

It is in this sense that the modern reader, who is not likely to read it as an allegory, will echo Akiba's passionate description of the book as "the Holy of Holies," for it is, in Herder's words, "holy as a song of pure natural love, the holiness of human life."

Over and beyond its eternal youthfulness and inherent charm, the Song of Songs, precisely because it is within the canon of Scripture, serves to broaden the horizons of religion. It gives expression, in poetic and hence in deathless terms, to the authentic world-view of Judaism, which denies any dichotomy between body and soul, between matter and spirit, because it recognizes them both as the twin aspects of the great and unending miracle called life.

## THE SONG OF SONGS, WHICH IS SOLOMON'S

### I

#### THE CALL TO LOVE

*In passionate accents, the beloved voices her desire for the presence of her bridegroom, who is here called "king," in accordance with a common West-Semitic and Jewish usage.*

*This song emanates not from the countryside, but from the city. Hence the background of many-chambered houses, the abundance of wine and oil and the presence of many maidens (1:2-4).*

Let me drink of the kisses of his mouth,  
For thy love is better than wine!  
Thine oils are a delight to inhale,  
Thy presence — as oil wafted about,  
Therefore do the maidens love thee.

Draw me after thee, let us hasten —  
The king has brought me to his chambers,  
Saying, "We will rejoice and be merry with thee!"  
We shall inhale thy love rather than wine!  
As fine wine do they love thee.

## II

## THE RUSTIC MAIDEN

*A country girl addresses the sophisticated women of the capital with a mixture of naivete and coquetry, of modesty and pride. Her skin, unlike that of the well-kept women of the capital, is dark. She has been exposed to the sun's rays, because she has been compelled to guard the vineyards of her brothers, who were angry with her. Their displeasure stemmed from the fact that she had left her own "vineyard" unguarded, being too prodigal with her favors (1:5-6).*

Swarthy am I, but comely, O daughters of Jerusalem,  
 Swarthy as Kedar's tents,  
 Comely as Solomonic hangings.  
 Do not look askance upon me, for being swarthy,  
 For the sun has tanned me;  
 My brothers were incensed against me,  
 They set me a keeper over the vineyards;  
 But my own vineyard I did not keep.

## III

## TELL ME WHERE MY LOVE

*The maiden pleads with her lover, to tell her where he is guarding his flocks. She gives him a gentle warning that if she must seek him herself, his fellow-shepherds are likely to make overtures for her affection (1:7-8).*

Tell me, O thou whom I love,  
 Where dost thou pasture thy sheep,  
 Where dost thou let them lie at noon?  
 Why, indeed, should I be a wanderer  
 Among the flocks of thy comrades,  
 Who would say to me:  
 "If thou knowest not, fairest among women,  
 Follow the footprints of the sheep,  
 And pasture thy kids  
 Near the tents of the shepherds."

## IV

## BEDECKED IN CHARM

*In this duet, the locale of which is southern Palestine, the "king" praises the beauty of his bride, bedecked in gold and silver ornaments, and compares her to a steed in Pharaoh's chariots. The comparison, somewhat strange to our habits of thought, is characteristically Semitic. It should be recalled that the horse was not a beast of burden in the Orient, but the cherished companion of kings and nobles in war and the chase. The bride responds by extolling the joys of love with her "king" (1:9-14).*

**THE BRIDEGROOM:** To a steed in Pharaoh's chariots  
Do I compare thee, my beloved.  
Thy cheeks are beautiful with banglets,  
Thy neck, with strings of jewels.  
Golden beads shall we make thee  
With studs of silver.

**THE BRIDE:** While the king was on his couch,  
My nard gave forth its fragrance.  
A bag of myrrh is my beloved,  
Lying between my breasts.  
A cluster of henna is my beloved to me  
From the vineyards of En-gedi.

## V

## OUR WALLS ARE CEDARS

*This simple lyric is of North-Israelite origin. The lovers make their tryst in the forest, with the cedars and cypresses as their home (1:15-17).*

**THE LOVER:** Thou art fair, my beloved, thou art fair,  
Thine eyes are doves.

**THE BELOVED:** Thou art handsome, my beloved, yea sweet,  
And our couch is green.

**BOTH:** The beams of our house are cedars,  
And our rafters are cypresses.

## VI

## WHO IS LIKE MY LOVE

*In this brief duet, the maiden describes her charms in modest terms, which the lover turns into a triumphant praise of her beauty. She counters by extolling his handsome presence, describing the joy she finds in his company (2:1-3).*

THE MAIDEN: I am but a rose in Sharon,  
A lily of the valleys.

