



*Oh, give me the kisses of your mouth,
For your sweet loving is better than wine. — Songs 1:2*

I. A Call to Intimacy

*Oh, give me the kisses of your mouth,
For your sweet loving is better than wine,*

I am called to intimacy, and my longing calls me to Life.
I request Your mouth; I invite the Supreme Risk.
Your kiss is Death as well as Revelation. Yet I know
that all the wine I have drunk is just a taste; each and
every moment of ecstasy only stirs the coals. A spark,
my true spark, awakens, leaps and then grows dark
again. Each time I feel Your breath on my face, my
spark awakens and twinkles with laughter or trembles
with terror. And then, I am all lips, all expectancy, all
hunger.

*Your juices are fragrant,
Your essence pours out like oil,
This is why all the young women want you.*

Take me with you, let us run together!

Your fragrance, the scent of Reality, lures me
Beneath the dry surface of this seeming world...
Behind the shadows that confound me...
Between the sureties of conception and form
The tantalizing fragrance of Your Presence calls to me.

You long for me as I long for You,
You defy description and elude my grasp,

Yet as Your Essence pours into this world,
All forms are moistened with mystery.

Your Essence pours into my body and I become fluid.
Dancing wildly, I recover my full range of emotion,
I am infused with desire.

*The King has brought me to his chambers.
Let us delight and rejoice in your love,
Enjoying each caress more than wine,
They are right to love you so.*

I love You
with all my heart all my soul all my might.

As I pass through, these words call from every doorway,
But I do not calmly walk into your chambers;
I am brought,
Sometimes dragged—kicking, struggling, screaming.

Only after my heart's been broken,
My will defeated,
My expectations deflated,
Only now is true delight born. Only now
Does inner joy shine through outer circumstance.

This joy is delight in Being,
This love is existence itself.
Each breath touches my insides as a caress
Both soothing and arousing.

*I am dark and beautiful, Oh Daughters of Jerusalem,
Dark as the tents of Kedar, lavish as Solomon's
tapestries,*

*Do not see me only as dark
For the sun has stared at me.
My brothers quarreled with me;
They made me guard the vineyard.
I have not guarded my own.*

My dark beauty shines in the life that I have lived, the mistakes that I have made. This dark beauty shines in my regrets, in the tears that I have shed for love lost. I have been weathered. Each wrinkle on my face shows a road on the map. And the circuitous journey is etched on my soul. Yet my darkness is still a mystery which I offer up to the fires of awareness. I have quarreled with my life. My argument with the World is exhausting. Yet you see me. You harvest the fruit of my unguarded vineyard. I open the gate wide and wider still, to receive You.

*Tell me, my only love,
Where do you pasture your sheep,
Where do you rest them in the heat of noon?
Why should I wander among the flocks of your
companions?*

Why should I waste my time on anything less than our moments together? Why do I squander my time in worry, regret, scheming, blame or recrimination? It is Your Presence that nourishes and fills me;

תָּרַעָה, אִיכָה תִרְכִּיץ בְּצִהְרִים, שְׁלֵמָה אֶהְיֶה כְּעֵטָה עַל עֲרֵי חֲבָרִיָּה.
 ח אִם לֹא תִדְעֵי לָךְ, הִיפָה בְנָשִׁים, צְאִי לָךְ בְּעַקְבֵי הַצֹּאן, וְרַעִי אֶת
 גְּדִיתֶיךָ עַל מִשְׁכְּנוֹת הָרָעִים. ט לִסְסָתִי בְּרַכְבֵּי פָרַעַה דְּמִיתֶיךָ, רַעֲיָתִי.
 י נֶאֱוֹו לְחִמֶּיךָ בְּתָרִים, צִנְאָרֶךְ בְּחִרוּזִים. יא תוֹרֵי זֶהָב נֶעְשָׂה לָךְ, עִם נִקְדוֹת
 הַקֶּסֶף. יב עַד שֶׁהִמְלַךְ בְּמַסְכּוֹ, נִרְדִּי נִתַּן רִיחוֹ. יג צְרוּר הַמֵּר דּוּדֵי לֵי, בֵּין
 שְׂדֵי יֵלֶין. יד אֲשַׁכַּל הַכֶּפֶר דּוּדֵי לֵי, בְּכַרְמֵי עֵין גִּדִי. טו הִנֵּךְ יָפָה, רַעֲיָתִי.
 הִנֵּךְ יָפָה, עֵינֶיךָ יוֹנִים. טז הִנֵּךְ יָפָה, דּוּדֵי, אֶף נָעִים, אֶף עֲרָשְׁנוּ רַעֲנָנָה.
 יז חֲרוֹת בְּתֵינּוּ אֲרָזִים, רְהִיטֵנוּ בְּרוֹתִים.

