוֹ׃ ג טוֹב כַּעַס מִשְּׂחוֹק כִּי־בְרַע פָּנִים יִיטַב
לֵב׃ ד לֵב חֲכָמִים בְּבֵית אֵבֶל וְלֵב כְּסִילִים בְּבֵית שִׂמְחָה׃ ה טוֹב לִשְׁמֹעַ גַּעֲרַת חָכָם מֵאִישׁ שֹׁמֵעַ
שִׁיר כְּסִילִים׃ ו כִּי כְקוֹל הַסִּירִים תַּחַת הַסִּיר כֵּן שְׂחוֹק הַכְּסִיל וְגַם־זֶה הָבֶל׃ ז כִּי הָעֹשֶׁק יְהוֹלֵל
חָכָם וְיאַבֵּד אֶת־לֵב מַתָּנָה׃ ח טוֹב אַחֲרִית דָּבָר מֵרֵאשִׁיתוֹ טוֹב אֶרֶךְ־רוּחַ מִגְּבַהּ־רוּחַ׃
ט אַל־תְּבַהֵל בְּרוּחֲךָ לִכְעוֹס כִּי כַעַס בְּחֵיק כְּסִילִים יָנוּחַ׃ י אַל־תֹּאמַר מֶה הָיָה שֶׁהַיָּמִים
הָרִאשֹׁנִים הָיוּ טוֹבִים מֵאֵלֶּה כִּי לֹא מֵחָכְמָה שָׁאַלְתָּ עַל־זֶה׃ יא טוֹבָה חָכְמָה עִם־נַחֲלָה וְיֹתֶר
לְרֹאֵי הַשָּׁמֶשׁ׃ יב כִּי בְּצֵל הַחָכְמָה בְּצֵל הַכָּסֶף וְיִתְרוֹן דַּעַת הַחָכְמָה תְּחַיֶּה בְעָלֶיהָ׃ יג רְאֵה
אֶת־מַעֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים כִּי מִי יוּכַל לְתַקֵּן אֵת אֲשֶׁר עִוְּתוֹ׃ יד בְּיוֹם טוֹבָה הֱיֵה בְטוֹב וּבְיוֹם רָעָה
רְאֵה גַּם אֶת־זֶה לְעֻמַּת־זֶה עָשָׂה הָאֱלֹהִים עַל־דִּבְרַת שֶׁלֹּא יִמְצָא הָאָדָם אַחֲרָיו מְאוּמָה׃
טו אֶת־הַכֹּל רָאִיתִי בִּימֵי הֶבְלִי יֵשׁ צַדִּיק אֹבֵד בְּצִדְקוֹ וְיֵשׁ רָשָׁע מַאֲרִיךְ בְּרָעָתוֹ׃ טז אַל־תְּהִי
צַדִּיק הַרְבֵּה וְאַל־תִּתְחַכַּם יוֹתֵר לָמָּה תִּשּׁוֹמֵם׃ יז אַל־תִּרְשַׁע הַרְבֵּה וְאַל־תְּהִי סָכָל לָמָּה תָמוּת
בְּלֹא עִתֶּךָ׃ יח טוֹב אֲשֶׁר תֶּאֱחֹז בָּזֶה וְגַם־מִזֶּה אַל־תַּנַּח אֶת־יָדֶךָ כִּי־יָרֵא אֱלֹהִים יֵצֵא אֶת־כֻּלָּם׃
יט הַחָכְמָה תָּעֹז לֶחָכָם מֵעֲשָׂרָה שַׁלִּיטִים אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ בָּעִיר׃ כ כִּי אָדָם אֵין צַדִּיק בָּאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר
יַעֲשֶׂה־טּוֹב וְלֹא יֶחֱטָא׃ כא גַּם לְכָל־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר יְדַבֵּרוּ אַל־תִּתֵּן לִבֶּךָ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תִשְׁמַע
אֶת־עַבְדְּךָ מְקַלְלֶךָּ׃ כב כִּי גַּם־פְּעָמִים רַבּוֹת יָדַע לִבֶּךָ אֲשֶׁר גַּם־אַתָּה [אַתָּה] קִלַּלְתָּ אֲחֵרִים׃
כג כָּל־זֶה נִסִּיתִי בַחָכְמָה אָמַרְתִּי אֶחְכָּמָה וְהִיא רְחוֹקָה מִמֶּנִּי׃ כד רָחוֹק מַה־שֶּׁהָיָה וְעָמֹק | עָמֹק
מִי יִמְצָאֶנּוּ׃ כה סַבּוֹתִי אֲנִי וְלִבִּי לָדַעַת וְלָתוּר וּבַקֵּשׁ חָכְמָה וְחֶשְׁבּוֹן וְלָדַעַת רֶשַׁע כֶּסֶל וְהַסִּכְלוּת
הוֹלֵלוֹת׃ כו וּמוֹצֵא אֲנִי מַר מִמָּוֶת אֶת־הָאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר־הִיא מְצוֹדִים וְחֶרְמִים לִבָּהּ אֲסוּרִים יָדֶיהָ
טוֹב לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים יִמָּלֵט מִמֶּנָּה וְחוֹטֵא יִלָּכֵד בָּהּ׃ כז רְאֵה זֶה מָצָאתִי אָמְרָה קֹהֶלֶת אַחַת
לְאַחַת לִמְצֹא חֶשְׁבּוֹן׃ כח אֲשֶׁר עוֹד־בִּקְשָׁה נַפְשִׁי וְלֹא מָצָאתִי אָדָם אֶחָד מֵאֶלֶף מָצָאתִי וְאִשָּׁה
בְּכָל־אֵלֶּה לֹא מָצָאתִי׃ כט לְבַד רְאֵה־זֶה מָצָאתִי אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם יָשָׁר וְהֵמָּה
בִּקְשׁוּ חִשְׁבֹּנוֹת רַבִּים׃

פרק ח

א מִי־כְהֶחָכָם וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ פֵּשֶׁר דָּבָר חָכְמַת אָדָם תָּאִיר פָּנָיו וְעֹז פָּנָיו יְשֻׁנֶּא׃ ב אֲנִי פִּי־מֶלֶךְ שְׁמוֹר
וְעַל דִּבְרַת שְׁבוּעַת אֱלֹהִים׃ ג אַל־תִּבָּהֵל מִפָּנָיו תֵּלֵךְ אַל־תַּעֲמֹד בְּדָבָר רָע כִּי כָּל־אֲשֶׁר יַחְפֹּץ
יַעֲשֶׂה׃ ד בַּאֲשֶׁר דְּבַר־מֶלֶךְ שִׁלְטוֹן וּמִי יֹאמַר־לוֹ מַה־תַּעֲשֶׂה׃ ה שׁוֹמֵר מִצְוָה לֹא יֵדַע דָּבָר רָע
וְעֵת וּמִשְׁפָּט יֵדַע לֵב חָכָם׃ ו כִּי לְכָל־חֵפֶץ יֵשׁ עֵת וּמִשְׁפָּט כִּי־רָעַת הָאָדָם רַבָּה עָלָיו׃ ז כִּי־אֵינֶנּוּ
יֹדֵעַ מַה־שֶּׁיִּהְיֶה כִּי כַאֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה מִי יַגִּיד לוֹ׃ ח אֵין אָדָם שַׁלִּיט בָּרוּחַ לִכְלוֹא אֶת־הָרוּחַ וְאֵין
שִׁלְטוֹן בְּיוֹם הַמָּוֶת וְאֵין מִשְׁלַחַת בַּמִּלְחָמָה וְלֹא־יְמַלֵּט רֶשַׁע אֶת־בְּעָלָיו׃ ט אֶת־כָּל־זֶה רָאִיתִי
וְנָתוֹן אֶת־לִבִּי לְכָל־מַעֲשֶׂה אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ עֵת אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַט הָאָדָם בְּאָדָם לְרַע לוֹ׃
י וּבְכֵן רָאִיתִי רְשָׁעִים קְבֻרִים וָבָאוּ וּמִמְּקוֹם קָדוֹשׁ יְהֻלְּכוּ וְיִשְׁתַּכְּחוּ בָּעִיר אֲשֶׁר כֵּן־עָשׂוּ גַּם־זֶה
הָבֶל׃ יא אֲשֶׁר אֵין־נַעֲשָׂה פִּתְגָם מַעֲשֶׂה הָרָעָה מְהֵרָה עַל־כֵּן מָלֵא לֵב בְּנֵי־הָאָדָם בָּהֶם לַעֲשׂוֹת
רָע׃ יב אֲשֶׁר חֹטֶא עֹשֶׂה רָע מְאַת וּמַאֲרִיךְ לוֹ כִּי גַּם־יוֹדֵעַ אֲנִי אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה־טּוֹב לִירְאֵי הָאֱלֹהִים
אֲשֶׁר יִירְאוּ מִלְּפָנָיו׃ יג וְטוֹב לֹא־יִהְיֶה לָרָשָׁע וְלֹא־יַאֲרִיךְ יָמִים כַּצֵּל אֲשֶׁר אֵינֶנּוּ יָרֵא מִלִּפְנֵי
אֱלֹהִים׃ יד יֶשׁ־הֶבֶל אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה עַל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר | יֵשׁ צַדִּיקִים אֲשֶׁר מַגִּיעַ אֲלֵהֶם כְּמַעֲשֵׂה
הָרְשָׁעִים וְיֵשׁ רְשָׁעִים שֶׁמַּגִּיעַ אֲלֵהֶם כְּמַעֲשֵׂה הַצַּדִּיקִים אָמַרְתִּי שֶׁגַּם־זֶה הָבֶל׃ טו וְשִׁבַּחְתִּי אֲנִי
אֶת־הַשִּׂמְחָה אֲשֶׁר אֵין־טוֹב לָאָדָם תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ כִּי אִם־לֶאֱכֹל וְלִשְׁתּוֹת וְלִשְׂמוֹחַ וְהוּא יִלְוֶנּוּ
בַּעֲמָלוֹ יְמֵי חַיָּיו אֲשֶׁר־נָתַן־לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ׃ טז כַּאֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי אֶת־לִבִּי לָדַעַת חָכְמָה
וְלִרְאוֹת אֶת־הָעִנְיָן אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה עַל־הָאָרֶץ כִּי גַם בַּיּוֹם וּבַלַּיְלָה שֵׁנָה בְּעֵינָיו אֵינֶנּוּ רֹאֶה׃
יז וְרָאִיתִי אֶת־כָּל־מַעֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים כִּי לֹא יוּכַל הָאָדָם לִמְצוֹא אֶת־הַמַּעֲשֶׂה אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה
תַּחַת־הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ בְּשֶׁל אֲשֶׁר יַעֲמֹל הָאָדָם לְבַקֵּשׁ וְלֹא יִמְצָא וְגַם אִם־יֹאמַר חֲכָם לָדַעַת לֹא יוּכַל

לִמְצֹא׃

פרק ט

א כִּי אֶת־כָּל־זֶה נָתַתִּי אֶל־לִבִּי וְלָבוּר אֶת־כָּל־זֶה אֲשֶׁר הַצַּדִּיקִים וְהַחֲכָמִים וַעֲבָדֵיהֶם בְּיַד
הָאֱלֹהִים גַּם־אַהֲבָה גַּם־שִׂנְאָה אֵין יוֹדֵעַ הָאָדָם הַכֹּל לְפָנֵיהֶם׃ ב הַכֹּל כַּאֲשֶׁר לַכֹּל מִקְרֶה אֶחָד
לַצַּדִּיק וְלָרָשָׁע לַטּוֹב וְלַטָּהוֹר וְלַטָּמֵא וְלַזֹּבֵחַ וְלַאֲשֶׁר אֵינֶנּוּ זֹבֵחַ כַּטּוֹב כַּחוֹטֵא הַנִּשְׁבָּע כַּאֲשֶׁר
שָׁבוּעָה יָרֵא׃ ג זֶה | רָע בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־נַעֲשָׂה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ כִּי־מִקְרֶה אֶחָד לַכֹּל וְגַם לֵב בְּנֵי־הָאָדָם
מָלְא־רָע וְהוֹלֵלוֹת בִּלְבָבָם בְּחַיֵּיהֶם וְאַחֲרָיו אֶל־הַמֵּתִים׃ ד כִּי־מִי אֲשֶׁר יְחֻבַּר [יְחֻבַּר] אֶל
כָּל־הַחַיִּים יֵשׁ בִּטָּחוֹן כִּי־לְכֶלֶב חַי הוּא טוֹב מִן־הָאַרְיֵה הַמֵּת׃ ה כִּי הַחַיִּים יוֹדְעִים שֶׁיָּמֻתוּ
וְהַמֵּתִים אֵינָם יוֹדְעִים מְאוּמָה וְאֵין־עוֹד לָהֶם שָׂכָר כִּי נִשְׁכַּח זִכְרָם׃ ו גַּם אַהֲבָתָם גַּם־שִׂנְאָתָם
גַּם־קִנְאָתָם כְּבָר אָבָדָה וְחֵלֶק אֵין־לָהֶם עוֹד לְעוֹלָם בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־נַעֲשָׂה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ׃ ז לֵךְ אֱכֹל
בְּשִׂמְחָה לַחְמֶךָ וּשְׁתֵה בְלֵב־טוֹב יֵינֶךָ כִּי כְבָר רָצָה הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת־מַעֲשֶׂיךָ׃ ח בְּכָל־עֵת יִהְיוּ בְגָדֶיךָ
לְבָנִים וְשֶׁמֶן עַל־רֹאשְׁךָ אַל־יֶחְסָר׃ ט רְאֵה חַיִּים עִם־אִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר־אָהַבְתָּ כָּל־יְמֵי חַיֵּי הֶבְלֶךָ אֲשֶׁר
נָתַן־לְךָ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ כֹּל יְמֵי הֶבְלֶךָ כִּי הוּא חֶלְקְךָ בַּחַיִּים וּבַעֲמָלְךָ אֲשֶׁר־אַתָּה עָמֵל תַּחַת
הַשָּׁמֶשׁ׃ י כֹּל אֲשֶׁר תִּמְצָא יָדְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּכֹחֲךָ עֲשֵׂה כִּי אֵין מַעֲשֶׂה וְחֶשְׁבּוֹן וְדַעַת וְחָכְמָה בִּשְׁאוֹל
אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה הֹלֵךְ שָׁמָּה׃ יא שַׁבְתִּי וְרָאָה תַּחַת־הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ כִּי לֹא לַקַּלִּים הַמֵּרוֹץ וְלֹא לַגִּבּוֹרִים
הַמִּלְחָמָה וְגַם לֹא לַחֲכָמִים לֶחֶם וְגַם לֹא לַנְּבֹנִים עֹשֶׁר וְגַם לֹא לַיֹּדְעִים חֵן כִּי־עֵת וָפֶגַע יִקְרֶה
אֶת־כֻּלָּם׃ יב כִּי גַּם לֹא־יֵדַע הָאָדָם אֶת־עִתּוֹ כַּדָּגִים שֶׁנֶּאֱחָזִים בִּמְצוֹדָה רָעָה וְכַצִּפֳּרִים הָאֲחֻזוֹת
בַּפָּח כָּהֶם יוּקָשִׁים בְּנֵי הָאָדָם לְעֵת רָעָה כְּשֶׁתִּפּוֹל עֲלֵיהֶם פִּתְאֹם׃ יג גַּם־זֹה רָאִיתִי חָכְמָה תַּחַת
הַשָּׁמֶשׁ וּגְדוֹלָה הִיא אֵלָי׃ יד עִיר קְטַנָּה וַאֲנָשִׁים בָּהּ מְעָט וּבָא־אֵלֶיהָ מֶלֶךְ גָּדוֹל וְסָבַב אֹתָהּ
וּבָנָה עָלֶיהָ מְצוֹדִים גְּדֹלִים׃ טו וּמָצָא בָהּ אִישׁ מִסְכֵּן חָכָם וּמִלַּט־הוּא אֶת־הָעִיר בְּחָכְמָתוֹ
וְאָדָם לֹא זָכַר אֶת־הָאִישׁ הַמִּסְכֵּן הַהֽוּא׃ טז וְאָמַרְתִּי אֲנִי טוֹבָה חָכְמָה מִגְּבוּרָה וְחָכְמַת הַמִּסְכֵּן
בְּזוּיָה וּדְבָרָיו אֵינָם נִשְׁמָעִים׃ יז דִּבְרֵי חֲכָמִים בְּנַחַת נִשְׁמָעִים מִזַּעֲקַת מוֹשֵׁל בַּכְּסִילִים׃ יח טוֹבָה
חָכְמָה מִכְּלֵי קְרָב וְחוֹטֵא אֶחָד יְאַבֵּד טוֹבָה הַרְבֵּה׃

פרק י

א זְבוּבֵי מָוֶת יַבְאִישׁ שֶׁמֶן רוֹקֵחַ יָקָר מֵחָכְמָה מִכָּבוֹד סִכְלוּת מְעָט׃ ב לֵב חָכָם לִימִינוֹ וְלֵב
כְּסִיל לִשְׂמֹאלוֹ׃ ג וְגַם־בַּדֶּרֶךְ כְּשֶׁהַסָּכָל [כְּשֶׁשָּׁכָל] הֹלֵךְ לִבּוֹ חָסֵר וְאָמַר לַכֹּל סָכָל הוּא׃
ד אִם־רוּחַ הַמּוֹשֵׁל תַּעֲלֶה עָלֶיךָ מְקוֹמְךָ אַל־תַּנַּח כִּי מַרְפֵּא יַנִּיחַ חֲטָאִים גְּדוֹלִים׃ ה יֵשׁ רָעָה
רָאִיתִי תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ כִּשְׁגָגָה שֶׁיֹּצֵא מִלִּפְנֵי הַשַּׁלִּיט׃ ו נִתַּן הַסָּכָל בַּמְּרוֹמִים רַבִּים וַעֲשִׁירִים
בַּשֵּׁפֶל יֵשֵׁבוּ׃ ז רָאִיתִי עֲבָדִים עַל־סוּסִים וְשָׂרִים הֹלְכִים כָּעֲבָדִים עַל־הָאָרֶץ׃ ח חֹפֵר גּוּמָּץ בּוֹ
יִפּוֹל וּפֹרֵץ גָּדֵר יִשְׁכְּנֶנּוּ נָחָשׁ׃ ט מַסִּיעַ אֲבָנִים יֵעָצֵב בָּהֶם בּוֹקֵעַ עֵצִים יִסָּכֵן בָּם׃ י אִם־קֵהָה
הַבַּרְזֶל וְהוּא לֹא־פָנִים קִלְקַל וַחֲיָלִים יְגַבֵּר וְיִתְרוֹן הַכְשֵׁיר חָכְמָה׃ יא אִם־יִשֹּׁךְ הַנָּחָשׁ
בְּלוֹא־לָחַשׁ וְאֵין יִתְרוֹן לְבַעַל הַלָּשׁוֹן׃ יב דִּבְרֵי פִי־חָכָם חֵן וְשִׂפְתוֹת כְּסִיל תְּבַלְּעֶנּוּ׃ יג תְּחִלַּת
דִּבְרֵי־פִיהוּ סִכְלוּת וְאַחֲרִית פִּיהוּ הוֹלֵלוּת רָעָה׃ יד וְהַסָּכָל יַרְבֶּה דְּבָרִים לֹא־יֵדַע הָאָדָם
מַה־שֶּׁיִּהְיֶה וַאֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה מֵאַחֲרָיו מִי יַגִּיד לוֹ׃ טו עֲמַל הַכְּסִילִים תְּיַגְּעֶנּוּ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדַע לָלֶכֶת
אֶל־עִיר׃ טז אִי־לָךְ אֶרֶץ שֶׁמַּלְכֵּךְ נָעַר וְשָׂרַיִךְ בַּבֹּקֶר יֹאכֵלוּ׃ יז אַשְׁרֵיךְ אֶרֶץ שֶׁמַּלְכֵּךְ בֶּן־חוֹרִים
וְשָׂרַיִךְ בָּעֵת יֹאכְלוּ בִּגְבוּרָה וְלֹא בַשְּׁתִי׃ יח בַּעֲצַלְתַּיִם יִמַּךְ הַמִּקְרֶה וּבְשִׁפְלוּת יָדַיִם יִדְלֹף הַבָּיִת׃
יט לִשְׂחוֹק עֹשִׂים לֶחֶם וְיַיִן יְשַׂמַּח חַיִּים וְהַכֶּסֶף יַעֲנֶה אֶת־הַכֹּל׃ כ גַּם בְּמַדָּעֲךָ מֶלֶךְ אַל־תְּקַלֵּל
וּבְחַדְרֵי מִשְׁכָּבְךָ אַל־תְּקַלֵּל עָשִׁיר כִּי עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם יוֹלִיךְ אֶת־הַקּוֹל וּבַעַל הַכְּנָפַיִם [כְּנָפִים] יַגִּיד
דָּבָר׃

פרק יא

א שַׁלַּח לַחְמְךָ עַל־פְּנֵי הַמָּיִם כִּי־בְרֹב הַיָּמִים תִּמְצָאֶנּוּ׃ ב תֵּן־חֵלֶק לְשִׁבְעָה וְגַם לִשְׁמוֹנָה כִּי לֹא

תֵּדַע מַה־יִּהְיֶה רָעָה עַל־הָאָרֶץ׃ ג אִם־יִמָּלְאוּ הֶעָבִים גֶּשֶׁם עַל־הָאָרֶץ יָרִיקוּ וְאִם־יִפּוֹל עֵץ
בַּדָּרוֹם וְאִם בַּצָּפוֹן מְקוֹם שֶׁיִּפּוֹל הָעֵץ שָׁם יִהְיֶה׃ ד שֹׁמֵר רוּחַ לֹא יִזְרָע וְרֹאֶה בֶּעָבִים לֹא יִקְצֹר׃
ה כַּאֲשֶׁר אֵינְךָ יוֹדֵעַ מַה־דֶּרֶךְ הָרוּחַ כַּעֲצָמִים בְּבֶטֶן הַמְּלֵאָה כָּכָה לֹא תֵדַע אֶת־מַעֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים
אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה אֶת־הַכֹּל׃ ו בַּבֹּקֶר זְרַע אֶת־זַרְעֶךָ וְלָעֶרֶב אַל־תַּנַּח יָדֶךָ כִּי אֵינְךָ יוֹדֵעַ אֵי זֶה יִכְשַׁר
הֲזֶה אוֹ־זֶה וְאִם־שְׁנֵיהֶם כְּאֶחָד טוֹבִים׃ ז וּמָתוֹק הָאוֹר וְטוֹב לָעֵינַיִם לִרְאוֹת אֶת־הַשָּׁמֶשׁ׃ ח כִּי
אִם־שָׁנִים הַרְבֵּה יִחְיֶה הָאָדָם בְּכֻלָּם יִשְׂמָח וְיִזְכֹּר אֶת־יְמֵי הַחֹשֶׁךְ כִּי־הַרְבֵּה יִהְיוּ כָּל־שֶׁבָּא הָבֶל׃
ט שְׂמַח בָּחוּר בְּיַלְדוּתֶיךָ וְיִטַיְבְךָ לִבְּךָ בִּימֵי בְחוּרוֹתֶךָ וְהַלֵּךְ בְּדַרְכֵי לִבְּךָ וּבְמַרְאֵי עֵינֶיךָ וְדָע כִּי
עַל־כָּל־אֵלֶּה יְבִיאֲךָ הָאֱלֹהִים בַּמִּשְׁפָּט׃ י וְהָסֵר כַּעַס מִלִּבֶּךָ וְהַעֲבֵר רָעָה מִבְּשָׂרֶךָ כִּי־הַיַּלְדוּת
וְהַשַּׁחֲרוּת הָבֶל׃

פרק יב

א וּזְכֹר אֶת־בּוֹרְאֶיךָ בִּימֵי בְחוּרוֹתֶיךָ עַד אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָבֹאוּ יְמֵי הָרָעָה וְהִגִּיעוּ שָׁנִים אֲשֶׁר תֹּאמַר
אֵין־לִי בָהֶם חֵפֶץ׃ ב עַד אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תֶחְשַׁךְ הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וְהָאוֹר וְהַיָּרֵחַ וְהַכּוֹכָבִים וְשָׁבוּ הֶעָבִים אַחַר
הַגָּשֶׁם׃ ג בַּיּוֹם שֶׁיָּזֵעוּ שֹׁמְרֵי הַבַּיִת וְהִתְעַוְּתוּ אַנְשֵׁי הֶחָיִל וּבָטְלוּ הַטּוֹחֲנוֹת כִּי מִעֲטוּ וְחָשְׁכוּ
הָרֹאוֹת בָּאֲרֻבּוֹת׃ ד וְסֻגְּרוּ דְּלָתַיִם בַּשּׁוּק בִּשְׁפַל קוֹל הַטְּחֹנָה וְיָקוּם לְקוֹל הַצִּפּוֹר וְיִשַּׁחוּ
כָּל־בְּנוֹת הַשִּׁיר׃ ה גַּם מִגָּבֹהַּ יִרְאוּ וְחַתְחִתִּים בַּדָּרֶךְ וְיָנֵאץ הַשָּׁקֵד וְיִסְתַּבֵּל הֶחָגָב וְתָפֵר הָאֲבִיּוֹנָה
כִּי־הֹלֵךְ הָאָדָם אֶל־בֵּית עוֹלָמוֹ וְסָבְבוּ בַשּׁוּק הַסּוֹפְדִים׃ ו עַד אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יֵרָחֵק [יֵרָתֵק] חֶבֶל
הַכֶּסֶף וְתָרֵץ גֻּלַּת הַזָּהָב וְתִשָּׁבֵר כַּד עַל־הַמַּבּוּעַ וְנָרַץ הַגַּלְגַּל אֶל־הַבּוֹר׃ ז וְיָשֹׁב הֶעָפָר עַל־הָאָרֶץ
כְּשֶׁהָיָה וְהָרוּחַ תָּשׁוּב אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר נְתָנָהּ׃ ח הֲבֶל הֲבָלִים אָמַר הַקּוֹהֶלֶת הַכֹּל הָבֶל׃
ט וְיֹתֵר שֶׁהָיָה קֹהֶלֶת חָכָם עוֹד לִמַּד־דַּעַת אֶת־הָעָם וְאָזַן וְחִקֵּר תִּקֵּן מְשָׁלִים הַרְבֵּה׃ י בִּקֵּשׁ
קֹהֶלֶת לִמְצֹא דִּבְרֵי־חֵפֶץ וְכָתוּב יֹשֶׁר דִּבְרֵי אֱמֶת׃ יא דִּבְרֵי חֲכָמִים כַּדָּרְבֹנוֹת וּכְמַשְׁמְרוֹת
נְטוּעִים בַּעֲלֵי אֲסֻפּוֹת נִתְּנוּ מֵרֹעֶה אֶחָד׃ יב וְיֹתֵר מֵהֵמָּה בְּנִי הִזָּהֵר עֲשׂוֹת סְפָרִים הַרְבֵּה אֵין קֵץ
וְלַהַג הַרְבֵּה יְגִעַת בָּשָׂר׃ יג סוֹף דָּבָר הַכֹּל נִשְׁמָע אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים יְרָא וְאֶת־מִצְוֹתָיו שְׁמוֹר כִּי־זֶה
כָּל־הָאָדָם׃ יד כִּי אֶת־כָּל־מַעֲשֶׂה הָאֱלֹהִים יָבִא בְּמִשְׁפָּט עַל כָּל־נֶעְלָם אִם־טוֹב וְאִם־רָע׃*

A Time for Poetry

What time is it? Is it time to go? Is it nap-time? Let's kill some time. Now we've run out of time. Time heals.

What is it that we mean by the word, "time?" We can employ the word in a multitude of ways: a fixed moment (12:57pm), an opportunity with appropriate conditions ("time" to go), a moment defined by its very activity ("nap-time"), something remotely tangible (that we can "kill" or "run out of"), and even something therapeutic ("time heals"). Existentially, "time" is that which we can embrace, fight, or ignore. There are probably different times for each of these responses. In any case, we are always in some sort of relationship with "time."

Consequently, the question, "how do you experience 'time' in your life?" can become emotionally charged. When that 3rd century B.C.E. sage asked himself the question, the answer came in the form of a passionately ambivalent, repetitive, self-contradictory, brutally honest and ultimately reflective exposition that we call the Book of Kohelet. Of course, Kohelet never states this particular question explicitly. And to be sure, he has other big questions on his agenda. But to humanity's relationship with "time," he devotes a poem. It is not his only poem,[1] but it is certainly his best known. Particularly with the help of the Byrds' hit song of the 1960's, *Turn, Turn, Turn: To Everything There is a Season*, Kohelet's poetic words of late antiquity were popularized within 20th and early 21st century western culture. Kohelet writes that

> A season [*zman* זמן] is set for everything, a time [*et* עת] for every experience under heaven:
>
> A time for being born and a time for dying,
> A time for planting and a time for uprooting the planted;
> A time for slaying and a time for healing,

[1] Judging by the parallelism typical of Biblical poetry, both Kohelet's introduction (1:2-11) and part of his conclusion (12:3-8) also appear to be poems.

A time for tearing down and a time for building up;
A time for weeping and a time for laughing,
A time for wailing and a time for dancing;
A time for throwing stones and a time for gathering stones,
A time for embracing and a time for shunning embraces;
A time for seeking and a time for losing,
A time for keeping and a time for discarding;
A time for ripping and a time for sewing,
A time for silence and a time for speaking;
A time for loving and a time for hating;
A time for war and a time for peace.

This passage is found in Kohelet 3:1-8. Why in chapter 3, though? Why break from the free-flowing, associative, rhetorical prose for an interlude of poetic constraint, *here*, on the topic of "time?" Modern scholars acknowledge Kohelet's "Catalogue of Times" as a poem, and openly refer to it as such. But as this analysis will reveal, the major areas of scholarly inquiry tend to address issues such as whether the various "times" are to be seen as positive or negative, whether Kohelet's overall sense of "time" suggests pure determinism or some measure of human control, or indeed, what else might be Kohelet's intended message(s) of the "poem." As such, the "Catalogue of Times" seems to be called a poem more out of convenient reference than out of any technical assertion of the science or study of poetry, which would include meters and versification.

This philosophical and theological study of Kohelet's Catalogue of Times will include an exploration of the poem's poetic devices. There will be a time for prose. But there must also be a time for poetry. With a brief but hopefully sufficient overview of the major tools used to analyze biblical poetry, we will be ready to climb inside the poem and attempt to read it on its own poetic terms. In doing so, we will uncover why it is often deemed to be biblical poetry in the first place. Most significantly, though, we may find that peering deeply into Kohelet's *form* reveals insights into Kohelet's intended *content*.

It will also be interesting to see the extent to which this strictly poetic analysis contributes to the ongoing conversations about what has been at stake — intellectually, existentially, theologically — in reading this poem that has been read for millennia. Modern scholarly and classical rabbinic responses to Kohelet's treatment of "time" have been passionate and varied. "In time," we may even be in a position both to appreciate and criticize the poem anew, and possibly to appreciate Kohelet's angst.

Who Has the Correct Time?

Although the Hebrew word for "time," or *et* עת, is used in four other chapters,[2] Kohelet's first and most comprehensive exploration of the word and the concept occurs in chapter 3. There are 31 uses of the word; 28 of which become the very structure for our poem in 3:2-8. There is, however, another word for "time" used but once in the entire book: *zman* זמן. *Zman* זמן is widely translated as "season"[3] implying a "fixed or appointed time" to distinguish it from *et* עת as a "right/appropriate time." T.A. Perry even takes the notion of *zman* זמן as a fixed time to an extreme, understanding it as "preordained", and therefore translating it as "fate."[4] The question that remains is this:

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[2] They can be found in 7:17; 8:5,6,9; 9;11,12; and 10:17.

[3] For example, James L. Crenshaw, Ecclesiastes: A Commentary (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987) 92; Michael V. Fox. A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1999) 201; and the translation employed in the current study, the New Jewish Publication Society (1999), also translates *zman* זמן as "season", and *et* עת as "time" Crenshaw explains that *zman* זמן as a noun occurs only in late Biblical Hebrew and is probably borrowed from Aramaic. M. Fox observes that "*zman* does not seem to mean a propitious or right time, nor does it ever clearly designate time as a configuration of circumstances."

[4] T.A. Perry, Dialogues with Kohelet: The Book of Ecclesiastes, Translation and Commentary (Pennsylvania: Penn State Press, 1993) 85. Perry has a unique approach to the Book of Kohelet. He radicalizes the treatment of the book as a veritable dialogue between *two* individuals: Kohelet (whom he calls "K") and a "Presenter" ("P"). Perry's translation renders the book a transcript of a Socratic debate between **K**, the "skeptical persona/man of experience" (whose words are presented in bold) and *P*, the "man of faith" (presented in italics). Perry 45. Perry therefore attributes the assertion that "'**fate' (זמן) rules**

what is the significance of Kohelet's overwhelming choice of *et* עת, given that he elected to use *zman* זמן only once?

In his most recent rereading of Kohelet, Michael Fox outlines two main categories of time:[5]

1) Temporally defined; i.e. a specific location on the time continuum such as a date (including, for example, 'wintertime') or hour.
2) Substantively defined; i.e. events or configurations of circumstances, such as 'harvest time').

To illustrate the distinction between the two categories, Fox offers the following example:

> The period when lakes are frozen (December-March, where I am) is defined by the event in that period, whereas winter, defined by a time-slot (winter solstice to vernal equinox), will always be winter regardless of how severe global warming becomes. Put otherwise, a 'time' in category 1 (for example, March 1949, or March every year) would be the 'same' time regardless of what happened then, whereas as in category 2, a 'time' (for example, a 'good time to ski') exists as such only insofar as it fits the requisite conditions (a good snow cover); if it does not, it is not *that* time.[6]

Fox therefore places all the "times" of Kohelet's poem, such as "being born times" and "dying times", "planting times" and "uprooting times" (3:2), squarely in the latter category, of time *substantively* defined. What Kohelet recounts are indeed events and configurations of circumstances. As such, these "times" have the potential to be more, or less, prudent, sensible, ripe, right. Broadly, the difference between *zman* זמן and *et* עת is the difference between that which *does* happen, versus that which *should* happen. Fox also anticipates the potential problem of circular reasoning: whenever someone happens

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over everything" (3:1a) to **K**, and the response, "*yet every thing has its appropriate time (עת) under the heavens*" (3:1b), to *P*.

[5] Abbreviated from Fox's extensive outline 195-6.

[6] Fox 196.

to be sewing does *not* make that moment the right "time for sewing." Rather, "'time' in Kohelet's sense is more like a hole in a pegboard...A round time, so to speak, calls for a 'round' action that will fill it."[7]

Happily for proponents of (at least some measure of) human free will, the *zman* זמן/*et* עת distinction foils a purely predeterministic reading of Kohelet's passage. The modicum of autonomy is soon frustrated, however, since humanity must still face a formidable reality. Although we may know that right, appropriate "times" *do* exist for all actions, alas, we cannot see what those right times are! Kohelet might even have added the exclamation mark to his own words in 3:10-11 where he says,

> I have observed the business that God gave man to be concerned with: He brings everything to pass precisely at its time; He also puts eternity in their mind, but without man ever guessing, from first to last, all the things that God brings to pass.

Yet his exasperation leads to a remarkably upbeat conclusion, remarking "Thus I realized that the only worthwhile thing there is for them is to enjoy themselves and do what is good in their lifetime" (3:12).

But readers of Kohelet do not always seem to be consoled. It is even unclear to what extent Kohelet himself is consoled by this realization. 3:12 seems to emerge more out of necessity than consolation. As such, it may help provide someone with a more existentially viable alternative for living life, but it does not fully mitigate the harsh truth that control over human life does not ultimately rest with people. As Fox puts it, "Every event and deed may have a right time...But there's a catch: God has denied man the knowledge of when those times are."[8] Another scholar laments as follows:

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[7] Fox 198.
[8] Fox 192.

> God has given us a sore travail. Events happen to us from time to time, but God has given us a longing to know the eternity of things, the whole scheme; but, try as we will, we cannot see it, though we can declare by faith that each event plays its part in the beauty of the plan.[9]

In its own courageous way, Midrash Rabbah not only faces the difficult reality directly, but also seeks to make meaning of it. In a creative re-reading of *ha'olam* העולם (world/eternity) in 3:11 as *hu'alam* הועלם (hidden), Kohelet Rabbah explains, by way of analogy, *why* it is that divine knowledge is hidden from human beings:

> [This] may be likened to a king who held a banquet to which he invited guests. After they had eaten and drunk, they said to him, 'Give us swords and spears to play with'; but he gave them myrtle-branches, and they struck and wounded one another with them. The king exclaimed, 'If you acted so when I gave you myrtle-branches, how much damage would there have been had I given you swords and spears!'[10]

According to the analogy, a full knowledge of "time" is too powerful and dangerous for the king (God) to entrust to his guests (us). Apparently we are not the most responsible guests at that great "banquet" we call life. And this is coming from a midrashist who predated humanity's horrors of the 20th century, indeed of the last millennium. Rashbam (Rav Shmuel ben Meir), a prominent 12th century biblical and Talmudic commentator from France, offers another reason for why we cannot know the times of God.

> The Holy One put time in the hearts of men that they may know and understand that there are times appointed for good and times appointed for evil. For man cannot discover or know the acts of the Holy One from the beginning to the end. For if all the times were for good or all for evil, man would not repent before the Holy One, because he would think, 'Since there is one fate in the world, either everything is for good, or everything is for evil, should I

[9] Addison G. Wright, Reflecting with Solomon, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1994) 23.
[10] Kohelet Rabbah, 3.11.3, Soncino translation.

> abandon my evil deeds for that, and what benefit would I get in my repentance?'[11]

The very moral order of the universe requires that we not have the same power and knowledge as God. Besides, even if a person were to try to discover these precious right times, s/he would end up "idle," at least according to the following commentary of Rashbam on Kohelet 11:4 ("If one watches the wind, he will never sow; and if one observes the clouds, he will never reap"):

> Whoever keeps watch and expects a wind to come up in the world — because sowing is good when the wind is blowing — he will not sow much, for the wind only happens to blow occasionally. Whoever observes and regards the clouds at harvest time will not reap; for it is impossible that he will not see clouds or not be afraid of rain and showers every morning. But he should reap whatever he can reap, and not be idle because of the clouds which he sees in the morning of that day. If he refrains from reaping today for fear of rain, perhaps it will not rain today but tomorrow, and so it (may go on) each day. The result is that he remains idle.[12]

So, using the capacities of our senses to "second-guess" the times (an ability for which Kohelet yearns) is ultimately immobilizing, incapacitating. Rashbam seems to suggest that we just need to keep living — in a sort of suspended reality — "as if" our efforts will be fruitful... not the most comforting conclusion for a rationalist like Kohelet. Then again, Kohelet did not seek to protect his readers from any of his own unsettling ruminations.

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[11] Sara Japhet and Robert B. Salters, Rashbam on Qohelet: The Commentary of R.Samuel Ben Meir (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press Hebrew University, 1985) 116.
[12] Japhet and Salters 200-202.

And a Time for Poetry

> *...A poem is successful not because of the poet's ambition or sense of purpose but because of the effect it creates in the reader and in many readers over time.*
>
> - Robert Pinsky (American Poet Laureate)

In his conclusion to "The Grip of Time", J.A. Loader is left unsettled after his analysis of Kohelet's poem. Loader summarizes what he judges to be the poem's central message: a person cannot guarantee his/her own happiness. As if this was the good news, Loader immediately counters,

> But there is also something very unsatisfactory about the poem. There is a restlessness like that of a weaver's shuttle in it, a persistent uncertainty in the back-and-forth movement of its ideas. It is a restless and unfathomable sea in which the human lifeboat tosses about.[13]

This is an eloquent and accurate description of what the poem can do to its reader! Loader has allowed himself to experience the full vertigo of the poem and the poet. But *how* is Kohelet effectively communicating his perturbed state through this poetic vehicle? While Loader may wish for an anchor amidst the storm of the Times, the literary biblical scholar Robert Alter warns that biblical poetry in general is not in the habit of providing balance and stability.[14] Although the hallmark of biblical poetry is parallelism (which we see in a singularly stark way in Kohelet's Catalogue of Times), Alter argues that the purpose of this parallelism is to make a *unique semantic modification.*[15] The goal is precisely to achieve dynamic movement, rather than any sense of equilibrium. A

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[13] J.A. Loader, "The Grip of Time: Ecclesiastes 3:1-9," Specific Themes and Passages in the Book of Ecclesiastes, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1994) 261.
[14] Robert Alter, The Art of Biblical Poetry (USA: Basic Books, 1985) 33. Alter observes a "clear statistical preponderance of dynamic over static lines" in Biblical poetry.
[15] Alter 10.

comparable example of such basic and blatant parallelism as we have in the Catalogue of Times is hard to find elsewhere in the Bible. There are fourteen sets of "a time for this and a time for that." At first, the parallelism may even appear elementary, but there is plenty that is not so obvious about the poem. Most impressive is how the poem's rigid parallelism manages to create the paradoxical effect of a swirling tempest, reminiscent of those ever-turning winds Kohelet opens with, in 1:6.