ב

א אֲנִי חֲבַצְלַת הַשָּׂרוֹן, שׁוֹשַׁנַּת הָעַמְקִים. ב כְּשׁוֹשְׁנָה בֵּין הַחוּחִים, כֵּן
 רַעֲיָתִי בֵּין הַבְּנוֹת. ג כְּתַפּוּחַ בְּעֵצֵי הַיָּעַר, כֵּן דּוּדֵי בֵּין הַבְּנִים, בְּצִלּוֹ חֲמֹדֹתֵי
 וְיִשְׁבָּתֵי, וּפְרִיָו מְתוֹק לְחֵכֵי. ד הִבִּיאֲנִי אֶל בֵּית הַיַּיִן, וְדָגְלוּ עָלַי אֲהָבָה.
 ה סִמְכוֹנִי בְּאֲשִׁישׁוֹת, רִפְרוּנִי בְּתַפּוּחִים, כִּי חוֹלַת אֲהָבָה אָנִי. ו שְׂמֵאלוֹ
 תַחַת לְרֹאשִׁי, וַיְמִינוּ תַחְבְּקֵנִי. ז הִשְׁבַּעְתִּי אֶתְכֶם, בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם,
 בְּצַבָּאוֹת אוֹ בְּאֵילוֹת הַשָּׂדֶה, אִם תַּעֲיִרוּ וְאִם תַּעוֹרְרוּ אֶת הָאֲהָבָה עַד

will You graze Your flock? Where will You rest them under the fiercest sun of harshest Exile? Why shall I be like one veiled in mourning among the flocks of Your fellow shepherds?

↪ God responds to Israel:

8. If you know not where to graze, O fairest of nations, follow the footsteps of the sheep — your forefathers who traced a straight, unswerving path after My Torah. Then you can graze your tender kids even among the dwellings of foreign shepherds.

9. With My mighty steeds who battled Pharaoh's riders I revealed that you are My beloved.

10. Your cheeks are lovely with rows of gems, your neck with necklaces — My gifts to you from the splitting sea, ...

11. ... by inducing Pharaoh to engage in pursuit, to add circlets of gold to your spangles of silver.

↪ Israel to God:

12. While the King was yet at Sinai my malodorous deed gave forth its scent as my Golden Calf defiled the covenant.

13. But my Beloved responded with a bundle of myrrh — the fragrant atonement of erecting a Tabernacle where His Presence would dwell amid the Holy Ark's staves.

14. Like a cluster of henna in Ein Gedi vineyards has my Beloved multiplied his forgiveness to me.

15. He said, 'I forgive you, My friend, for you are lovely in deed and lovely in resolve. The righteous among you are loyal as a dove.'

16. It is You Who are lovely, my Beloved, so

pleasant that you pardoned my sin, enabling our Temple to make me ever fresh.

17. The beams of our House are cedar, our panels are cypress.

II

1. I am but a rose of Sharon, even an ever-fresh rose of the valleys.

↪ God to Israel:

2. Like the rose maintaining its beauty among the thorns, so is My faithful beloved among the nations.

↪ Israel reminisces:

3. Like the fruitful, fragrant apple tree among the barren trees of the forest, so is my Beloved among the gods. In His shade I delighted and there I sat, and the fruit of His Torah was sweet to my palate.

4. He brought me to the chamber of Torah delights and clustered my encampments about Him in love.

5. I say to Him, 'Sustain me in exile with dainty cakes, spread fragrant apples about me to comfort my dispersion — for, bereft of Your Presence, I am sick with love.'

6. With memories of His loving support in the desert, of His left hand under my head, of His right hand enveloping me.

↪ Israel to the nations:

7. I adjure you, O nations who are destined to ascend to Jerusalem — for if you violate your oath you will become as defenseless as gazelles or

שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים

In some congregations each individual recites שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים, Song of Songs, on Friday afternoon before Minchah.