Scholars all agree that parallelism is the hallmark of biblical poetry.[16] Parallelism means there is some kind of relationship between the units or "versets" of the line. But this is the question that remains: what is the role of the second item in the paralleled pair? In other words, if each verse is made up of two parallel versets, what exactly is the force of the *second* verset? Is the second verset simply synonymous, a straightforward echo of the first one? If so, then Biblical poetry is a fairly flat poetry of stasis, simplistic, perhaps even tedious. On the other hand, what if the second verset were actually serving, in any number of ways, to heighten, intensify, develop, specify, and comment back on or even contrast with the first? Is it perhaps an antonym, a reversal of the first? How does it have a dynamic impact upon the meaning of the line and the development of the entire poetic piece? Alter's thesis is a passionate quest to argue this latter case for Biblical poetry in general. With respect to Kohelet's poem of the Times, we are faced with an additional complication. We are not sure about the nature of the parallel relationships between the Times; that is, we do not know whether synonyms or antonyms are at work.

[16] Specifically Alter 1985, and the foundational work by Benjamin Hrushovski (Harshav), "Hebrew Prosody," Encyclopaedia Judaica 1971 ed. 1200-1202.

Below, we apply a system of typographical symbols that Alter has devised for analysis of biblical poetry, to Kohelet's Catalogue of Times poem.[17] As one can see, each verse contains two versets. The typographical symbol between the two denotes shifting semantic relations between the versets. The symbols are as follows:

= **Synonymity**: With synonymity, the second verset is relatively equivalent to the first, without lending a unique modification in meaning. This results in what Alter calls a perspective of stasis,[18] such as "For this is I sing your praises, Adonai...and chant Your name" (Psalms 18:50).

{ } **Complementarity**: Another example of static parallelism is complementarity, where "two coordinate items belong to the same category, like 'green pastures' and 'still waters.'"[19]

> **Focusing, heightening, intensification, specification**. Indicates various sorts of intensification, that may be manifested in many parts of speech such as nouns, adjectives, verbs or adverbs that Alter found to be so crucial to Biblical poetry. I.e. The second verset may dramatize ("who beholds visions...who falls down with eyes unveiled", Num. 24:4), elevate ("curse... execrate", Num. 23:2), narrow (Judea...the streets of Jerusalem), intensify ("weep and laugh... wail and dance," as we will see below in Kohelet 3:4) etc., the idea in the first verset.[20]

[17] Alter 29-30, also uses "→" to denote a sense of "consequentiality" to indicate "sequential movement in time and consequential movement in a chain of causality (35). An unambiguous example is "Praised I called the Lord,/ and from my enemies I was saved" (Psalms 18). A trickier case might be, "Mounted a cherub and flew, / soared on the wings of the wind." But consequentiality does not seem to play a role in our poem.

[18] Alter 10. Alter also put the equation sign "=" in a circle to denote what he called "synonymity with verbatim repetition" (29), but this does not apply in our poem.

[19] Alter 22.

[20] Alter 19-23, offers a series of examples.

Kohelet 3:1-9

[1] A season (*zman* זמן) is set for everything, a time (*et* עת) for every experience[21] under heaven:

[2] A time for being born and a time for dying, </> A time for planting and a time for uprooting the planted;

[3] A time for slaying and a time for healing, { } A time for tearing down and a time for building up;

[4] A time to weep and a time to laugh, > A time for wailing and a time for dancing;

[5] A time for throwing stones and a time for gathering stones, > A time for embracing and a time for shunning embraces;

[6] A time for seeking and a time for losing, > A time for keeping and a time for discarding;

[7] A time for ripping and a time for sewing, { } A time for silence and a time for speaking;

[8] A time for loving and a time for hating; > A time for war and a time for peace.

[9] What value, then, can the man of affairs [doing] get from what he earns [toils]?

[א] לַכֹּל זְמָן וְעֵת לְכָל־חֵפֶץ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמָיִם׃

[ב] עֵת לָלֶדֶת וְעֵת לָמוּת <\> עֵת לָטַעַת וְעֵת לַעֲקוֹר נָטוּעַ׃

[ג] עֵת לַהֲרוֹג וְעֵת לִרְפּוֹא { } עֵת לִפְרוֹץ וְעֵת לִבְנוֹת׃

[ד] עֵת לִבְכּוֹת וְעֵת לִשְׂחוֹק < עֵת סְפוֹד וְעֵת רְקוֹד׃

[ה] עֵת לְהַשְׁלִיךְ אֲבָנִים וְעֵת כְּנוֹס אֲבָנִים <

עֵת לַחֲבוֹק וְעֵת לִרְחֹק מֵחַבֵּק׃

[ו] עֵת לְבַקֵּשׁ וְעֵת לְאַבֵּד < עֵת לִשְׁמוֹר וְעֵת לְהַשְׁלִיךְ׃

[ז] עֵת לִקְרוֹעַ וְעֵת לִתְפּוֹר { } עֵת לַחֲשׁוֹת וְעֵת לְדַבֵּר׃

[ח] עֵת לֶאֱהֹב וְעֵת לִשְׂנֹא < עֵת מִלְחָמָה וְעֵת שָׁלוֹם׃

[ט] מַה־יִּתְרוֹן הָעוֹשֶׂה בַּאֲשֶׁר הוּא עָמֵל ׃

[21] Alternatively, *chafetz* חפץ can be translated as a "desire."

Indeed, the majority of verses evince some sort of intensification. In verse 2, planting and uprooting can be read as a graphic metaphor for being born and dying, thereby intensifying the meaning of the first verset. It is also possible that planting and uprooting *feel* graphic next to being born and dying because they are not meant to be compared as equivalences (as in elaborate simile), but as parts representing the whole, as in metonymy. Planting and uprooting become parts of the broader whole of being born and dying. On the other hand, we must also consider the possibility of a *reverse* intensification, where it is the first verset that has greater intensity than the second. After all, "life and death" is the way we talk about issues of urgency and intensity. From the very beginning of the poem we are faced with a dynamic parallelism.

But the second line, verse 3 (like the second to last line, verse 7), seems fairly complementary and therefore stable. If there is semantic movement, it is quite subtle. Verse 4, however, is a clear and beautiful magnification of weeping and laughing. Weeping heightens to wailing and laughing explodes into dance.

Verse 5 is enigmatic. There is some debate as to what the ancient expression of "throwing and gathering stones" referred. Assuming the poetic parallelism is at work, the most compelling translation is as a euphemism for "lovemaking and refraining from lovemaking,"[22] since what follows is "embracing and shunning embrace." The versets thus appear to be in a relationship of reverse intensification, as we considered with verse 2. Perhaps here in verse 5 too, the arrow should be flipped since the intensification moves in the opposite direction. While this irregularity could be a clue that "throwing and

[22] Fox, however, is not convinced. He urges us to consider other possibilities such as: stones were cast upon fields as an act of war and in peacetime were gathered and removed. Still others consider the expression in financial terms- of spending (throwing stones) and saving money (gathering stones). Fox 208.

gathering stones" refers to something other than lovemaking, it is interesting to consider how a reverse intensification could infuse additional flux into the poem. It invites us to recall Loader's image of the back-and-forth movement of a weaver's shuttle.

Although verse 6 seems ambiguous to us, Loader observes that the second pair of verbs intensifies the first, as follows: "'keeping' as compared with 'seeking' and 'throwing away' as compared with 'giving up.'"[23] Verse 7 requires some knowledge of ancient mourning customs. "Tearing" clothing and being "silent" were mourning practices (although wailing was also common in mourning). As such, the versets could be a good example of complementarity. Verse 8, finally, *would* have been an uncomplicated instance of intensification, from love to peace and hate to war, had the second verset not reversed the order from the first. Perry theorizes that Kohelet ended this way to effect a reverse parallel of the opening "born and die", adding simply that it is also better to end a series on a positive note.[24] But these are not the most compelling arguments, least of all the suggestion that the poem is "ending on a positive note." Although it is quite clear that ending on an uplifting note was (and is) a value within the rabbinic tradition, we lack examples of why this would be a value for *Kohelet*, or any author of late antiquity.

Overall, Alter observes that biblical poets tended to frame the opening and closing lines with examples of *static* parallelism.[25] Conversely, Kohelet's poem both begins and ends with *intensification*, probably contributing further to the reader's sense of disorientation. Essentially, the second verset is actually a mini-commentary on the first; a sort of micro-midrashic move — not only among the versets within the line, but throughout the interlinear development of the whole piece.

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[23] Loader 260.
[24] Perry 18.

The semantic intensifications return us, yet again, to the restlessness of that weaver's shuttle. These are the movements that are tossing Loader's human lifeboat about. In a subtle yet penetrating way, the reader's overall unease is heightened by reversals and other tensions in the parallelism. Parallel structures prime our brains to seek neat, clear-cut categories for the ideas. We would like all the positive/favorable notions to be on one side and negative/unfavorable ones to be on another. But they are not. It would be nice to have clarity about the Times and about our times; a reliable pattern by which we can anticipate what the second verset will hold, what our next moment will hold. But lucidity is not Kohelet's trademark,[26] nor does he experience life as having transparent meaning. Indeed, Kohelet's contribution lies in confronting the vicissitudes that we so desperately try to mask.

Incidentally, Fox, Loader, and Perry all produce their own schemata that organize the Times into good and bad. Each does so from a human (as opposed to divine) point of view.[27] With the exception of the first verset in verse 5 (containing the ancient expression about stones), the three scholars are unanimous about which Times are good and which are not (although Fox does express some doubt about "silence" and "speaking").[28] Indeed, from our informal poll, people will always assign these very same valences to each Time, even if they have the urge to assert that there can also be "right times" for the so-called negative times. Interestingly enough, it seems that this is precisely Kohelet's point. There *are* right times for the negative things; but could this then render them *positive*?

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[25] Alter 33.
[26] If anything, it is mist or *hevel* הבל that too quickly evaporates. For Kohelet, everything is *hevel* הבל, often translated as "futility" (1:2, 2:1 and elsewhere throughout).
[27] Fox 193, Loader 258, and Perry 17. Their schemata have been reproduced in Appendix I.
[28] Fox 194.

What the three do not agree upon is the possible significance of the pairings. For Fox, "positive and negative appear in no apparent sequence....The positive-negative pairing teaches that everything in life, even unfortunate and destructive deeds and events, have their right times."[29] For Loader, the pairings create an elaborate reversal (a form of chiasm), so that what otherwise would have been a parallel structure becomes crisscrossed into an X-pattern. Loader even suggests that this pattern makes the poem resemble a modern sonnet.[30] Perry analyzes the pairings from a slightly different angle. He is interested in the *direction* in which the favorability moves. He counts seven pairings of "decline" (move from a positive to a negative, such as born to die, plant to uproot, etc.), and seven pairings of life-enhancement (move from negative to positive, such as kill to heal, tear and build, etc.). The examples of decline he calls "natural patterns" and the examples of life-enhancement he calls "human patterns."[31] Such a classification would have directly raised the ever-looming question of theodicy, but recall that for Perry, this is a debate between a pessimist (observing "natural patterns") and an optimist (observing "human patterns"), and not a duel between God and humanity. Perry's point, and perhaps even Kohelet's, is that (all) that remains within our control, is how we choose to view the world.

Undoubtedly, great poetic power and tension is created by the inconsistent positive-negative pairings. It seems to me that a major source of this power is the poem's most glaring attribute: its use of "anaphora"; that is, a repetition of a word or phrase at

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[29] Fox 193-194.
[30] Loader 258.
[31] Perry 17. Perry nuances his typology: "By natural-versus-human pattern I do not mean that the first series (K's) refers only to nature's activities, since both series can refer to the human sphere. But in the first, man's activities conform to natural patterns and the succession from (+) to (-) is thus irreversible: pleasure always ends up in pain, rise always leads to fall, life is relentlessly destroyed and nothing (i.e., vanity)

the beginning of two or more verses creating a productive tension between sameness and difference.[32] The word repeated is, of course, time or *et* עת. The repetitions of *et* עת, twice in each verset, create a certain rhythm because the music of the word *et* עת becomes a predictable, familiar refrain for the ear. But what is contained within the framing of the *et* עת repetitions is neither predictable nor familiar. There are reversals, X-patterns that switch back and forth, intensifications, and unlikely and sometimes jarring juxtapositions. Perhaps this is as if to say, "Yes, various times we have come to know well will occur and recur, but don't expect to understand, to be ready for, or to have a say about what your second verset holds." In other words, one pair of events is not a clear indication as to what will follow.

While semantic intensification is a major vehicle for biblical poetry, it is not the sole vehicle. According to Benjamin Harshav, it represents one-third of the inner workings of biblical poetry. Harshav argues that the source of rhythm for biblical poetry is three-fold. It gets its rhythm from the sequence of *meanings* of the versets (semantic), from *word order* (syntactic) and from *syllabic stress* (accentual). Thus, Harshav described biblical poetry with the technical mouthful, "semantic-syntactic-accentual rhythm." Harshav demonstrates that there can be combinations of one or more of these three types of rhythm present in any given parallelism. This is what lends freedom to the biblical style of verse. The parallelism, then, is the structure that contains the verse. Our poetic analysis will conclude with a brief comment upon a second of the three rhythm types that is our poem's syntax, or word order. Making claims about the third type — the actual sound of Biblical poetry, where and how the syllables were stressed — is very

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remains. The second or human series, by contrast, illustrates the paradox that 'the end of a thing is better

risky. We cannot be entirely sure where the accents originally fell, how the vowels and syllables sounded and worked, or if there were changes in any of this over the centuries of biblical poetry.[33]

In some sense, the word order of our unit appears quite straightforward. The order of the parts of speech is closely mirrored in the pairs of versets. This becomes a particularly effective rhetorical device whose power lies, yet again, in the contrast. The sentences largely follow the same structure; namely, a subject is followed by an infinitive verb, i.e. "a time/ to be born." There are some exceptions to this, however. In some cases, there is a direct object, such as a time/ to throw/ *stones*. In others, our verb loses its infinitive prefix, "li-" *lamed* ל. In verse 4, for example, although the meaning of *lispod* לספוד is not changed, we wonder why the regular infinitives "to wail," *lispod* לספוד, and "to dance," *lirkod* לרקוד were not used. There is a phonetic change. Our attention is drawn to this second verset, as we miss the regular and predictable sound of the letter *lamed* ל. It seems to give the second verset an added "punch," further heightening the intensification of meanings already present in the verse (from weeping to wailing, laughing to dancing). The final and major exception to the regular subject/infinitive pattern lies in the very last line of the poem, where we encounter a subject-noun structure in the second verset of 3:8, which reads "a time for war and a time for peace." The switch to nouns at the end does seem to conclude the poem with a finality that could not have been captured by another set of verbs.

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than its beginning' (7:8)."
[32] Alter 64.
[33] Alter 4.

A Time for Restlessness?

Let us pay one final visit to Loader's unsettling lifeboat.

> But there is also something very unsatisfactory about the poem. There is a restlessness like that of a weaver's shuttle in it, a persistent uncertainty in the back-and-forth movement of its ideas. It is a restless and unfathomable sea in which the human lifeboat tosses about.[34]

The restlessness we have seen reflects and (we believe) captures a theological and existential restlessness. It is Kohelet's, but also Everyperson's who has ever cried out in indignation, "what is the meaning of all this?!" One of the greatest Italian commentators of the Renaissance period, Sforno (Rav Ovadiah Sforno, 1470-1550), sought to keep his balance amidst this ever-churning sea. His commentary on Kohelet 3:1 reads as follows:

> While it is not proper to completely reject the endeavor to acquire temporal life, it is also not proper to constantly immerse oneself in it, because 'everything has an appointed season,' which experience in natural and man-made phenomena will attest to.[35]

We are ultimately relegated to living with *persistent uncertainty*. Plain terms can describe a profound angst. In Alter's words, "Kohelet describes the impossibility of knowing what is truly going on in the world."[36]

On the other hand, through his dialectical reading of the Catalogue of Times, Perry observes that "the possibility of an optimistic structure of human time [is] one that opens toward salvation — not supinely being saved, of course, but rather receiving the

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[34] Loader 261.
[35] A.J. Rosenberg transl., The Books of Lamentations, Ecclesiastes; A New English Translation of the text, Rashi and a Commentary Digest Vol.2. (New York: The Judaica Press, 1992) 29.
[36] Alter 308.

God-given chance to save one's self."[37] But to get here, Perry had to ask a different question.

> On the crucial matter of time...it is not at all a question of 'when?' or even 'how fast?' or even of our wise understanding of the right time to act but rather of something much more accessible: In what direction are we headed? To answer this question we need only two points of comparison. For it does matter whether we view our lives as going from Sunday to Wednesday or from Wednesday to the Sabbath, whether the day is seen as going from day to night or from night to day, whether we end up with bitter or sweet fruit.[38]

Perry then creatively compares his question of "which way we are headed" to a famous dispute between Hillel and Shammai (Babylonian Talmud 21b) over lighting the Chanukiah.[39] Shammai argued that the lights be kindled by way of subtracting from eight to one on the final night (after all, one gradually runs *out* of oil, rather than accumulating it), while Hillel argued that the lights be kindled by way of adding (so as to make a statement of spiritual enhancement).[40] Hillel and Shammai may indeed represent Kohelet's responses to his own description of "time." *Logically* we run out of oil, but *psychologically* we need to increase the light. In other words, logically, Kohelet knows he cannot know God's intended times (3:9-11), but psychologically he realizes the need to live in a worthwhile way (3:13). Perhaps this is our strongest clue yet as to why the poem ends unexpectedly with the war/peace reversal, and concludes with "peace/wholness," or "*shalom* שלום."

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[37] Perry 45.
[38] Perry 20.
[39] Perry 21.
[40] So too are the days of the Jewish week traditionally named to indicate moving *towards* Shabbat, rather than away from it, i.e. Sunday is the "day one towards Shabbat," or "*yom rishon l'Shabbat* יום ראשון לשבת."

As much as the poem evinces blatant parallelism, it paradoxically undoes the predictability which parallelism fosters. Kohelet's form reflects his content, which is moving, shifting, changing. "Time" does not hold still, and too much about the Times remains hidden to humans. Kohelet seeks to provoke our anxiety just as his life has provoked his. The poem is not about a view of a world full of stability and security, but of imbalance and flux. Loader, and anyone else, has every right to respond with lament and even outrage to the ceaseless motion in the versets of our life. Perhaps it is even our human duty. But, as Perry would ask, in what direction do we go with our unsettling feelings? Need lament be the *only* response?

Kohelet's poem may serve as a sort of "existential Rorschach" test for its readers. As interpreters, we may therefore find it difficult — sometimes impossible — to maintain distinctions between Kohelet and our own passionate *responses* to him. Still, it seems worthwhile to try. At the very least, we may gain personal insight. Kohelet at one point is reluctant to accept God's gifts (3:13) because he knows there are fatal strings attached. Had Kohelet known about such things, he may have called these gifts *time bombs*. Perhaps this is the idea that the Yiddish proverb "A watchmaker is a thief" seeks to express. Kohelet's response, albeit reluctant, seems to accommodate another human reality: existential "rest" is something humans create. Out of healthy necessity, humans need to fabricate personal, meaningful time imposed upon the abstract, impersonal, rest-less time. Life *is* a very complicated gift to accept, but alternatives prove less acceptable.

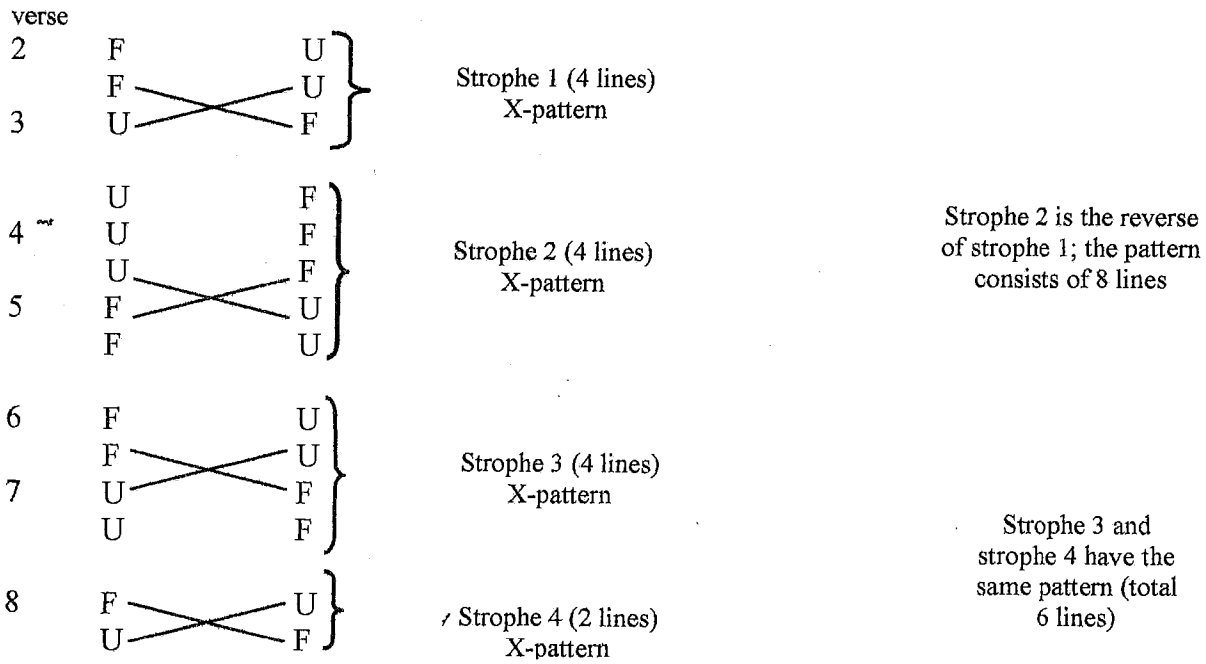
Appendix I

Three Theoretical Schemata for The Catalogue of Times

A. According to Michael V. Fox, there is no apparent sequence to the positive and negative pairings.[41]

+ being born	- dying
+ planting	- uprooting
- killing	+ healing
- tearing down	+ building up
- weeping	+ laughing
- mourning	+ dancing
- (?) casting stones	+ (?) gathering stones
+ embracing	- shunning embrace
+ seeking	- losing
+ keeping	- casting away
- rending	+ sewing
- (?) silence	+ (?) speaking
+ loving	- hating
- war	+ peace

B. J. Loader labels the pairings "favorable" and "unfavorable", and finds an intricate structure of chiasms (X patterns) within chiasms.[42]



[41] Fox. A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes 193.
[42] Loader 258.

C. T.A. Perry assumes the Book of Kohelet is a dialogue between "K" (the pessimist) and "P" (Presenter). Perry describes the Pessimist's way of nature as the decline from a life-enhancing "plus" to its "minus" or opposite, and the human possibility offered by the Presenter as the reversal of this order.[43]

(A) NATURAL PATTERNS:
+ > —
Kohelet's position

1. born and die (3:2)
2. plant and uproot (3:2)

7. have intercourse and abstain (3:5)
8. embrace and hold from embraces (3:5)
9. seek and give up (3:6)
10. keep and cast off (3:6)

13. love and hate (3:8)

(B) HUMAN PATTERNS:
— > +
Presenter's position

3. kill and heal (3:3)
4. wreck and build (3:3)

5. weep and laugh (3:4)

6. mourn and dance (3:4)

11. tear and repair (3:7)
12. be silent and speak (3:7)

14. make war and peace (3:8)

[43] Perry 17.

Connection to Sukkot

The blessing for the sukkah commandment is simply "to dwell in the sukkah," "*leishev ba'sukkah* לישב בסוכה." Just *being* in the sukkah is the goal. We necessarily experience time in that space differently from more permanent, more protective, more luxurious spaces. Although Einstein did not likely have Sukkot in mind when considering that time and space are relative, there may be a metaphysical statement to be made after all. Einstein's work revealed "the spatiotemporal structure of the universe depends on the distribution of all matter in it, and that time is unimaginable apart from the other dimensions."[44]

The time into which the sukkah space immerses us is creation time, God's time. It becomes night not when a certain number strikes the clock, but when dusk falls over the sukkah, the temperature cools, and eventually the cosmic time of the starlight — light years away — peers through our roof of hanging palm fronds, or *schach* סכך, overhead. We can bring candles and flashlights into our sukkot, but it still does not compare to the light in the room of a permanent building, which allows us to be continuously productive, if we want to be, and sustain an illusion that time is ours to control.

"Sukkah-time" is similar to "camping-time", and it is in contrast to what we refer to below as "Las Vegas-time." Camping in the outdoors fundamentally changes one's experience of time. And it takes an alternative dwelling space to do it. Indeed, although they may not phrase it in exactly these terms, many people go camping precisely to alter their experience of "time": to naturalize it, to spiritualize it. And yet, however beautiful and invigorating, we lack all control of time, as Kohelet promised. We cannot manipulate

[44] Related by Fox 195.

the darkness or the light, the rain or the sun. As the evening prayer for creation, *Ma'ariv Aravim* מעריב ערבים states,

> ...in wisdom You open the gates, and with knowledge change the times and switch the seasons, and organize the stars in their travels...

Someone Else controls this time. It can be awesome; full of dread, but also awesome; full of inspiration. In any case, *being* in the sukkah reminds us of that time "out there," that ultimately (Kohelet would have us remember) controls our own souls, deep "in here," within us. Being in a flimsy, temporary, outdoor space reveals that we have far less control than we would like, over time. But as Kohelet would have preferred, it is a far more honest picture of our reality, and possibly helps us to make more honest decisions about the sorts of spaces we would like to spend our time.

Las Vegas-time is the opposite. That unique section of Las Vegas known as "the strip" may be the epitome of an artificial reconstruction of time. In order to keep gamblers comfortable and removed from natural time, everything is simulated such as the temperature of the air and the lighting. There are no clocks, windows, or exit signs. Even the elevators are especially fast lest someone have too much "time" to change their mind about going down to the tables. By and large, we have become quite good at hiding sukkah-time in such ways, perhaps because it *is* so very comforting to exercise a sense of control over it, or because it fulfills commercial aims.

Whether or not we create little "Las Vegases" for ourselves, and despite how much fun they can be, the commandment to sit, to dwell, to be in the sukkah, *leishev ba'sukkah* לישב בסוכה, has the potential reorient in a powerful way to Kohelet's loud, albeit oblique charge of carpe diem (seize the *time*) while you can! Paradoxically,

sukkah-time may also help us to seize *less*, at least for a while, that we may reflect and refocus, just as Kohelet did. All this becomes particularly relevant in light of the *season* of reflection that culminates in Sukkot. From Selichot, to Rosh Hashanah, through the 10 days of "turning," to Yom Kippur, Judaism urges us to take an accounting of many things, and many times, in many ways. By the time we dwell in a sukkah, we have done difficult work. The season, *zman* זמן, helps us to make fuller meaning of our time, our *et* עת.

Book of Kohelet: Applied Learning Pages

For an explanation on how to use the following pages, please refer to the Introduction: How to Use This Book, on Page 7.

What's the Question?
מה קשה לי? *Mah Kasheh Li?*

קהלת ג:יא

אֶת־הַכֹּל עָשָׂה יָפֶה בְּעִתּוֹ גַּם אֶת־הָעֹלָם נָתַן בְּלִבָּם מִבְּלִי אֲשֶׁר
לֹא־יִמְצָא הָאָדָם אֶת־הַמַּעֲשֶׂה אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה הָאֱלֹהִים מֵרֹאשׁ וְעַד־סוֹף׃

Kohelet 3:11

[God] brings everything to pass precisely at its time; God also puts eternity in their mind, but without ever guessing, from first to last, all the things that God brings to pass.

In the box below, you will find a list of principles for interpreting Torah. For each category, ask yourself: does this verse present a difficulty, a *koshi* קשׁי? If yes, please describe the *koshi* קשׁי.

1. **Is there superfluous language?**
   The rabbis believe that every word in the Bible is there for a precise purpose. When a word seems repetitive and/or synonymous with another word, the rabbis always justify the existence of each word. In the quote above, do you think any words seem repetitive and/or synonymous?

2. **Are there grammatical curiosities?**
   The rabbis respond to sentences with unexpected or incorrect grammar, such as unusual word order, awkward prepositions, illogical sentences, inconsistent verb tenses, or unclear pronouns. In the quote above, is the grammar problematic?

3. **Are there theological or moral dilemmas?**
   The rabbis identify moments that raise questions about God's characteristics, God's role in the world, and how God is depicted in the Bible. They are also troubled by what seem to be breaches of moral or ethical conduct by God and/or human beings. In the quote above, do you find any theological or moral dilemmas?

4. **Are there gaps in the text?**
   The rabbis are also intrigued by what is not in the text. In other words, when feelings, time spans, physical descriptions, conversations, etc. are not written in the text, they often fill in the gaps. In the quote above, do you find anything missing from the text?

5. **Are there political or sociological issues?**
   The rabbis seek to render power dynamics among nations according to their worldview (e.g. putting Israel or Judaism at the center). Moreover, questions of ethnicity, gender, class, etc. prompt their investigation. In the quote above, are any of these kinds of issues relevant?

6. **Are there any other difficulties, *kushiot* קושיות?**

Write a creative response, a possible answer, to the *koshi* קשׁי that you find most interesting.

What's the Conversation?
מה קשה לנו? *Mah Kasheh Lanu?*

קהלת ג:יא

אֶת־הַכֹּל עָשָׂה יָפֶה בְּעִתּוֹ גַּם אֶת־הָעֹלָם נָתַן בְּלִבָּם מִבְּלִי אֲשֶׁר
לֹא־יִמְצָא הָאָדָם אֶת־הַמַּעֲשֶׂה אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה הָאֱלֹהִים מֵרֹאשׁ וְעַד־סוֹף׃

Kohelet 3:11

[God] created everything beautiful [to pass] in its time; God also puts eternity in their mind, but without ever guessing, from first to last, all the things that God brings to pass.

On this page, several commentators respond to the following difficulty, or קשי: Why does this verse teach that God created everything beautiful to pass in its time when it seems to humans that this is not always so?

QUESTIONS

1. How does each commentator resolve the קשי?
2. How do their conclusions differ from one another?
3. How do you resolve the קשי? Add your voice as a "21st Century Commentator."

Taalumot Chochmah:
"אֶת־הַכֹּל עָשָׂה יָפֶה בְּעִתּוֹ" "GOD CREATED EVERYTHING BEAUTIFUL IN ITS TIME" Nevertheless God did not abolish man's free will. In a manner that is beyond the capacity of human intellect to fathom, God allowed man to retain his freedom of choice. No decision is imposed upon him- whether to perform *mitzvot* or to transgress them is entirely in his own hands.

Abraham ibn Ezra:
"אֶת־הַכֹּל עָשָׂה יָפֶה בְּעִתּוֹ" "GOD CREATED EVERYTHING BEAUTIFUL IN ITS TIME" I recognize that God created everything in its beautiful time: e.g. death and old age; and everything else in the time predestined for it by infinite wisdom.

David Altschuler:
"אֶת־הַכֹּל עָשָׂה יָפֶה בְּעִתּוֹ" "GOD CREATED EVERYTHING BEAUTIFUL IN ITS TIME" Everything God created is beautiful, but must be utilized only in its designated time.

Michael V. Fox: "אֶת־הַכֹּל עָשָׂה יָפֶה בְּעִתּוֹ" "GOD BRINGS EVERYTHING TO PASS PRECISELY AT ITS TIME" Kohelet does not seem to be saying here that God makes all things, including human actions, happen when they do. God does intervene in human lives, but not to that extent. The point of verse 11 is that God made a world in which all things, even events with a human agent, even death and disease, are good and serviceable in their proper time...Of course, this is not the only thing Qohélet believes. He also believes that God sometimes does things (in particular bringing death and executing judgment) in what do not seem to be the right times as far as man is concerned (Time 210).

21st Century Commentator:

BIOGRAPHY

Abraham ibn Ezra: (1092-1167) Poet, physician, philosopher, and astrologer in Spain and Italy.

David Altschuler: 18th century Jewish Bible commentator who wrote *Metzudat David.*

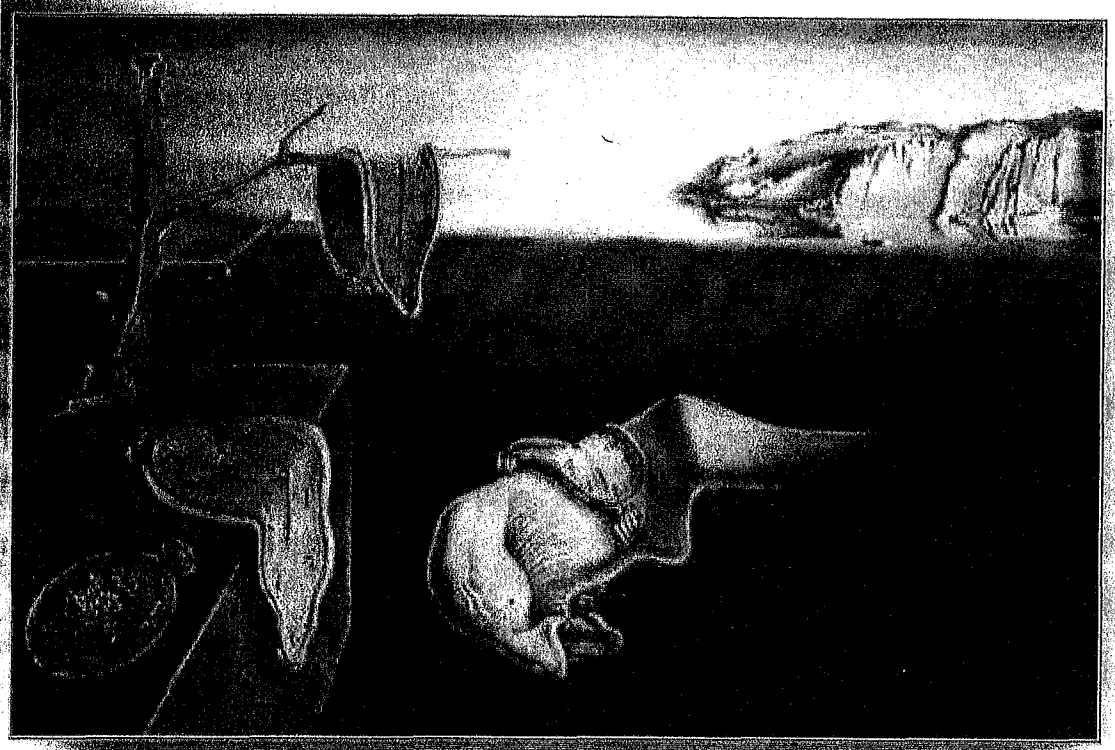
Michael V. Fox: Rabbi ordained from HUC-JIR, he is the Weinstein-Bascom Professor in Jewish studies at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

Taalumot Chochmah: Rav Yaakov ben Yaakov Moshe of Lissa Lorberbaum (1760-1832), Polish rabbi and judge, or *posek,* פוסק. He was a vigorous opponent of the Eastern European Jewish Enlightenment, called *Haskalah,* and Jewish reformers.

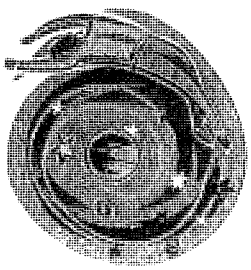
What's the Connection?
מה הקשר? *Mah HaKesher?*

Below you will find a picture that relates to the theme of time. It is one of many possible ways to encounter the theme in our world.

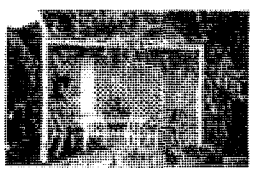
"The Persistence of Memory" by Salvador Dali



מה הקשר לקהלת?
Mah HaKesher to Kohelet:
What connections do you find between the picture above and the Book of Kohelet?



מה הקשר לחג?
Mah HaKasher to Sukkot:
What connections do you find between the picture above and Sukkot?



Now is your chance to draw from your own experience and identify something you have encountered in your world (a conversation, an article in the newspaper, a story, a road trip, etc.) that connects to the Book of Kohelet. How does your encounter shed light on the Book of Kohelet and the holiday of Sukkot?

What's Our Contribution?
מה קישוט החג? *Mah Kishut Hechag?*

And a Time to Be - לישב בסוכה

Kohelet was convinced that there were appropriate times for every experience under heaven. His poem in chapter 3 makes this clear. But all the actions he chooses to include describe specific activities — even "to love" or "to hate" imply concrete manifestations of the abstract verbs. How might Kohelet have dealt with a verb like "to be?" Is there "a time to be," as opposed to, say, "a time to do?" Perhaps the holiday of Sukkot has the potential to facilitate just such a unique sort of "time."

The blessing for the sukkah commandment is literally to "dwell," to "sit" in the sukkah, L*eishev ba'sukkah* **לישב בסוכה**. It is not a goal-oriented time such as "eating" or "praying" in the sukkah. Being in the sukkah is not a means to an end, it is an end in itself. In fact, *being* in the sukkah seems to be the mitzvah. *Leishev ba'sukkah* **לישב בסוכה** sounds like we are to sit, perhaps even to be still, but at least to *be* in the sukkah... which means spending some "time" in the sukkah.

Generally, our sukkah-sitting occurs over festive meals, with family and friends. For children and adults alike, these can be some of the most profoundly meaningful and enjoyable moments of the Jewish year. But is a meal the only "time" to dwell in the sukkah? What if we took the commandment to "sit/dwell" in the sukkah quite literally, and found ourselves with "a time to be?" Sukkah-space provides us with sukkah-time: a time for no clocks, a time for no watches, a time to free ourselves from the artificial compartmentalization of our lives into arbitrary units called days, hours, minutes, seconds. Each of us has favorite ways of simply, but profoundly, "being." What will be our ways of *being* in the sukkah?

Blessed are You, Adonai, Ruler of the Universe, who makes us holy through the commandments and has commanded us to *be* in the sukkah.

Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha'olam asher kidishanu b'mitzvotav Vitzivanu leshev basukah.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לֵישֵׁב בַּסֻּכָּה.

✡ Reading to read?

✡ Beholding a sunrise?

✡ Reading to a child?

✡ Visiting with friends, engaging with family members?

✡ Yoga?

✡ Napping?

Double Consciousness

"A season is set for everything, a time for every experience under heaven: a time for being born, a time for dying...." (Kohelet 3:1)

"For indeed, if there were no death, birth would not continue, and so vice-versa, but life as we know it would cease to be, and so it would happen with all human endeavors, for if one of the opposites would persist, its opposite would never come about, even at the proper time." (S'forno on 3:1-2)[1]

So comments the medieval Rabbi Obadiah ben Jacob, known as S'forno (1470-1550), on Kohelet's famous statement in 3:1. S'forno acknowledges the inherent value and meaning in the cycles of life and death. Kohelet himself, however, was not as accepting of death as was S'forno. In fact, throughout his book, Kohelet – like many of us – struggles with the idea of death. His book is, in many ways, an encounter with mortality and we, his readers, alongside the young person his book addresses, join him in that encounter. We begin by looking at his essential attitude towards death, and then travel with him, examining his multiple perspectives, as he struggles to discern whether death makes life meaningless or meaningful. And in the end, we consider his words because we sense that he has journeyed with honesty and integrity.

Death is our Common Destiny

"No person has authority over the lifebreath – to hold back the lifebreath[2]; there is no authority over the day of death..." (8:8). In this verse, Kohelet earnestly confronts the reality of death. He announces what it is to be human and makes a humble pronouncement about the truth of human existence: we will all die. Kohelet lives life in

[1] Rabbi A.J. Rosenberg, transl. and ed., The Five Megilloth: A New English Translation of the Text, Rashi and a Commentary Digest (New York: The Judaica Press, 1992) 34.
[2] in Hebrew, "*ruah* רוח."

death's shadow; he cannot divorce life from its ultimate end. One cannot mean anything without the other. In the modern world death is sensationalized both on television and in the movies, and hidden away in hospitals and nursing homes. Not so in Kohelet's world. Kohelet neither sensationalizes death nor hides from it and, as his readers, neither can we. He will die. I will die. You will die. There is nothing we can do to change that. When it comes to death, Kohelet is a realist. The question, for Kohelet and for us, is this: what impact does the reality of death have upon the significance of life?

Perspective: Death Renders Life Meaningless

"A wise man has eyes in his head, whereas a fool walks in darkness. But I also realized that the same fate awaits them both. So I reflected: 'the fate of the fool is also destined for me; to what advantage then have I been wise?'" (2:14-15). Kohelet's serious reflections on death begin with this question: since both the wise and the foolish die, why does it matter how we live our lives? Why does it matter whether we are wise or foolish? With these words, Kohelet declares that the certainty of death makes life absurd. If nothing we do can win us escape from death, he argues, then what we do in this world does not matter. According to this logic, we can assume that Kohelet would only see life's choices as crucial if making the proper ones could keep us alive indefinitely. Death is the symbol of meaninglessness, the end that makes daily life insignificant.

This view is expressed in an even more pointed manner in 3:16-21 where Kohelet says:

> And, indeed, I have observed under the sun: alongside justice there is wickedness, alongside righteousness there is wickedness. I mused: "God will doom both righteous and

wicked, for there is a time for every experience and for every happening." So I decided, as regards people[3], to dissociate them [from] the divine beings and to face the fact that they are beasts. For in respect of the fate of people and the fate of beast, they have one and the same fate: as the one dies so dies the other, and both have the same lifebreath; a person has no superiority over beast, since both amount to nothing. Both go to the same place; both came from dust and both return to dust. Who knows if a person's lifebreath does rise upward and if a beast's breath does sink down into the earth?