א

א שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים אֲשֶׁר לְשֵׁלְמָה. ב יִשְׁקֵנִי מִנְשִׁיקוֹת פִּיהוּ, כִּי טוֹבִים
 דְּרִיךְ מֵיָיִן. ג לְרִיחַ שְׁמֵנֶיךָ טוֹבִים, שְׁמֵן תּוֹרַק שְׁמֶךָ,
 עַל כֵּן עֲלַמּוֹת אֶהְבֹּךָ. ד מִשְׁכְּנֵי אַחֲרֶיךָ נְרוּצָה, הִבִּיאֲנִי הַמֶּלֶךְ חֲדָרָיו,
 נְגִילָה וְנִשְׁמַחָה כָּךְ. ו נִזְכְּרָה דְרִיךְ מֵיָיִן, מִיִּשְׁרִים אֶהְבֹּךָ. ז שְׁחוּרָה אָנִי
 וְנֶאֱוָה, בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם, כְּאֶהְלִי קָדֶר, כִּירִיעוֹת שְׁלֵמָה. ח אֶל תִּרְאֵנִי שְׂאֵנִי
 שְׁחַרְחֲרַת, שֶׁשְׁזַפְתֵּנִי הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ, בְּנֵי אֲמִי נִחְרוּ בִי, שְׁמֵנִי נִטְרָה אֶת
 הַכְּרָמִים, כְּרַמֵּי שְׁלִי לֹא נִטְרָתִי. ט הִגִּידָה לִי, שְׂאֲהָבָה נִפְשִׁי, אִיכָה

שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים / SONG OF SONGS

As the entire gamut of Talmudic and Rabbinic literature relating to *Shir HaShirim* makes clear, this highly emotional, seemingly sensuous song is an allegory. As such, a literal translation would be misleading — even false — because it would not convey the meaning intended by King Solomon, the composer. The ArtScroll translation follows the commentary of Rashi, and a full commentary may be found in the ArtScroll *Shir Hashirim*. The following introductory comments are adapted from Rashi's own introduction:

Solomon foresaw through רוח הקדש, the Holy Spirit, that Israel is destined to suffer a series of exiles and will lament, nostalgically recalling her former status as God's chosen beloved. She will say, 'I shall return to my first husband [i.e., to God] for it was better with me than than it is now' (*Hoshea* 2:9). The children of Israel will recall His beneficence and the trespasses which they trespassed (*Leviticus* 26:40). And they will recall the goodness which He promised for the End of Days.

The prophets frequently likened the relationship between God and Israel to that of a loving husband angered by a straying wife who betrayed him. Solomon composed *Shir HaShirim* in the form of that same allegory. It is a passionate dialogue between the husband [God] who still loves his estranged wife [Israel], and the wife, a veritable widow of a living husband, who longs for her husband and seeks to endear herself to him once more, as she recalls her youthful love for him and admits her guilt.

God, too, is afflicted by her afflictions (*Isaiah* 63:9), and He recalls the kindness of her youth, her beauty, and her skillful deeds for which He loved her [Israel] so. He proclaimed that He has not afflicted her capriciously (*Lamentations* 3:33), nor is she cast away permanently. For she is still His 'wife' and He her 'husband,' and He will yet return to her.

The custom of reciting *Shir HaShirim* before the Sabbath (or during the Sabbath if time did not permit it earlier) is based on the Kabbalistic teaching that the recitation at this time helps save one from the suffering of Gehinnom (*Siddur Arugas HaBosem*).

I

1. The song that excels all songs dedicated to God, the King to Whom peace belongs.

↪ Israel in exile to God:

2. Communicate Your innermost wisdom to me again in loving closeness, for Your friendship is dearer than all earthly delights.

3. Like the scent of goodly oils is the spreading fame of Your great deeds, Your very name is Flowing Oil, therefore have nations loved You.

4. Upon perceiving a mere hint that You wished to draw me, we rushed with perfect faith after You into the wilderness. The King brought me into His cloud-pillared chamber; whatever our travail we shall always be glad and rejoice in Your Torah. We recall Your love more than

earthly delights, unrestrainedly do they love You.