Here, Kohelet contests teachings from other parts of the Bible that assert humanity's affinity with God.[4] In Psalm 8, for example, it is written, "that You [God] have made humanity little less than divine, and adorned humanity with glory and majesty" (Psalms 8:6). In contrast, Kohelet proclaims that the reality of death makes people more like animals than like God. Moreover, not only are we no different from animals, but the fact that we die renders both of us inconsequential. As contemporary scholar Michael Fox explains, for Kohelet "individual existence is absurd, because all distinctions in life, even the difference between humans and other creatures, are obliterated by death."[5] Death makes life meaningless. "A person has no superiority over beast, since both amount to nothing" (3:19).[6]

Perspective: Death Renders Life Meaningful

Several chapters later, Kohelet expresses a different perspective on death.

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[3] We used our own translation throughout this book because the word "*adam* אדם," often mistranslated as "man," is not actually gender specific.

[4] According to Jewish hermeneutics of Bible study, different parts of the Bible can be compared to one another because the Bible is not necessarily "in order." This rabbinic principle of non-linear time is called "There is no early and no late in Torah, *Ayn mukdam v'ayn m'uchar baTorah* אין מוקדם ואין מאוחר בתורה."

[5] Michael V. Fox, Qohelet and His Contradictions (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1989) 197.

[6] in Hebrew "nothing" is "*Hakol havel* הכל הבל"

> A good name is better than fragrant oil, and the day of death than the day of birth. It is better to go to a house of mourning than to a house of feasting; for that is the end of every person, and a living one should take it to heart. Vexation is better than revelry; for though the face be sad, the heart may be glad. Wise people are drawn to a house of mourning, and fools to a house of merrymaking. (7:1-4)

As opposed to the first response in which he says that distinguishing between the wise and the foolish is pointless because both will die, here he articulates a fundamental distinction between the two. Kohelet teaches that wise people go to houses of mourning because "that is the end of every person, and a living one should take it to heart" (7:2). At this moment, he considers death without the sense of outrage he expressed previously. He tells us: wise people confront their mortality. Why? Why should "a living one take it to heart?" What does it mean to "take it to heart?" Although Kohelet does not answer these questions at this point in his philosophical reflections, later commentators try to explain what Kohelet might have meant by these words. Their comments, grounded in statements Kohelet makes elsewhere in his book, are the seeds of a second perspective: death renders life meaningful.

18th century commentator Metzudat David writes about this passage, "They think about mourning at all times, in order to humble their hearts, so that they should beware of sin."[7] Similarly, Rabbi Samuel ben Meir, known as Rashbam (1085-1174), comments, "it is better for man to go to a house of mourning than to a house of feasting, for the house of mourning is the final point in the death of every person, and a living man, going there, sets his thought and mind upon human death and as a result he refrains from

[7] Rosenberg 79.

sinning."[8] In other words, confronting mortality results in making different, and better, life choices; by considering death, people change their lives. According to the commentators, instead of death making life meaningless, Kohelet now teaches us that death invests life with meaning. Facing mortality gives us a chance to live more fully by being aware of what we have. What people do does matter. Recognizing that we will not live forever can, or should, propel us to do our best, ideally, propel us towards goodness. Barry Davis explains, "Perhaps to his surprise, Solomon discovered that the meaning of life can be found only by facing the inevitable reality of death."[9]

Perspective: Opposites Attract

> For all this I noted, and I ascertained all this: that the actions of even the righteous and the wise are determined by God. Even love! Even hate! A person knows none of these in advance – none! For the same fate is in store for all: for the righteous, and for the wicked; for the good and pure, and for the impure; for the one who sacrifices, and for the one who does not; for the one who is pleasing and for the one who is displeasing; and for the one who swears, and for the one who shuns oaths. That is the sad thing about all that goes on under the sun: that the same fate is in store for all. (9:1-3)

This clearly echoes his sentiment in chapter 3 that our life choices are inconsequential because "the same fate is in store for all." We might ask, however, whether he really believes that choosing righteousness over wickedness, goodness and purity over impurity, makes no difference? Such a conclusion seems absurd coming from someone who has invested much in the search for wisdom. A re-reading of this response, a reading that

[8] Sara Japhet and Robert B. Salters, trans., The Commentary of R. Samyuel Ben Meir RASHBAM on Qoheleth (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1985) 150.

looks beneath the words themselves to the potential underlying meaning and motivation for speaking them, uncovers another possibility. Here and elsewhere in the book, these words may essentially be emotional statements, emotional outcries, lamenting death and expressing frustration that there is nothing that can be done to prevent it. He seems to wish that good behavior could keep death at bay, laments that death was not in the world. Kohelet does not want life to end, although he knows that "no person has authority over the lifebreath – to hold back the lifebreath; there is no authority over the day of death..." (8:8).

Despite his despair, however, Kohelet follows this lament, a few verses later, with a command: go out and enjoy life. He proclaims,

> Go, eat your bread in gladness, and drink your wine in joy; for your action was long ago approved by God. Let your clothes always be freshly washed, and your head never lack ointment. Enjoy happiness with a woman you love all the fleeting days of life that have been granted to you under the sun – all your fleeting days" (9:7-9).

If, at the beginning of chapter 9 Kohelet essentially tells us again that what we do does not matter, why does he now tell us what to do? In effect, by placing these two passages together, he says that *because* we will die, we must live our lives well. Death is still inevitable, but death has a different consequence now. Despair is coupled with direction. Enjoy life, Kohelet commands, since "the time of mischance comes to all. And a person cannot even know his time" (9:11). As Duane A. Garrett teaches, Kohelet's

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[9] Barry C. Davis, "Death, an Impetus for Life: Ecclesiastes 12:1-8," Reflecting with Solomon: Selected Studies on the Book of Ecclesiastes, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994) 348. According to tradition, Solomon was the author of the book of Kohelet.

"recommendations that the reader enjoy life...arise not from a skeptic's despair but from a profound understanding of human mortality."[10]

It is crucial to recognize that Kohelet does not completely resolve his feelings about death. He does not stop lamenting death and his outrage never dissipates. However, he is able to assuage that grief and anger. Death has two consequences: it makes life absurd and it makes our life choices significant. We cry out because we will die, and we live well because we will die. Kohelet does not allow himself, or us, to drown in the absurdity of life, nor does he permit a mindless escape into life's pleasures. Life is still meaningless and life remains meaningful. He tempers one response with the other, puts them in conversation, hoping that the dialogue will yield some sort of resolution with which he can live. In the end, life and death remain complicated. Kohelet's response is not to simplify, not to give an easy answer, but rather to live with open eyes and an open heart amidst life's complexities.

Kohelet's Audience: You

An examination of Kohelet's views on death requires that we look at his final poem in 11:7-12:8. Like the section in chapter 9, this passage also embodies both of Kohelet's responses to death. Traditional and medieval commentators, as well as many moderns, see it as an allegory of aging, with each image pointing towards the decay of a different body part. For example, Rashbam says that "the maids that grind, grown few, are idle" (12:3) means "that the teeth will be idle because they will have diminished in

[10] Duane A. Garrett, "The Theology and Purpose of Ecclesiastes," Reflecting with Solomon: Selected Studies on the Book of Ecclesiastes, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994) 150.

strength"; and "the ladies that peer through the windows grows dim" (12:3) means "the eyes have become dim in their place."[11]

Michael Fox reads this poem differently. He encourages readers to look at the images more literally, at first, without trying to unpack them. "A literal reading thinks of the images as phenomena we could actually see were we present at the scene depicted."[12] Looking at the poem this way, Fox sees it as one of "communal mourning."[13] He explains the same two images described above in this way:

> The grinding-maids, whatever else they represent, are first of all grinding-maids. When they leave off from their work, one of the background sounds of everyday life stops, and the unwonted silence makes us aware of their earlier presence. Milling was a never-ending task, and in normal times, its sound would drone on unabated. Hence its silencing would leave a disturbing void. The gloom of the ladies at the lattices darkens the mood of the village. In the past their half-hidden presence, scarcely noticed, signaled human contact. They observed, noted, and registered the busy movements of everyday life. Now their faces grow dark. What grieves them?[14]

Fox later answers his own question. He wants to know why the town is in mourning. Moving from a literal to a symbolic reading, Fox answers, "They mourn for *you*, you to whom Qohelet addressed his advice and warnings; the 'you' of 12:1. It is *your* fate that appalls them, for this, Qohelet says, is what awaits *you*. Your death is eclipsing their world, and you are present at the terrible scene."[15]

And now, with this reading, Kohelet draws us most poignantly into his world. His ponderings about death have never been his alone. Throughout, he speaks to a young

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[11] Japhet and Salters 208.
[12] Micahel V. Fox, "Aging and Death in Qohelet 12," Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 42 (1988): 59-60.
[13] Fox "Aging" 61.
[14] Fox "Aging" 62.
[15] Fox "Aging" 63.

person, the youth of 11:9; throughout, he speaks to us.[16] Fox, writing about 12:1-8, says, "...the poem's purpose is not to convey information; it is to create an attitude toward aging and, more importantly, death."[17] His words could very well be said to apply to the entire Book of Kohelet. "A season is set for everything, a time for every experience under heaven: a time for being born a time for dying...." The time for facing mortality is now.

Connection to Sukkot

In the daily evening prayers, we say to God, "Spread over us the sukkah of your peace." During Sukkot we leave behind the protective structures that we have built and deemed secure and move into that sukkah, into God's protective shelter. We move from our solid homes into makeshift huts whose roofs, according to Jewish law, must leave open space for seeing the stars. Those makeshift huts, those seemingly fragile structures, in fact, represent God's shelter. During the holiday of Sukkot, living outdoors at the whims of nature, living in God's shelter, we confront life's fragility. When we do so, we also must leave behind the structures we have built in our own minds that shield us from an awareness of our mortality. In the sukkah, we are acutely aware that we are not in control of the world or our lives and that we depend on God. God's shelter, the sukkah, does not shield us from the real world; the sukkah moves us into it.

When we were primarily an agricultural people, Sukkot was a critical time of the year. In the Torah, Sukkot is called "The Holiday," or *he-chag* החג. In the agricultural year this time was significant because it determined whether we would have food or would be hungry in the coming year. Now, as then, we celebrate Sukkot as we enter the

[16] See also the direct statement in 11:9 where Kohelet specifically addresses a young person.

autumn season. We too are dependent on a good summer harvest and on the earth's eventual rebirth after winter's rains. As we celebrate Sukkot, we watch the green leaves on the trees turn into brilliant and beautiful colors – and then we witness its seeming death, with trust and hope that it will blossom again in the Spring. It is fitting that we read Kohelet, written in the apparent autumn of one man's life, at the autumn of the year – at a moment there seems to be less time remaining.

And yet, even as we bear witness to life's fragility, we are commanded to be joyous. In the Torah, Sukkot is called "the time of our joy," or *z'man simchateinu* זמן שמחתינו, and we are, in fact, required to be joyous throughout the holiday. Deuteronomy charges us,

> After the ingathering from your threshing floor and your vat, you shall hold the Feast of Booths for seven days. You shall rejoice in your festival, with your son and daughter, your male and female slave, the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow in your communities. You shall hold a festival for YHVH your God seven days, in the place that YHVH will choose; for YHVH your God will bless all your crops and all your undertakings, and you shall have nothing but joy. (Deuteronomy 16:13-15)

Sukkot epitomizes one of Kohelet's responses to death. It is an occasion to take note of life's fragility and, on that account, to celebrate the life we possess while we have it. Death leads us to an awareness of life. Kohelet leads us to Sukkot rejoicing. "Go, eat your bread in gladness, and drink your wine in joy; for your action was long ago approved by God.... Whatever it is in your power to do, do with all your might..." (9:7, 10).

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[17] Fox "Aging" 71.

Book of Kohelet: Applied Learning Pages

For an explanation on how to use the following pages, please refer to the Introduction: How to Use This Book, on Page 7.

What's the Question?
מה קשה לי? *Mah Kasheh Li?*

קהלת ז:א

טוֹב שֵׁם מִשֶּׁמֶן טוֹב וְיוֹם הַמָּוֶת מִיּוֹם הִוָּלְדוֹ׃

Kohelet 7:1

A good name is better than fragrant oil, and the day of death than the day of birth.

In the box below, you will find a list of principles for interpreting Torah. For each category, ask yourself: does this verse present a difficulty, a *koshi* קשׁי? If yes, please describe the *koshi* קשׁי.

1. **Is there superfluous language?**
   The rabbis believe that every word in the Bible is there for a precise purpose. When a word seems repetitive and/or synonymous with another word, the rabbis always justify the existence of each word. In the quote above, do you think any words seem repetitive and/or synonymous?

2. **Are there grammatical curiosities?**
   The rabbis respond to sentences with unexpected or incorrect grammar, such as unusual word order, awkward prepositions, illogical sentences, inconsistent verb tenses, or unclear pronouns. In the quote above, is the grammar problematic?

3. **Are there theological or moral dilemmas?**
   The rabbis identify moments that raise questions about God's characteristics, God's role in the world, and how God is depicted in the Bible. They are also troubled by what seem to be breaches of moral or ethical conduct by God and/or human beings. In the quote above, do you find any theological or moral dilemmas?

4. **Are there gaps in the text?**
   The rabbis are also intrigued by what is not in the text. In other words, when feelings, time spans, physical descriptions, conversations, etc. are not written in the text, they often fill in the gaps. In the quote above, do you find anything missing from the text?

5. **Are there political or sociological issues?**
   The rabbis seek to render power dynamics among nations according to their worldview (e.g. putting Israel or Judaism at the center). Moreover, questions of ethnicity, gender, class, etc. prompt their investigation. In the quote above, are any of these kinds of issues relevant?

6. **Are there any other difficulties, *kushiot* קושיות?**

Write a creative response, a possible answer, to the *koshi* קשׁי that you find most interesting.

What's the Conversation?
מה קשה לנו? *Mah Kasheh Lanu?*

קהלת ז:א
טוֹב שֵׁם מִשֶּׁמֶן טוֹב וְיוֹם הַמָּוֶת מִיּוֹם הִוָּלְדוֹ׃

Kohelet 7:1
A good name is better than fragrant oil, and the day of death than the day of birth.

On this page, several commentators respond to the following difficulty, or קשי: Why is the day of death better than the day of birth?

QUESTIONS

1. How does each commentator resolve the קשי?
2. How do their conclusions differ from one another?
3. How do you resolve the קשי? Add your voice as a "21st Century Commentator."

Kohelet Rabbah: "וְיוֹם הַמָּוֶת מִיּוֹם הִוָּלְדוֹ"
"AND THE DAY OF DEATH THAN THE DAY OF BIRTH" When a person is born all rejoice; when a person dies all weep. It should not be so...It is as if there were two ocean-going ships, one leaving the harbor and the other entering it. As the one sailed out of the harbor all rejoiced, but none displayed any joy over the one which was entering the harbor. A shrewd man was there and he said to the people, "I take the opposite view to you. There is no cause to rejoice over the ship which is leaving the harbor because nobody knows what will be its plight, what seas and storms it may encounter; but when it enters the harbor all have occasion to rejoice since it has come in safely." Similarly, when a person dies all should rejoice and offer thanks that the person departed from the world with a good name and in peace.

Michael V. Fox: "מִיּוֹם הִוָּלְדוֹ"
"AND THE DAY OF DEATH THAN THE DAY OF BIRTH" "This verse (7:1) is a proverb of ratio: just as a reputation is preferable to good oil, so is a day of death preferable to the day of birth....Given Qohelet's re-curring melancholy, he may well be praising death for releasing man from the awareness of injustice and the toils to which birth exposes him (4:3 and 6:3)" (Time 251-52).

21st Century Commentator:

Sefer HaIkkarim: "וְיוֹם הַמָּוֶת"
"AND THE DAY OF DEATH THAN THE DAY OF BIRTH" The meaning of this statement is that a good name is better than good oil, for a fine reputation travels much further than the scent of fine oil. But a good name is not an essential and ultimate good of the soul. Therefore, the day of death, when a man has attained his complete knowledge, is better than the day of his birth; for on the day of death, he has already actualized the potential of his intellect. On the day of his birth, however, his physical being has developed to the point where it can independently sustain life, but his spiritual, intellectual being — the perfection of the soul — has only the potential of existence.

BIOGRAPHY

Michael V. Fox: Rabbi ordained from HUC-JIR, he is the Weinstein-Bascom Professor in Jewish Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.
Kohelet Rabbah: Time and place of this midrash cannot be determined, but probably dates to around the 7th century.
Sefer HaIkkarim: Pseudonym for Rav Yoseph Albo, a 15th cenury Spanish philosopher. His greatest work, *Sefer HaIkkarim*, is a theological and philosophical work.

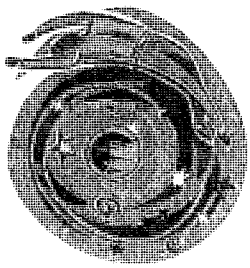
What's the Connection?
מה הקשר? *Mah HaKesher?*

Below you will find a poem that relates to the theme of mortality. It is one of many possible ways to encounter the theme in our world.

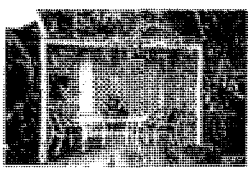
The following poem titled "When Death Comes" is found in Mary Oliver's book titled New and Selected Poems (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992) 10-11.

When death comes like the hungry bear in autumn;
when death comes and takes all the bright coins from his purse
to buy me, and snaps the purse shut;
when death comes like the measle-pox;
when death comes, like an iceberg between shoulder blades,
I want to step through the door of curiosity, wondering:
what is it going to be like, that cottage of darkness?
And therefore I look upon everything as a brotherhood and a sisterhood,
and I look upon time as no more than an idea, and I consider eternity as another possibility,
and I think of each life as a flower, as common as a field daisy, and as singular,
and each name a comfortable music in the mouth, tending, as all music does, toward silence,
and each body a lion of courage, and something precious to the earth.
When it's over, I want to say: all my life I was a bridegroom, taking the world into my arms.
When it's over, I don't want to wonder if I have made of my life something particular, and real.
I don't want to find myself sighing and frightened, or full of argument.
I don't want to end up simply having visited this world.

מה הקשר לקהלת?
Mah HaKesher to Kohelet:
What connections do you find between the poem above and the Book of Kohelet?



מה הקשר לחג?
Mah HaKasher to Sukkot:
What connections do you find between the poem above and Sukkot?



Now is your chance to draw from your own experience and identify something you have encountered in your world (a conversation, an article in the newspaper, a story, a road trip, etc.) that connects to the Book of Kohelet. How does your encounter shed light on the Book of Kohelet and the holiday of Sukkot?

What's Our Contribution?
מה קישוט החג? *Mah Kishut HeChag?*

A Will to Remember

"The earlier ones are not remembered; so too those that will occur later will no more be remembered than those that will occur at the very end" (Kohelet 1:11). Throughout his book, Kohelet expresses concern that once people die they are forgotten. Perhaps the greatest irony of the book is that Kohelet, by writing down his thoughts, is himself not forgotten. In many ways, the Book of Kohelet is an ethical will, a written statement of Kohelet's values and beliefs that has been passed down through the generations. It is his legacy for us.

Sukkot is an opportunity to pen a spiritual and ethical legacy for the future. According to Jack Riemer and Nathaniel Stampher, one of the primary reasons people do not write ethical wills is as follows:

> ...in order to write an ethical will, one must come to terms with one's own mortality. If you think that you are going to live forever, you need not write one. The trouble is that everyone understands in their minds, but no one really believes in their gut, that they are mortal, and so it is hard for us to contemplate a time when we will no longer be.[1]

Sitting in the sukkah is a time for rejoicing and a time for facing life's fragility. Sitting in the sukkah is a perfect time for pondering the legacy, the spiritual and ethical shelter, we wish to pass on to those who come after us. Kohelet likely wrote his book near the end of his life, but such an ethical will can be written at any time, and at many times once a person reaches maturity.

There is a custom on Sukkot, developed by the Safed Kabbalists, called Ushpizin. It is a ritual of welcoming symbolic guests into the sukkah. Traditionally, those guests are Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, and David — one for each day of the holiday. In modern times, women ancestors have been added as well. In thinking about your ethical will, consider extending such invitations to seven members of your family who have died. Think about what each of them has taught you. Invite them into your sukkah. And, as you write your own ethical will, acknowledge your teachers, acknowledge those who came before you, those who instilled within you some of the values that you wish to pass on to the next generation.

Ethical wills can take many forms. For examples and advice, consult *So That Your Values Live On — Ethical Wills and How to Prepare Them.*[2] They suggest the following phrases as a good way begin.

- ✡ These were the formative events of my life: ...
- ✡ This is the world from which I came: ...
- ✡ These are some of the important lessons that I have learned in my life: ...
- ✡ These are people that have influenced me most: ...
- ✡ These are some of the favorite possessions that I want you to have and these are the stories that explain what makes these things precious to me: ...
- ✡ These are causes for which members of our family have felt a sense of responsibility, and I hope you will too: ...
- ✡ These are the Scriptural passages that have meant the most to me: ...
- ✡ These are the mistakes that I regret having made the most in my life that I hope you will not repeat: ...
- ✡ This is my definition of true success: ...
- ✡ This is how I feel as I look back over my life: ...
- ✡ I would like to ask your forgiveness for: ...and I forgive you for: ...
- ✡ I want you to know how much I love you and how grateful I am to you for: ...[3]

Remember, the only "right" way to write an ethical will is to teach your own truth.

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[1] Jack Riemer and Nathaniel Stampher, So That Your Values Live On — Ethical Wills and How to Prepare Them (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1991)25.
[2] Riemer and Stampher 25.
[3] Riemer and Stampher 231.

Our Work in the World

It seems we all have moments when we feel overwhelmed by the vast magnitude of the world and we feel compelled to question our place in it. The Book of Kohelet articulates questions of life's transience, God's providence and the value of life's work. This book glances into one person's struggles with life's larger mysteries, as the narrator (Kohelet) throws his hands into the air and screams, (as it were), "what does it all amount to?" And yet, amidst the angst, Kohelet, and perhaps we too, experience savored moments when it seems as if we have the answers to our questions. Among some of the other questions, the Book of Kohelet inquires into the worth of tireless labor. Kohelet invites us to engage in his query and accompany him on his journey as he attempts to discover the worth and meaning in life's work. Although Kohelet conspicuously critiques the notion of gain in all human effort, there are pauses in his journey in which he speaks as though he has found some of the missing pieces to his puzzle. In the end, the reader might be left wondering if Kohelet solves all the burning questions that keep him awake at night. Kohelet's tireless search for meaning however, helps him deliver pieces of advice to future generations. Even though the questions of labor's worth may linger, it is in his search that we may find meaning for ourselves and for our time.

Laboring in Vain

The Hebrew word for labor, or *amal* עמל, appears twenty-two times in the Book of Kohelet. The word's repetition accentuates one of Kohelet's thematic inquiries that bewails useless labor. Kohelet first grieves over the lot of humans, who toil and toil without ever hoping for tangible and satisfactory gain, "What real value is there for a

person[1] in all the gains he makes beneath the sun?" (Kohelet 1:3). In his first look at labor, he expresses that his has been a wasted effort. One reason for his sense of the futility of his labor is that the so-called profits are unreliable, transitory, and hence pointless. The use of the word, *amal* עמל, may be a reference to Genesis.

> The repetition of the root *amal* עמל, characterizes existence in the same way the Yahwist[2] did in the story of the Fall, although the vocabulary is different. In this view fallen humanity must eke out a livelihood by the sweat of the brow, always contending with adverse working conditions. The author of Ecclesiastes makes a similar point by choosing the word, *amal* עמל, which has the nuance of burdensome labor and mental anguish.[3]

Before humanity's exile from the garden, they were appointed the splendid and rewarding task of "groundskeeper," yet after Adam's transgression, "work" is altered to harsher conditions, with little hope of valuable reward.

> Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you. But your food shall be the grasses of the field; by the sweat of your brow shall you get bread to eat, until you return to the ground—for from it you were taken. For dust you are, and to dust you shall return (Genesis 3:18-19).

Kohelet is mindful of the biblical origin of human labor, characterized in Genesis as suffering and backbreaking toil. Kohelet's first question, then, begs to understand both the gain for one's labor, and the aim of a life eclipsed by the continuous and grueling grind.

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[1] We used our own translation throughout this book because the word "*adam* אדם," is often mistranslated as "man," is not gender specific.

[2] "The name given to the earliest literary source underlying the books of Genesis through Numbers... The Yahwist source is usually dated around 950 BCE. Among its characteristics are bold anthropomorphisms; positive attitudes toward agricultural civilization, the state, and kingship; a mixture of nationalistic an universalistic concerns; and a style that exudes charm, simplicity, and clarity." Kent Harold Richard, "Yawist," HarperCollins Bible Dictionary, ed. Paul J. Achtemeier (New York: Harpercollins Publishers, 1996) 1232.

[3] James L. Crenshaw, Ecclesiastes: A Commentary (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987) 60.

Kohelet's exhaustive work agitates him when he ponders the profit of such labors. He assures himself that the product of effort will either slip between his fingers or be left behind for another to destroy or spoil. Kohelet first equates labor to the impossible task of chasing wind; "And so I loathed life. For I was distressed by all that goes on under the sun, because everything is futile and pursuit of wind" (Kohelet 2:17). The word "futile" is translated from the Hebrew word, *hevel* הבל. Some translate this word as vanity, but *hevel* הבל, is like a kind of mist that one feels on the tips of your fingers, never gathering enough in one's hand to actually hold. Bible scholar, James Crenshaw explains why Kohelet chooses the word, *hevel* הבל, to describe his life's work.

> The image of working for something as intangible as wind has extraordinary power, for the wealth that the rich man had managed to acquire slipped through his fingers exactly as wind eludes those who hope to capture it in their hands.[4]

The work as well as the profit for such work are *hevel* הבל and like the wind, useless to chase. Kohelet's grievance with tireless work deepens when he imagines the products of his labor left to one undeserving: "So, too, I loathed all the wealth that I was gaining under the sun. For I shall leave it to the person who will succeed me—" (2:18). To leave all wealth to an anonymous other, who has not worked for it, or has little sense of your effort to acquire such wealth, is, according to Kohelet, absurd and unjust. Kohelet asks why we should struggle endlessly, if in the end, no one will know our effort and our achievements will frustratingly evaporate like *hevel* הבל:

> Then my thoughts turned to all the fortune my hands had built up, to the wealth I had acquired and won— and oh, it was all *hevel* הבל and pursuit of wind; there was not real value under the sun (2:11).

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[4] Crenshaw 123.

Kohelet is vexed by this question of work, for even its effort he seems to suggest will end in grief and despair.

> For what does a person get for all the toiling and worrying he does under the sun? All his days his thoughts are grief and heartache, and even at night, his mind has no respite. That too is *hevel* הבל (2:22-23).

Kohelet describes the person who diligently works day in and day out, yet finds no solace when he lays his head to rest. Nightfall comes and torments him when he realizes that the gain, whatever it may be, cannot provide the happiness he seeks. This is the moment when we might expect a defeated Kohelet to renounce labor entirely, and admonish those who continue to find work pleasurable. Yet, in the very next verse, Kohelet's path turns toward resolution, he is not ready to dismiss work entirely for he answers himself: "There is nothing worthwhile for a person but to eat and drink and afford oneself enjoyment" (2:24). Kohelet's questions continue to linger, but there is something of an attitude shift in verse 24. Although Kohelet is troubled with backbreaking labor, he knows that one should enjoy work and now he will try to learn how one does that.

Profit Margin

Kohelet realizes that despite his futility, he must enjoy his labor, but his question is not fully answered yet: what is the value or gain of one's work? The Hebrew word, most commonly translated as profit, *yitron* יתרון, appears throughout the Book of Kohelet. Kohelet's search for meaning and worth in his labor continues as he focuses on the *yitron* יתרון, that is intended to issue from rigorous labor. Some would suggest that the term is "limited to what comes to a person from his or her own efforts," however

Michael Fox defines *yitron* יתרון, as "enduring gain."[5] This definition helps characterize Kohelet's inquiry into the *yitron* יתרון, that he believes should issue from diligent work. But what kind of profit does Kohelet wish to accumulate? After reflection, Kohelet warns that profit is not an "enduring gain." Perhaps Kohelet is beginning to understand that an enduring gain must, continue to satisfy throughout one's life's work. Profit in many cases does not provide Kohelet with the satisfaction of a job well done. Wealth, according to Kohelet, is fleeting, or *hevel* הבל. Kohelet advises, "A lover of money never has his fill of money, nor a lover of wealth his fill of income. That too is *hevel* הבל" (5:9). Kohelet, pondering aloud, counsels readers that wealth cannot be an "enduring gain," and additionally it may bring destruction rather than the self-satisfaction Kohelet seeks. He continues to chastise the affluent, warning that riches cause insomnia, anxiety, and stress since a person worries about losing such wealth.

> A worker's sleep is sweet, whether he has much or little to eat; but the rich person's abundance doesn't let him sleep. Here is a grave evil I have observed under the sun: riches hoarded by their owner to his misfortune (5:11-12).

In Kohelet's warning against excessive greed, traditional commentators find an opportunity to expand his good counsel. The fifth century Talmudist, Rabbi Hanina B. Isaac argues that profit is injurious to the soul. He uses a parable to elucidate his point:

> To what may the matter be likened? To a villager who married a woman of royal lineage. Though he brings her everything in the world, it is not esteemed by her at all. Why? Because she is a king's daughter [and is used to comforts]. So is it with the soul; though you bring it all the luxuries in the world, they are nothing to it. Why? Because it is of heavenly origin.[6]

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[5] Michael V. Fox, Qohelet and his Contradictions (England: The Almond Press, 1989) 60.
[6] Kohelet Rabbah 6:1.

In other words, Rabbi Hanina suggests that an individual can never adequately satisfy his/her soul with wealth, for the soul that God provides, needs a different kind of nourishment. In addition, Rabbi Hanina further explicates this point in commenting on the great hindrance of wealth. Accordingly, he suggests that the one who aims to accumulate riches for the soul, "will enjoy his sleep and rejoice with his portions, whether he eats much or little."[7] The Medieval commentator, Rabbi Shemuel ben Meir (Rashbam), derives an additional insight from Kohelet's objection to wealth, when he imagines the wealthy isolating themselves from the rest of the community, alienating themselves from others.

> You can have someone in the world that troubles himself and is anxious about his earnings; and he does not want to have a second man with him to help him, since the other would take his share of his goods and earnings.[8]

Rashbam's position notes those who are greedy and hoard their earnings segregate themselves out of fear of loosing money. As wealth accumulates, ugly cynicism may grow larger, and the rich may question the intentions of friends and family.

Modern commentators, such as George R. Castellino, expand upon Kohelet's understanding as well, inviting contemporary meaning from the book's ancient advice. Although seemingly simplistic, "a lover of money," begs interpretation for our own time. (5:9)

> Health, riches, possessions, material and sensual pleasures, honors, ambition, career, prestige, etc., are of their nature incapable of giving man full satisfaction to his craving for happiness. Further, these values are not stable; man cannot

[7] Akedath Yizhak 5:11.
[8] Sara Japhet and Robert B. Salters, ed. and transl., Rashbam on Qohelet: TheCommentary of R. Samuel Ben Meir (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press HebrewUniversity, 1985) 124.

> rely on them, because they may easily be lost; and then man's frustration is greater, the greater had been his efforts to obtain them and the greater the enjoyment while they lasted.[9]

Many people can surely relate to the tension of wanting to increase their "profit margin," believing that such an increase would bring security and stability. Yet, even as affluence is achieved, Kohelet's words ring true. Despite the riches accumulated, one may continue to feel empty. Crenshaw explains a modern understanding of how wealth may cause more grief than good.

> Various factors over which we have no control lead to disenchantment with wealth: bad investments, sickness, increasing overhead costs, worry, and an inability to take wealth with us at death. Qohelet exposes human jealousy to public scrutiny, the grasping to have more than our neighbors possess and the insatiable lust for possessions. [10]

Yet, if all this is true, if the striving after riches brings misery, loneliness, and greed, what then could be the use of work, if not to increase our economic standing? What is the *yitron* יתרון that will provide us with continuous happiness? Without enjoyment, Kohelet warns, there is no need for affluence. As Kohelet persists in pondering his life's work, he changes his focus from profit to the process, that is, the work itself. Kohelet begins to understand that toiling *with* enjoyment might be the combination that finally satisfies some deeper need.

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[9] George R. Castellino, "Kohelet and His Wisdom," Reflecting With Solomon: Selected Studies on the Book of Ecclesiastes, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Michigan: Baker Books, 1994) 42-43.
[10] Crenshaw 120.

Labor of Love

Kohelet's journey towards resolution gains momentum now, as he begins to answer some of his own questions. What does a person gain from his/her labor? The answer lies within our own means. Kohelet reminds himself, and anyone who will listen, that we must think differently, choosing to see our labor as a gift from God.

> Thus I realized that the only worthwhile thing there is for them is to enjoy themselves and do what is good in their lifetime; also, that whenever a person does eat and drink and get enjoyment out of all his wealth, it is a gift of God. (3:12-13)

Kohelet wants us to rejoice and to "to do what is good," which perhaps means one's work. Kohelet explains that all of these things, including work are gifts from God. "The self continues to be the measure of all things" and thus we are the only ones who can gauge our success, give meaning to our labor, and recognize God's role in the happiness we allow ourselves. We are challenged by Kohelet to put off the monotonous toiling for wealth in order to be "thankful to God for whatever satisfaction [God] gives you, valuing and measuring everything as a gift" from God.[11]

Kohelet now affirms that life, its beauty, and work, are gifts from God. Yet, his words assert more than simple gratitude to God. For Kohelet one's work is wrapped up in fate, and that work, one' s labor is the portion that God allots us.

> I saw that there is nothing better for a person than to enjoy his possessions, since that is his portion. For who can enable him to see what will happen afterward? (3:22)

[11] Castellino 43.

Far from being a defeatist, Kohelet asserts that his possessions, all earned in his tireless labor are all wound up in God's plan. Now, the possessions, and even the work have new meaning; one's work is sacred and precious. Has Kohelet truly found happiness in accepting tireless work as "the will of God?" What if our job lessens our dignity, and weakens the self, yet we find ourselves trapped in order to provide food for the table? What if it is more difficult to accept one's "lot" as Kohelet asserts? Kohelet's words shouldn't be read as prescriptive, encouraging people to stay in a job that is demeaning. In fact, often Kohelet seems unsure of his own sentiments on the subject. Sometimes he is frustrated and reflects on the nature of labor, and sometimes he counsels or advises that we should enjoy our work, saying that there is reward. Perhaps then, Kohelet is most helpful in describing our personal choices in how we understand our life's work. Kohelet Rabbah expands on the idea of choosing our attitude towards our work, and asserts that humans have a choice in how they understand labor.

> It may be likened to an old man who was sitting at the crossroads. Before him were two paths, one which was even at its beginning but with thorns, cedars, and reeds at the end, while the other began with thorns, cedars, and reeds but ended in an even road. He warned the passers-by and told them that the beginning of this path was even but that it had thorns, cedars, and reeds at the end. As for the other, its beginning was thorns, cedars, and reeds, but its end was even. Ought not people to be thankful to him for warning them for their good so that they should not weary themselves?[12]

Thorns and thickness fill each path and they crowd and thwart the journey. The old man in the parable can offer no alternative route that isn't plagued with frustrations. But the message of the story may be applied to our reading of Kohelet. His messages act as a warning but also a guide, as regards our ability to

make choices in our work, or in our attitude towards work. If we merely labor for profit, our path will end in cedars and reeds. In other words, if we expect to find wealth and riches waiting for us at the end of our lives, we may be disappointed, for wealth, as Kohelet finds, does not bring happiness. If we choose to accept our work or attempt to enjoy what gifts it offers, our path will begin with cedars and reeds. It will be hard at times, life's work can be grueling, but in the end, we will look back with accomplishment. But somewhere along either path, Kohelet begs us to seek enjoyment, to "stop and smell the flowers," and to notice that at some point the path smoothes out.

Kohelet nears the end of his searching with the verses below:

> Enjoy happiness with a woman you love all the *hevel* הבל-like[13] days of your life that have been granted to you under the sun— all your *hevel* הבל-like days. For that alone is what you can get out of life and out of the means you acquire under the sun. Whatever it is in your power to do, do with all your might. (9:9-10).[14]

Kohelet decides that he has learned this life lesson, that one should live joyfully with life's companion, love labor, and do one's work, with strength and full commitment. The combination of verses seems to blur the lines between work, enjoyment, and relationships, and suggests a deeper understanding of Kohelet's search. It is tempting to allow work to be the measure our success and dignity. But perhaps we need to expand our notion of "work." We have many "jobs" in our lives. We are responsible for many different people, organizations, and the

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[12] Kohelet Rabbah 14:1.
[13] JPS renders "fleeting days."
[14] Note on gendered language: Kohelet's intended audience is young males as they reach adulthood, seek a profession, and discover their path. In our more inclusive culture, the message can be broadened. For example, "live joyfully with the partner whom you love..."

community as a whole. Each role we play offers us "work" in which we labor to increase the dignity and self-respect of others. This "work" that we do in the world, as a sister, a father, a friend, a partner, a spouse, a committee member, a social activist, or a community member, is sacred and if done well, will afford us great riches. This "work" in the world is a gift from God.

Kohelet's examination of the value of "work" is a journey. Although this journey is frustrated with contradictions, he is receptive to a positive understanding of all his toil. His initial doubt lingers, humbling him and allowing him to live with these tensions. Kohelet inquires, "What gains a person from all his labor at which he labors under the sun?" (1:3) His answer steers us away from the focus on material gains in work and highlights instead, the importance of human dignity. Wealth, he asserts, is as fleeting as our days on the earth. Thus accumulating coins for a "rainy day" will not serve the one who labors relentlessly. Kohelet finds that "enduring gains" are measured by internal and not external standards. Kohelet's search lends great insight— *What is our work in the world?* Can we try to recognize the gifts our many different jobs afford us? Does it provide self-worth? Can we be proud of what we accomplish each day? What are the gains, *besides* monetary, that emerge from it? Could these questions stimulate true fulfillment in our work? But what if our work is not satisfying? If we find that our self-respect and our relationships suffer, then perhaps we move on to a different job, or perhaps we begin to recognize the other areas of our lives where we *can* affect change, where we can find merit, and "rejoice" in the fruit of our labors.

Connection to Sukkot

There are two key themes of Sukkot that that are related to the messages of Kohelet. Sukkot encourages us to take pleasure in our families, friends, and natural surroundings. In addition, it reminds us to put our faith, not in temporal structures or material wealth, but in God, who offers the most complete sheltering. During Sukkot, we are commanded to build and reside in temporary dwellings, "You shall live in booths seven days; all citizens of Israel shall live in booths" (Leviticus 23:42). The sukkah– a tent that has fragile siding and a roof made of palm fronds, is subject to nature's temperament. As we sit beneath the sukkah, gazing at the stars, we simultaneously remember that our material wealth and our homes can be just as temporal as the sukkah itself. Kohelet's message echoes in Sukkot as well, for he too warns that wealth is fleeting, "A lover of money never has his fill of money, nor a lover of wealth his fill of income. That too is *hevel* הבל" (Kohelet 5:9). The material possessions that seem central at times are not central at Sukkot. According to Isaac Klein, Kohelet counsels

> —that one should be content with his lot, that there is no joy in the possession of material wealth, and that everything we have is a gift from God. These themes reflect the mood of this festival.[15]

In addition, Sukkot calls us to rejoice more so than any other festival, or *chag* חג, "You shall rejoice of your festival... YHVH your God will bless all your crops and all your undertakings" (Deuteronomy 16:14, 15). Sukkot is the time to take pleasure in all undertakings, or "work." Our jobs create a yearly opportunity for us to stop, drink good

[15] Isaac Klein, A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1979) 166.

wine, dine with family and friends, and literally pull ourselves out of the daily grind to admire the goodness of the simple things in our lives. Kohelet reminds us, "There is nothing worthwhile for a person but to eat and drink and afford oneself enjoyment with one's means" (Kohelet 2:24). The gifts of God during Sukkot surround us; the sukkah we labored to build, the company and companionship of family and friends, the food and drink we worked to put on the table, and the faith we have in our accomplishments and in our God. So many of these gifts are transitory and so we step into the sukkah, onto the earth to value and cherish those gifts when we have them. We rejoice in our lives, and respect ourselves enough, to acknowledge those gifts.

Book of Kohelet: Applied Learning Pages

For an explanation on how to use the following pages, please refer to the Introduction: How to Use This Book, on Page 7.

What's the Question?
מה קשה לי? *Mah Kasheh Li?*

קהלת ה:יא

מְתוּקָה שְׁנַת הָעוֹבֵד
אִם־מְעַט וְאִם־הַרְבֵּה יֹאכֵל וְהַשָּׂבָע לָעָשִׁיר אֵינֶנּוּ מַנִּיחַ לוֹ לִישֹׁן׃

Kohelet 5:11

A worker's sleep is sweet, whether he has much or little to eat; but the rich person's abundance doesn't let him sleep.