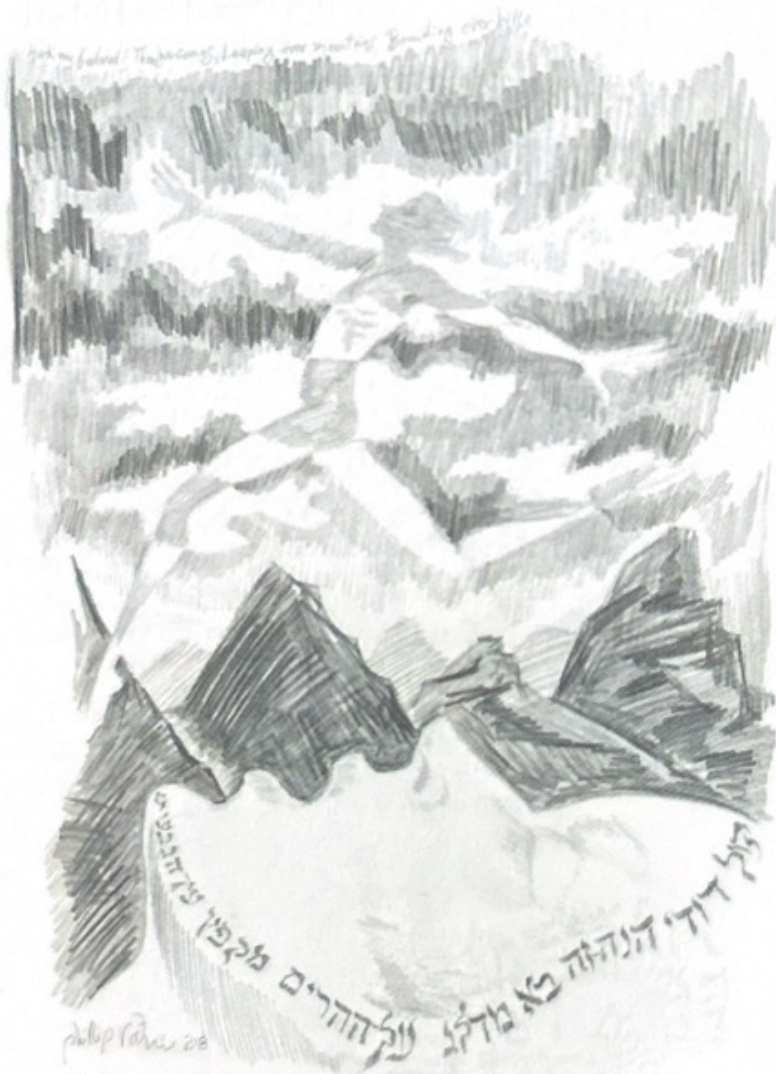
↪ Israel to the Nations:

5. Though I am black with sin, I am comely with virtue, O nations who are destined to ascend to Jerusalem, though sullied as the tents of Kedar, I will be immaculate as the draperies of Him to Whom peace belongs.

6. Do not view me with contempt despite my swarthinness, for it is but the sun which has glared upon me. The alien children of my mother were incensed with me and made me a keeper of the vineyards of idols, but the vineyard of my own true God I did not keep.

↪ Israel to God:

7. Tell me, You Whom my soul loves: Where



The voice of my beloved: Here it comes!
Leaping over the mountains, skipping across the hills. — Songs 2:8

The voice of my beloved: Here it comes!
Leaping over the mountains, skipping across the hills.

My love is like a gazelle, a wild stag.
He stands there on the other side of our wall, gazing
Through the windows, peering through the lattice.

My Beloved speaks to me through every sound, taste, fragrance, touch, color, light, emotion, and insight that leaps into my consciousness... through the ordinary miracles of each moment. My Lover knows no obstacle to the pursuit of His Love. He leaps over the mountains of my complacency, skips over the hills of my disappointment, blinding doubt, numbing fear and deeply ingrained habit.

I have built walls to keep You out. Such awesome love will surely mean the destruction of my small world.

Yet in moments of great beauty, my thick and stubborn opacity dissolves. I stand before You transparent, trembling, at the intersection of my greatest terror and my greatest longing—the place where I am finally seen.