In the box below, you will find a list of principles for interpreting Torah. For each category, ask yourself: does this verse present a difficulty, a *koshi* קשי? If yes, please describe the *koshi* קשי.

1. **Is there superfluous language?**
   The rabbis believe that every word in the Bible is there for a precise purpose. When a word seems repetitive and/or synonymous with another word, the rabbis always justify the existence of each word. In the quote above, do you think any words seem repetitive and/or synonymous?

2. **Are there grammatical curiosities?**
   The rabbis respond to sentences with unexpected or incorrect grammar, such as unusual word order, awkward prepositions, illogical sentences, inconsistent verb tenses, or unclear pronouns. In the quote above, is the grammar problematic?

3. **Are there theological or moral dilemmas?**
   The rabbis identify moments that raise questions about God's characteristics, God's role in the world, and how God is depicted in the Bible. They are also troubled by what seem to be breaches of moral or ethical conduct by God and/or human beings. In the quote above, do you find any theological or moral dilemmas?

4. **Are there gaps in the text?**
   The rabbis are also intrigued by what is not in the text. In other words, when feelings, time spans, physical descriptions, conversations, etc. are not written in the text, they often fill in the gaps. In the quote above, do you find anything missing from the text?

5. **Are there political or sociological issues?**
   The rabbis seek to render power dynamics among nations according to their worldview (e.g. putting Israel or Judaism at the center). Moreover, questions of ethnicity, gender, class, etc. prompt their investigation. In the quote above, are any of these kinds of issues relevant?

6. **Are there any other difficulties, *kushiot* קושיות?**

Write a creative response, a possible answer, to the *koshi* קשי that you find most interesting.

What's the Conversation?
מה קשה לנו? *Mah Kasheh Lanu?*

קהלת ה:יא
מְתוּקָה שְׁנַת הָעֹבֵד
אִם־מְעַט וְאִם־הַרְבֵּה יֹאכֵל וְהַשָּׂבָע לָעָשִׁיר אֵינֶנּוּ מַנִּיחַ לוֹ לִישֹׁן׃

Kohelet 5:11
A worker's sleep is sweet, whether he has much or little to eat; but the rich person's abundance doesn't let him sleep.

On this page, several commentators respond to the following difficulty, or קשׁי: Why is it that the rich man can't sleep? This seems counter-intuitive.

QUESTIONS

1. How does each commentator resolve the קשׁי?
2. How do their conclusions differ from one another?
3. How do you resolve the קשׁי? Add your voice as a "21st Century Commentator."

Rashi: "מְתוּקָה שְׁנַת הָעֹבֵד"
"SWEET IS THE SLEEP OF THE LABORER" The one who tills the soil sleeps, and he enjoys his sleep, weather he eats little or whether he eats much, for he is already accustomed to it.

Rav Yosef Karo: "מְתוּקָה שְׁנַת הָעֹבֵד"
"SWEET IS THE SLEEP OF THE LABORER" The man who is not indolent, and does not work only in order to hoard riches, but who tills the ground earnestly to support his family is extolled in this verse. Such a man has his concerns. He has no large estates or fortunes over which to worry constantly. Whether he eats little or much, he is able to sleep undisturbed by business worries.

Michael V. Fox: "מְתוּקָה שְׁנַת הָעֹבֵד"
"SWEET IS THE SLEEP OF THE LABORER" The contrast between the rich man and the worker is not meaningful, because the rich man works too hard. In fact it is his toil that keeps him awake (Time 236).

BIOGRAPHY
Rav Yosef Kara (1060-1130): French Bible commentator on most of Tanach, including the five megillot.
Michael V. Fox: Rabbi ordained from HUC-JIR, he is the Weinstein-Bascom Professor in Jewish studies at the University of Wisconsin- Madison.
Rashi: Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzhak (1040-1105): Most famous of all commentators on both Bible and Talmud. His commentaries are a fundamental tool in the Jewish method of studying sacred texts.
Targum: Literally "translation", refers to the Aramaic paraphrased translation believed to have been composed during the Talmudic era (3rd-5th century).

Targum: "מְתוּקָה שְׁנַת הָעֹבֵד" "SWEET IS THE SLEEP OF THE LABORER" The sleep of the man who serves the Lord of the Universe wholeheartedly is sweet, and he has peace in his grave, whether he lives few years or many years, since he served the Lord of the Universe in this world. In the World to Come, he will inherit the reward of the deeds of his hands, and the wisdom of the Torah of the Lord to a man who is rich in wisdom; just as he engaged in it in this world and toiled in studies, so it will rest upon him in his grave, and it does not leave him alone, just as a wife does not leave her husband alone to sleep.

21st Century Commentator:

What's the Connection?
מה הקשר? *Mah HaKesher?*

Below you will find a true story that relates to the theme of work. It is one of many possible ways to encounter the theme in our world.

Employees Toss Fish at Pike Place Fish Market

Dead fish don't tell tales. But a growing number of company employees are sharing anecdotes about greater enthusiasm, job satisfaction and productivity, after having adopted a management technique that stems from tossing about dead fish.

The management philosophy began with a corporate learning film called Fish! in June 1998 that documents the work style of fishmongers at the Pike Place Fish Market in Seattle. The fish sellers toss trout and salmon throughout the market in an upbeat and playful style. The idea behind the technique is to transfer that type of enthusiasm to the business world by encouraging employees to adopt a playful attitude about work, and for workers to go to extra lengths to meet a customer's needs.

The book tells the fictional story of a burnt-out department head charged with managing a rough-and-tumble group of employees. The character stumbles into Pike Place Fish Market during her lunch break to discover a crew of high-energy and joyous fishmongers at work. She takes the ideals she picks up back to her motley corporate crew, in an effort to motivate the lackluster bunch into happier and more productive workers.

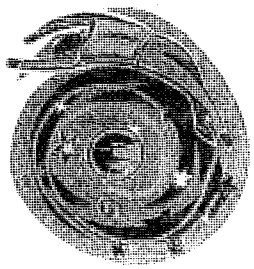
The Fish philosophy is based on four concepts: choosing one's attitude, playing at work, making a customer's day and being present. For example, choosing your attitude incorporates several ideals, such as demonstrating personal accountability, being proactive about work tasks, not acting like a victim and bringing your best self to work.

"Fish is really about being present and conscious at work," says Christensen, a filmmaker and CEO of ChartHouse International Learning Corp., a management consultant in Burnsville, Minn., which produced the Fish videos and literature.

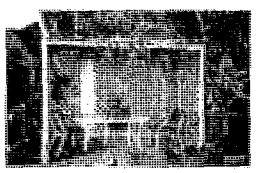
Christensen believes that the Fish philosophy applies particularly well to the technology realm. "Let's face the fact that most IT professionals work in their own space, and it's easy to not be engaged in what you're doing," he says. "With Fish, you ask yourself, 'Are you just going through the steps or being in the moment?' " Fish reminds workers to make a conscious decision to enjoy what they're doing, with the hope that this kind of focus will unlock creativity and problem solving and generally improve the work environment.

— Adapted from an Internet article by Lee Copeland Gladwin

מה הקשר לקהלת?
Mah HaKesher to Kohelet:
What connections do you find between the story above and the Book of Kohelet?



מה הקשר לחג?
Mah HaKasher to Sukkot:
What connections do you find between the story above and Sukkot?



Now is your chance to draw from your own experience and identify something you have encountered in your world (a conversation, an article in the newspaper, a story, a road trip, etc.) that connects to the Book of Kohelet. How does your encounter shed light on the Book of Kohelet and the holiday of Sukkot?

What's Our Contribution?
מה קישוט החג? *Mah Kishut HeChag?*

A Time to Build... A Time to Tear Down

Each year every Jew is commanded to build and decorate the sukkah. The task is difficult and for many of us, carpentry and architecture lie outside our realm of expertise. Yet, the labor and effort that help create and disassemble our temporary shelters can help infuse Sukkot with significance. The building up and tearing down of the sukkah can be a time for reflection and rejoicing. Although its building is commanded, Jewish tradition offers no formal blessing to recite before or after the building of the sukkah. In order to make building and tearing down more than trivial tasks, we suggest a reflection for this labor-intensive work. As we assemble and disassemble the wood, palm fronds, colorful pictures, holiday cards, and fruit to hang from the rafters, we take a moment to reach beyond that necessity, to sanctify our work by reciting Kohelet's verses appropriate for the job at hand.

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A Time to Build Up (עֵת לִבְנוֹת)

Bring all of your building materials to your chosen sukkah location. Glance around at all the items, hammer, nails, pictures, fruit and special family goods new and old. These raw materials will help make your temporary shelter your home throughout the Festival. Pause with your family, neighbors, or friends and together recite Kohelet's words.

There is nothing better for a person than to eat and drink, and to make your soul enjoy good in labor; but this also I saw, that it was from the hand of God. (Kohelet 2:24)
Ein tov ba'adam sheyokhal v'shatotah v'herah et nafsho tov ba'amalo gam zo
Raiti ani ki meed ha'elohim he.
אֵין־טוֹב בָּאָדָם שֶׁיֹּאכַל וְשָׁתָה וְהֶרְאָה אֶת־נַפְשׁוֹ טוֹב בַּעֲמָלוֹ גַּם־זֹה
רָאִיתִי אֲנִי כִּי מִיַּד הָאֱלֹהִים הִיא׃

Your sukkah is standing and now you are truly ready to observe the mitzvah of "dwelling" in the sukkah. Throughout the *chag*, you will sing, laugh, eat, and maybe even sleep under the stars. After you have completed the fruit of your labor, gather your fellow workers around and declare your intention to fully rejoice in this, our Season of Rejoicing, *Z'man Simchatenu* זמן שמחתנו.

Go your way, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has already accepted your works. (Kohelet 9:7)
Likh echol b'simcha lachmehcha ushateh v'lev tov yenech ki khivar ratza haelohim et ma'aseicha
לֵךְ אֱכֹל בְּשִׂמְחָה לַחְמֶךָ וּשְׁתֵה בְלֵב־טוֹב יֵינֶךָ כִּי כְבָר רָצָה הָאֱלֹהִים
אֶת־מַעֲשֶׂיךָ׃

◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆

A Time to Tear Down (עֵת לִפְרוֹץ)

It is time to tear down the sukkah. This sukkah has provided shelter, many memories, and plenty of leisure time, and so it might be difficult to pull down the joyful pieces of this *chag* חג. Yet, the work, while tedious and maybe even a little sad, is a time for reflection as well. Our laboring to remove this structure teaches us the importance of rejoicing in work that is like mist or vapor, *hevel* הבל. We rejoice in moving on and leaving Sukkot until next year; we rejoice in returning to our sheltering home. Gather together and let Kohelet's words echo through the sukkah.

There is nothing better for a person than that one should eat and drink, and that one should make the soul enjoy good in labor; but this also I saw, that it was from the hand of God (Kohelet 2:24).
Ein tov ba'adam she'yochal v'shatah v'herah et nafsho tov ba'amalo gam zo ra'iti ani ki mid ha'elohim he.
אֵין־טוֹב בָּאָדָם שֶׁיֹּאכַל וְשָׁתָה וְהֶרְאָה אֶת־נַפְשׁוֹ טוֹב בַּעֲמָלוֹ גַּם־זֹה
רָאִיתִי אֲנִי כִּי מִיַּד הָאֱלֹהִים הִיא׃

The sukkah pieces are back in their storage boxes and all that remains are the few dried leaves from the withering palm fronds. Sukkot has passed, the sukkah is down, and all is *hevel* הבל. Recite the season's final verse knowing that it is good to labor, even when laboring for *hevel* הבל.

Then I looked at all the works that my hands had done, and at the labor that I had labored to do and behold, all was *hevel* הבל and a striving after wind... (Kohelet 2:11)
Ufanitiani b'chol ma'asei she'asu yadai uve'amal she'amalti la'asot v'hineh hakol hevel ur'ut ru'ach.
וּפָנִיתִי אֲנִי בְּכָל־מַעֲשַׂי שֶׁעָשׂוּ יָדַי וּבֶעָמָל שֶׁעָמַלְתִּי לַעֲשׂוֹת וְהִנֵּה הַכֹּל
הֶבֶל וּרְעוּת רוּחַ

The Certainty of Uncertainty

"Learning occurs on the edge of chaos, where a delicate balance must be maintained between too much and too little structure."[1]

"All this I tested with wisdom, I thought I could fathom it, but it eludes me. [The secret of] what happens is elusive and deep, deep down; who can discover it?" (Kohelet 7:23-

Life constantly moves. It changes. We all find ourselves, at some times and in some places, experiencing this rhythm as soothing and comforting or upsetting and disconcerting. In his book on theories of change, Michael Fullan acknowledges what so many other change theorists maintain: the existential reality that all human beings desire some degree of structure in life. However, life does not follow a stable pattern. Reality is at times chaotic, unpredictable and always complex. Fullan recognizes this absence of a pattern and advocates a model called the "Complexity Theory." He writes,

> The new science of complexity essentially claims that the link between cause and effect is difficult to trace, that change unfolds in non-linear ways, that paradoxes and contradictions abound and that creative solutions arise out of interaction under conditions of uncertainty, diversity and instability.[2]

In other words, while some might hope for a consistent pattern to life, a recognizable flow to our existence, the multitude of interactions concurrently happening make any pattern too complex to discern. However, the ability to flourish in the midst of this uncertainty or inclination to resist it depends on individual personalities and life experiences.

Imagine Michael Fullan explaining complexity theory to Kohelet. The two may have become great friends because of their shared understanding of the uncertainty of life. In a book where Kohelet appears to contradict himself time and again, perhaps the

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[1] Michael Fullan, Change Forces: The Sequel (London and Philadelphia: Falmer Press, 1999) ix.

only clear message is that life is full of uncertainty. Despite this, throughout the ages, rabbis and scholars have tried to harmonize the apparent contradictions found in the Book of Kohelet, and so we must first examine these attempts. In order to understand the ways some have attempted to do this, it is important to first examine some of the various statements that appear to contradict one another.

VERSE #1	VERSE #2	CONTRADICTION
7:1 – The day of death is better than the day of birth	9:4 – …even a live dog is better than a dead lion.	Is it better to live or to die?
2:13 – I found that wisdom is superior to folly as light is superior to darkness; A wise man has his eyes in his head, whereas a fool walks around in darkness.	5:17 – Only this, I have found, is a real good: that one should eat and drink and get pleasure with all the gains he makes under the sun…	Is it better to be a reflective, wise person or to simply live in the moment and enjoy life?
7:26 – Now, I find woman more bitter than death; she is all traps, her hands are fetters and her heart is snares.	9:9 – Enjoy happiness with a woman you love all the fleeting days of life that have been granted to you under the sun – all your fleeting days.	Is it good or bad to be with a woman?
2:2 – Of revelry I said, "It's mad!" Of merriment, "What good is that?"	8:15 – I therefore praised enjoyment. For the only good thing a man can have under the sun is to eat and drink and enjoy himself.	Is enjoyment a value to be praised?
7:3 – Vexation is better than revelry; for though his face be sad, the heart may be glad.	7:9 – Don't let your spirit be quickly vexed, for vexation abides in the breasts of fools.	Is it better to be vexed or to be happy?
1:9 – Only that shall happen which has happened, only that occur which has occurred: There is nothing new under the sun	10:14 – A man cannot know what will happen; who can tell him what the future holds	If there is nothing new under the sun, why can we not predict the future based on the past?

[2] Fullan 4.

8:5 – One who obeys orders will not suffer from the dangerous situation.	8:14 – here is a frustration that occurs in the world: sometimes an upright man is requited according to the conduct of the scoundrel; and sometimes the scoundrel is requited according to the conduct of the upright. I say all that is frustration.	Is there divine justice in the world or not?

Desire to Harmonize

Throughout the ages rabbis and scholars have recognized the contradictions that abound in the Book of Kohelet. Yet many have not embraced them. Instead, they attempt to harmonize the contradictions in various ways: reinterpreting words and phrases, placing the confusion on the reader rather than Kohelet, and explaining that two different authors wrote the Book of Kohelet – a man of experience and a man of faith.

After discussing the day of King David's death, the rabbis deal with the canonical status of the Book of Kohelet as follows:

> R. Judah b. R. Samuel b. Shilath said in Rav's name; the sages sought to withdraw the Book of Qohelet because its words are mutually contradictory. Why then did they not withdraw it? Because it begins with words of Torah and it ends with words of Torah.[3]

These rabbis acknowledge the contradictions and then respond to them by explaining that the value of teaching Torah overrides them. At the same time, the Talmudic tractate cited above, as well as Midrash Kohelet Rabbah, seek to harmonize one of the major contradictions of the book: is it better to be a reflective, wise person or to simply live in the moment and enjoy life? In the Book of Kohelet, enjoyment of the good things in life

[3] Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 30b.

is extolled.[4] Uncomfortable with this, the rabbis suggest, "All eating and drinking mentioned in this book refer to Torah and good deeds."[5] If all six references to eating, drinking and just enjoying the moment can be understood as referring to Jewish learning, then this does not contradict all the suggestions that wisdom is superior to folly. In fact, if one eats and drinks Torah, then that person will increase in wisdom. The two complement one another perfectly, rather than standing in opposition. But as post-modern people we ask: is this what Kohelet meant? And is he right in what he says?

The rabbis attempt to harmonize the contradictions in other ways. For example, in a talmudic discussion (Shabbat 30b) they refer to the apparent contradictions found when comparing 2:2 with 8:15. Verse 2:2 reads, "Of revelry I said, 'it's mad!' of merriment, 'what good is that?'" On the other hand, verse 8:15 states, "I therefore praised enjoyment, for the only good thing a man can have under the sun is to eat and drink and enjoy himself." The rabbis explain that 2:2 refers to pleasure that does not proceed from the commandments, while 8:15 refers to the happiness that comes from fulfilling the commandments. Therefore, the two do not contradict one another.

Ibn Ezra, a 12th century commentator, continues this trend as he analyzes whether or not it is better to be vexed or to be happy. Verse 7:3 states, "Vexation is better than revelry; for though the face be sad, the heart may be glad." On the other hand, verse 7:9 states, "Don't let your spirit be quickly vexed, for vexation abides in the breasts of fools." In his comment on 7:3, Ibn Ezra observes, "even the least of the wise would not write a book and contradict his own words in his book." He harmonizes the two statements by suggesting that 7:3 teaches a wise person's anger is not permanent, but time bound and

[4] Kohelet 2:24, 3:12-13, 3:22, 5:18-19, 8:15, 9:7-9.
[5] Shabbat 30b, citing Kohelet Rabbah, 8:15.

temporary. At the same time, in 7:9 Kohelet means that vexation remains with fools at all times.

Another way to harmonize these contradictions is to explain that there is more than one person's voice in the Book of Kohelet. Modern scholar T.A. Perry argues this point:

> The book is a dialogue between a pious sage-narrator, the "Presenter" (P) who transmits and debates the wisdom of the skeptical persona, Kohelet (K). K is the man of experience. He is deterministic and skeptical and rejects wisdom and faith, except insofar as they emerge from his own experience. He teaches that we should embrace pleasure because it is within our power to do so and should fear God because of human ignorance. P, the man of faith, uses K's words to provoke thought and as the basis for argument. P affirms the value of labor, pleasure, and wisdom. God is to be feared because God is unpredictable; divine justice and freedom are not bound by human conceptions of justice.[6]

When two people speak to one another, they can have a difference of opinion. But when a single individual constantly moves from one opinion to the next, the person appears contradictory. Here we see an attempt to make sense of all the contradictions found in the book through the post-modern notion of multi-vocality.

Living with Contradictions

Perhaps the one consistent message of the Book of Kohelet is that life is full of contradictions — the challenge of being human is first to acknowledge that we live in such a world and then to figure out how to cope with life's uncertainties. Modern

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[6] Perry, cited in: Fox, Michael, "Qohelet," Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation, ed. John H. Hayes (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999) 351-52. Also note that the character(s) of Kohelet is congruent with the character Job, who speaks to God as both a man of experience and a man of faith.

commentator Ardel Caneday suggests that the book is characterized by both cycles and paradoxes:

> ...the polarity of structure and expression found in the book reproduces the *character of this world.* As the world which Qoheleth observed is characterized by its ceaseless recurrent cycles and paradoxes of birth and death, war and peace and the like (cf. 3:1-8), giving it an enigmatic quality, so Qoheleth reproduces its pattern in literary form, repeatedly turning back upon himself to reiterate and restate themes and observations upon various subjects which support his verdict.[7]

In other words, although Kohelet searches for answers to life's uncertainties, his observations of life's reality reflect its often uncertain and contradictory nature. He seeks to cultivate a life stance in the face of that reality.

The Book of Kohelet is dominated by the message that it is impossible to find the ultimate answers to life's most challenging questions and contradictions. This is evidenced by the use of the term "*hevel* הבל", repeated 38 times in the book. The same term that frames the book by its introduction in 1:2 and its conclusion in 12:8. It is defined in various sources as vanity, emptiness, mystery, futility, uselessness, absurdity, breath, vapor, meaninglessness, and mist.[8] Contrary to some of these definitions, the Hebrew word "*hevel* הבל" does not necessarily carry a negative valence. Rather, it is a word that likely means "mist" or "breath," something that one can feel but not grasp onto

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[7] Ardel B. Caneday, "Qoheleth: Enigmatic Pessimist or Godly Sage?" Reflecting With Solomon: Selected Studies on the Book of Ecclesiastes, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994) 97-98.

[8] "Vanity of vanities" Koren Publishers Jerusalem, New Revised Standard Version; "Utterly vain, utterly vain" Moffatt; "Emptiness, emptiness" NEV; "Futility, utter futility" REB; "It is useless, useless" GNB; "Utter futility! All is futile!" Jewish Publication Society; "Nothing is worthwhile" TLB; "Utterly absurd" Fox; "A vapor of vapors!" Scott; "Meaningless! Meaningless!" NIV

and keep. In his commentary on Kohelet, James Crenshaw defines *hevel* הבל as related to vapor:

> The word *hebel* derives from a root that connotes a breath or vapor. In Ecclesiastes it shows two nuances: temporal ('ephemerality') and existential ('futility' or 'absurdity')... breath or vapor is reinforced by the image of chasing after or herding the wind (c.f. 2:17). Wind, breath, and smoke are insubstantial when viewed from one perspective. Nevertheless, they are very real, even if one cannot see the wind or take hold of any one of the three.

In an article titled "The Meaning of the Term *Hebel,*" Graham Ogden connects *hevel* הבל and uncertainty:

> The term *hevel*...is the vehicle chosen to draw attention to an enigmatic situation.... Consistent with what is spelled out in more detail later in the book we find Qoheleth here impressing on his young readers the fact that we must live with many unanswered questions.[9]

At the end of the day, there are no permanent, unqualified answers. When we reach for ultimate answers, they evaporate like mist.

Kohelet begins his book with the statement that everything is mist, *hakol havel* הכל הבל. The word "*hakol* הכל" occurs in nearly half the verses found in the Book of Kohelet. W. Sibley Towner suggests that this word is used to illustrate that Kohelet is determined "to reflect on the meaning of all of life — not only on Israelite life, not even just human life, but of all life." By using the word *hakol* הכל, we see that Kohelet "attempts to arrive at understandings that will work everywhere and in every time."[10] His introduction and his conclusion are therefore the same, *hakol hevel* הכל הבל (1:2, 12:8).

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[9] Graham S. Ogden, "Variation on the Theme of Wisdom's Strength and Vulnerability: Ecclesiastes 9:17-10:20" Reflecting With Solomon: Selected Studies on the Book of Ecclesiastes, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994) 229.

[10] W. Sibley Towner. "The Book of Ecclesiastes: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections." New Interpreters Bible, ed. David L. Petersen (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997) 278.

Therefore, the universal message of the book is that everything is *hevel* הבל; nothing is permanent — everything changes.

We further understand the certainty of Kohelet's uncertainty if we examine key statements made throughout the book.[11]

- **1:14** — "I observed all the happenings beneath the sun, and I found that all is mist and pursuit of wind."
- **6:12** — "Who can possibly know what is best for a person to do in life — the few days of one's fleeting life? For who can tell what the future holds for a person under the sun?"
- **7:23-24** — "All this I tested with wisdom, I thought I could fathom it, but it eludes me. [The secret of] what happens is elusive and deep, deep down; who can discover it?"
- **8:7** — "Indeed, a person does not know what is to happen; even when it is on the point of happening, who can tell?"
- **8:17** — "And I have observed all that God brings to pass. Indeed, a person cannot guess the events that occur under the sun."
- **10:14** — "A person cannot know what will happen; who can tell what the future holds?"
- **11:6** — "Sow your seed in the morning, and don't hold back your hand in the evening, since you don't know which is going to succeed, the one or the other, or if both are equally good."

We may very well understand these quotations as conclusions of uncertainty spread throughout the book. They appear to be the only consistent messages.

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[11] We used our own translation throughout this book because the word "*adam* אדם," often mistranslated as "man" is not actually gender specific.

If everything in life is fleeting, like mist, then does Kohelet logically conclude that life is therefore meaningless? Most scholars agree that Kohelet encourages us both to acknowledge life's uncertainties and, at the same time, to find meaning in life as it is. According to Ogden, the word and the entire book urge accepting uncertainty:

> It does not mean that life therefore is "vanity"; rather, it means the pain of faith's having to live with many questions unanswered.... Quohelet does not mean to claim that life is empty, vain, and meaningless. As he addresses the next generation his point is simply that life is replete with situations to which even the sage, the philosopher theologian, has no answer.[12]

Fox agrees and adds,

> In a world of uncertainties, prepare for all eventualities, because you cannot know in advance which will come to pass, and in any case you cannot effect the course of events. What will be will be. Therefore, do not waste time pondering the future, but rather adapt yourself as well as you can to various possibilities.[13]

We can control how we respond to life's ambiguities. We have it within ourselves to make meaning from every moment, regardless of its fleeting nature.

Kohelet concludes what Michael Fullan, in our own time, argues, that regardless of our comfort level, paradoxes and contradictions abound in our world. The art of living calls for certain skills in the face of such uncertainties and paradoxes. Fullan provides the following helpful image of whitewater rafting:

> The first and foremost step is to understand what makes social forces move forward in turbulent environments. It is much like whitewater rafting. If you try to overmanage it, you capsize. Rather than steering away from upcoming rocks, you move toward the danger, guiding the craft in relation to the forces coming at you.[14]

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[12] Ogden 231.
[13] Michael Fox, Qohelet and His Contradictions (England: The Almond Press, 1989) 273.
[14] Fullan 79.

We all have moments in our lives when we are more or less comfortable steering our raft toward the turbulence. However, regardless of our comfort level, Kohelet reminds us that if we fight it, turbulence overpowers us. We may even find ourselves drowning as a result — or at least at the bank of despair. We need to accept the reality and immediacy of the unrest in our lives, focusing towards what is downstream. We cannot steer by looking behind or by looking ahead. We can only live in the present, and at best, guide ourselves through the instability to find our landing.

Kohelet then leaves us with the message that we cannot escape uncertainty or contradiction. This is a source of frustration for Kohelet, but does it lead him to despair? Is the book life affirming or pessimistic? Each reader is left to decide how to answer such questions. If we read the book aloud, we could read it with many voices — a voice of contentment or aggravation, the voice of a detached cynic or of a passionate realist. We may find comfort in the fact that we can read this book with many voices and still come to the same conclusion regarding life's uncertainty. Throughout our lives, we too will find ourselves at some times and in some places experiencing Kohelet's messages as soothing and comforting or upsetting and disconcerting. However we feel about life's contradictions, Kohelet asks that we begin by acknowledging them as a real part of life. He then provokes us to engage in dialogue about our options and values in light of these uncertainties.

Connection to Sukkot

Two famous midrashic passages offer spiritual insights on the ritual objects of Sukkot, namely the palm, or *lulav* לולב[15]; willow, or *aravah* ערבה; myrtle, or *hadas* הדס; and citron, or *etrog* אתרוג. In Leviticus 23:40, we read, "On the first day [of Sukkot] you shall take the product of *hadar* הדר [citrus] trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and the willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before Adonai your God seven days." This Biblical verse provides the foundation for the mitzvah of shaking the *lulav* לולב and *etrog* אתרוג, which we are each commanded to own. These four species are held together and shaken in all directions.

In one famous midrash from Leviticus Rabbah 30:14, each of these symbols comes to represent a different body part, "The rib of the *lulav* לולב resembles the spine; the *hadas* הדס resembles the eye; the *aravah* ערבה resembles the mouth, and the *etrog* אתרוג resembles the heart."[16] Read in this personal way, these symbols represent different parts of our inner selves, parts that may sometimes contradict one another. For example, there may be dissonance between feeling angry with a friend and nonetheless speaking to him or her with kindness when sharing that frustration. Or we may see a beautiful sunrise and feel a sense of darkness within because of a recent loss.

In an equally famous midrash, the symbols assume a communal rather than a purely personal tone. Leviticus Rabbah 30 also equates taste with knowledge of Torah and aroma with being righteous. Taste and aroma describes four types of Jews. The *etrog* אתרוג is shaped like the human heart; it has both taste and aroma and accordingly

[15] The word "lulav" is the Hebrew word for "palm" but it is also the word used to represent the combined palm, willow, and myrtle.

represents those Jews who have knowledge of Torah and do good deeds. The *lulav* לולב is long and narrow like the human spine and accordingly represents those Jews who have knowledge of Torah but do not do good deeds. The *hadas* הדס leaf is shaped like the human eye. Since it has aroma but no taste, it symbolizes Jews who perform good deeds but do not know Torah. The *aravah* ערבה leaf has the shape of the mouth. Since it has neither taste nor aroma, it represents Jews who perform no good deeds and know no Torah. The remarkable part of this midrash is that although it would seem that the tradition favors the knowledgeable Jew who performs good deeds, all symbols are equally important in the Sukkot ritual of shaking the objects. Just as all four symbols are necessary to complete the ritual of Sukkot, so too all Jews are an equally important part of Jewish communal consciousness.

The symbols can be understood on either a personal or a communal level. The things we see, say, feel, and stand for may exist in tension with one another. The people we interact with may understand and practice Judaism in a way that is very different from ourselves. Nonetheless, at Sukkot we hold these separate parts of ourselves and our community together, represented by the *lulav* לולב and, *hadas* הדס, *aravah* ערבה, and *etrog* אתרוג.

As we listen to the sound of our own symbols shaking, we can also hear the sound of contradictory messages echoing in our minds and in the world around us. For one moment, we have a hold on the contradictions in our lives. We acknowledge that life is complex, that complexity dwells in all directions, and that the contradictions in our lives can in fact exist harmoniously.

Book of Kohelet: Applied Learning Pages

For an explanation on how to use the following pages, please refer to the Introduction: How to Use This Book, on Page 7.

What's the Question?
מה קשה לי? *Mah Kasheh Li?*

קהלת א:ב
הֲבֶל הֲבָלִים אָמַר קֹהֶלֶת הֲבֶל
הֲבָלִים הַכֹּל הָבֶל׃

Kohelet 1:2
Havel Havalim[1]! Says Kohelet.
Havel Havalim! All is *Hevel.*

In the box below, you will find a list of principles for interpreting Torah. For each category, ask yourself: does this verse present a difficulty, a *koshi* קשי? If yes, please describe the *koshi* קשי.

1. Is there superfluous language?
The rabbis believe that every word in the Bible is there for a precise purpose. When a word seems repetitive and/or synonymous with another word, the rabbis always justify the existence of each word. In the quote above, do you think any words seem repetitive and/or synonymous?

2. Are there grammatical curiosities?
The rabbis respond to sentences with unexpected or incorrect grammar, such as unusual word order, awkward prepositions, illogical sentences, inconsistent verb tenses, or unclear pronouns. In the quote above, is the grammar problematic?

3. Are there theological or moral dilemmas?
The rabbis identify moments that raise questions about God's characteristics, God's role in the world, and how God is depicted in the Bible. They are also troubled by what seem to be breaches of moral or ethical conduct by God and/or human beings. In the quote above, do you find any theological or moral dilemmas?

4. Are there gaps in the text?
The rabbis are also intrigued by what is not in the text. In other words, when feelings, time spans, physical descriptions, conversations, etc. are not written in the text, they often fill in the gaps. In the quote above, do you find anything missing from the text?

5. Are there political or sociological issues?
The rabbis seek to render power dynamics among nations according to their worldview (e.g. putting Israel or Judaism at the center). Moreover, questions of ethnicity, gender, class, etc. prompt their investigation. In the quote above, are any of these kinds of issues relevant?

6. Are there any other difficulties, *kushiot* קושיות?

Write a creative response, a possible answer, to the *koshi* קשי that you find most interesting.

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[1] Vanity of vanities: Koren Publishers Jerusalem, New Revised Standard Version
Utterly vain, utterly vain: Moffatt
Futility, utter futility: REB
Utter futility! All is futile!: Jewish Publication Society
Utterly absurd: Fox
Meaningless! meaningless! NIV
Emptiness, emptiness: NEV
It is useless, useless: GNB
Nothing is worthwhile: TLB
A vapor of vapors!: Scott

What's the Conversation?
מה קשה לנו? *Mah Kasheh Lanu?*

קהלת א:ב
הֲבֶל הֲבָלִים אָמַר קֹהֶלֶת הֲבֶל
הֲבָלִים הַכֹּל הָבֶל׃

Kohelet 1:2
Havel Havalim! Says Kohelet
Havel Havalim! All is *Havel*.

On this page, several commentators respond to the following difficulty, or קשׁי: How can we understand the meaning of the word "*havel* הֶבֶל?

QUESTIONS

1. How does each commentator resolve the קשׁי?
2. How do their conclusions differ from one another?
3. How do you resolve the קשׁי? Add your voice as a "21st Century Commentator."

abbeinu Yonah: "הַכֹּל הָבֶל"
11 man's actions are in-nsequential — futile and uitless — unless they are otivated by lofty Torah eals. Nothing will remain of an's earthly labors. Only his iritual labors — his hteousness and Torah arning — will yield ever-sting fruits.

Kohelet Rabbah: "הַכֹּל הָבֶל"
King David said: "Man is like *hevel*, vapor." What kind of vapor? If it be the vapor of an oven or the vapor of the hearth, it has some substance. Then Solomon, his son came and explained: Thus it is written: vapor of vapors.

Michael V. Fox: "הַכֹּל הָבֶל"
Basic to Kohelet's thinking are certain assumptions about the way reality *should* operate. His primary assumption is that an action and a fitting recompense for that action are cause and effect; one who creates the cause can justly expect the effect. Kohelet identifies this expectation with the reasonableness he looks for in the working of the universe. At the time when he cleaves to this expectation, he sees that there is in reality, no such reasonableness, and his expectations are constantly frustrated.

abylonian Talud — Shabbat 9a: "הַכֹּל הָבֶל"
e world endures ly be-cause of e *hevel* of school ildren.

21st Century Commentator:

BIOGRAPHY

chael V. Fox: Rabbi ordained from HUC-JIR, he is the Weinstein-Bascom Professor in Jewish Studies at the iversity of Wisconsin – Madison.
helet Rabbah: Time and place of this midrash cannot be determined, but probably dates to around the 7th century.
mud: Contains mainly discussions on the Mishnah (earliest codification of what is referred to as Jewish oral ition). There are two compilations, most studied is the Babylonian Talmud.
beinu Yonah of Gerona: 13th century rabbi, cousin of Ramban. He wrote commentaries on portions of the Bible, mud, and famous ethical works, called Mussar literature.

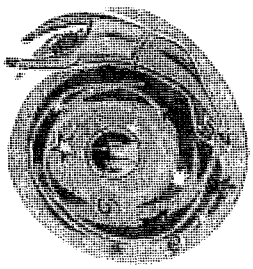
What's the Connection?
מה הקשר? *Mah HaKesher?*

Below you will find a book review that relates to the theme of contradictions. It is one of many possible ways to encounter the theme in our world.

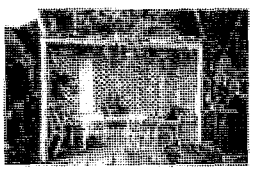
In his review of a book about Camus, Alexander Nahamas (Professor of Humanities and Philosophy at Princeton University) said that Camus' fatal flaw was that he could not take sides, that he saw everything from every point of view; that does not make him a failure. We think that it is impossible to act unless you're certain that you're right; but certainty about yourself is also the quickest road to fanaticism.

Now, uncertainty — the sense that not only you don't know the truth but that many complex issues are irresolvable ambiguous — is sometimes the most productive way of allowing you to act while at the same time respecting that others are not going to accept your view, approve your action, or follow your example. It produces a tentativeness that permits you to see many things from many points of view. Which is, I believe, the best definition of objectivity.

מה הקשר לקהלת?
Mah HaKesher to Kohelet:
What connections do you find between the passage above and the Book of Kohelet?

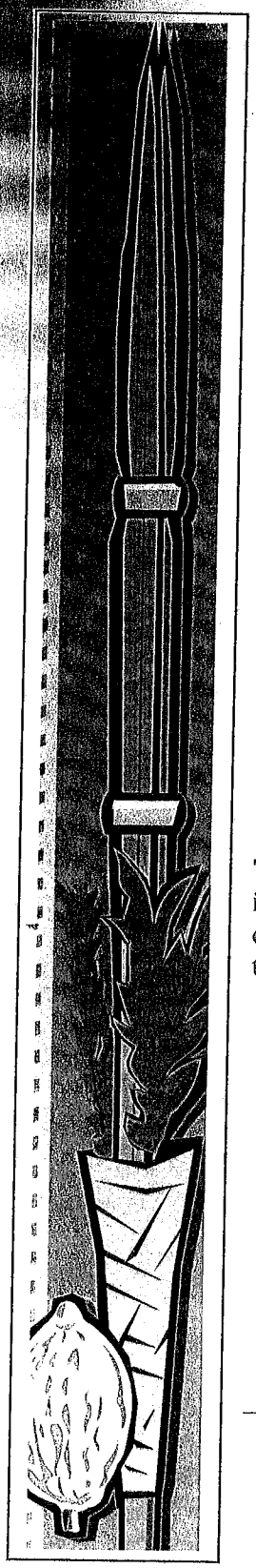


מה הקשר לחג?
Mah HaKasher to Sukkot:
What connections do you find between the passage above and Sukkot?



Now is your chance to draw from your own experience and identify something you have encountered in your world (a conversation, an article in the newspaper, a story, a road trip, etc.) that connects to the Book of Kohelet. How does your encounter shed light on the Book of Kohelet and the holiday of Sukkot?

What's Our Contribution?
מה קישוט החג? *Mah Kishut HeChag?*



The Symbols of Sukkot

On the left side of this page, you will see a picture of the symbols of Sukkot.

Below, you will find some words that describe these symbols in relation to one another. If you are familiar enough with the symbols to add your own description, please do so:

Palm, or *Lulav*[1] לולב (tallest one)
- ✡ long, sharp, straight, pointy, tapered, stiff

Willow, or *Aravah* ערבה (left of palm)
- ✡ short, smooth, thin, oval, flexible

Myrtl, or *Hadas* הדס (right of palm)
- ✡ short, smooth, shapely, round, fragrant

Citron, or *Etrog* אתרוג (bottom left)
- ✡ tough, bumpy, textured, bright, bitter, fragrant

To which of these characteristics might you be drawn?

Do any of the adjectives you selected contradict one another?

This Sukkot, as you shake these symbols while holding them all together, imagine for this one moment in time that all contradictions in your life coexist in creative ways and exist harmoniously. At that moment, recite the blessing:

Blessed are you Adonai our God,
Ruling Spirit of the universe,
Who makes us holy through your commandments
and commands us to lift up the lulav [in praise]

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ
עַל נְטִילַת לוּלָב

Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech Ha'olam,
asher kidishanu b'mitzvotav, vitzivanu
al netilat lulav

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[1]The word "*lulav* לולב" is the Hebrew word for "palm" but it is also used to represent the combined palm, willow, and myrtle. Hence, during the holiday, the combination of all four symbols are referred to as "*lulav* לולב and *etrog* אתרוג."

Conclusion?

This may be a conclusion, but it is certainly not the end. In autumn, the Jewish cycle of reading Torah *concludes* the reading of Deuteronomy, or *D'varim* דברים, but it never *ends*. No sooner does *D'varim* דברים close, than the Book of Genesis, or *B'reishit* בראשית, opens. The triumph of culmination mixes with the excitement of new beginnings. "In the beginning..." (Genesis 1:1).

In the beginning, we were four individuals with disparate research interests whose common learning goals brought us together. We think of Sukkot's four species – the *lulav* לולב, *aravah* ערבה, *hadas* הדס, and *etrog* אתרוג – brought together to form a whole that is greater than its separate parts. When the four species are held together on Sukkot, there is both unity and diversity. When we united, unique ideas merged to create something different. "Two are better than one" (Kohelet 4:9). And in writing this book, four was better than two.

Our hope is that you will seek out and create your own tight communities of learning. With partners, it is possible to bring two-dimensional texts to three-dimensional life. Living Torah through the seasons of the year and the seasons of life means engaging more than the text itself. It means engaging with others, engaging life. So, "Rise up and go forth" (Song of Songs 2:10). Find more to learn, more to live. Discover the richness, the depth, the insights of Torah. And bring your learning into the world. Make the world better because of it. And then it will be said of you, as it was of Boaz, "Blessed [are you] of Adonai, who has not failed in kindness" (Ruth 2:20).

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