THE YOUTH: As a lily among thorns,  
So is my beloved among the young women.

THE MAIDEN: As an apple-tree among the trees of the  
wood,  
So is my love among the young men.  
Under its shadow I delight to sit,  
And its fruit is sweet to my taste.

## VII

## LOVE'S PROUD PROCLAMATION

*The maiden proudly announces her love before all who are assembled in the tavern, and asks for refreshment, for she is faint through passion. She adjures the daughters of Jerusalem by a solemn oath to leave the lovers undisturbed, till their desire be spent (2:4-7).*

He has brought me to the banquet-hall,  
With his banner above me of love.  
Strengthen me with dainties, sustain me with apples;  
For I am love-sick.  
His left hand is beneath my head,  
While his right embraces me.  
I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,  
By the gazelles and the hinds of the field,  
That you disturb not, nor interrupt our love,  
Until it be satiated.

## COMMENTARY

1:1. The verse is the title of the book, added by the editor. Hence the use of the classical relative 'ašer instead of še employed throughout the book (e. g. 1:6; 5:8; 6:5, etc.). The post-Exilic editor accepts the Solomonic theory of authorship, which made the acceptance of the book into the canon possible. Hence שיר השירים meant for him "the best of songs," and is a superlative like קדש הקדשים, "holy of holies," הבל הבלים, "vanity of vanities" (Eccl. 1:2), מלך המלכים, "king of kings," as it was for Rabbi Akiba, "For all the writings are holy, but the Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies" (M. Yad. 5:3).

1:2. Read, with many moderns, יִשְׁקֵנִי. The change of person in the song is a characteristic of Biblical style; cf., *inter alia*, Micah 7:19. There is, therefore, no need to assume more than two characters in this song or to emend the vowels or suffixes in order to create a non-Biblical standard of consistency.

1:3. שָׁקַן חֶרֶק is best taken as "oil wafted about," literally "emptied, poured forth" (cf. LXX, V), though שָׁקַן is elsewhere masculine. Thus חֶמֶן, generally masculine, is feminine only in Job 31:34 and Eccl. 5:9 (reading חֶמֶן for חֶמֶן). See *KMW*, *ad loc.* חֶמֶן, generally feminine, is masculine in Ps. 42:8; 104:6 ("The deep — Thou hast covered it as with a garment") and in Job 28:14. Common in gender are מִתְּנָה, כִּים, שֶׁמֶשׁ, דֶּרֶךְ, etc. There is, therefore, no need to read חֶרֶק (cf. Esth. 2:3, 9, 12) or מִתְּנָה (*BH*) or מִתְּנָה, "purified" (Rothstein). שָׁקַן, "your name, being, presence." Cf. the figurative use of "the Name" for the presence or essence of God. On the assonance of *šem* and *šemen*, cf. Eccl. 7:1, and *KMW*, *ad loc.*

1:4. נִשְׁכְּרָה, not "we shall praise" but "we shall inhale"; on this meaning of the root, cf. Lev. 24:7; Isa. 66:3; Hos. 14:8; Ps. 20:4 (cf. I Sam. 26:19), as Ibn Janah recognized long ago. Hence there is no need to emend to נִשְׁכְּרָה, "we shall be drunk." אֶהְבֹּךְ, 3rd person plural, is impersonal; cf. Gen. 29:8; hence, "they love you, i. e. you are loved."

The traditional rendering for מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל אֶהְבֹּךְ, "rightly have they loved thee" (LXX, V, Rashi), is syntactically dubious and out of context. Deleting the phrase is a too easy solution; it destroys the rhythmic pattern which consists of 2 stichs (v. 2) followed by 3 (v. 3) and then of 3 stichs, followed by 2 (v. 4). What is required in the context is a reference to another element in the triad of wine, women and song. Accordingly, Ibn Ezra equates the word with "wine," in favor of which the parallelism may be adduced, as well as the occurrence of

the word in connection with wine three times (here, in 7:10, and in Prov. 23:31). In the two other passages, the noun occurs with הלך: יהלך במישרים and הלך לדודי למישרים; the noun, therefore, would seem to be the purpose or effect of the wine-drinking; see the Commentary on 7:10 for another suggestion. Here it may mean "strong wine" or refer to a special variety. Both because of the parallelism and the better syntax, it may be better to render the stich: "As fine wine do they love thee." On the other hand, Tur-Sinai (*op. cit.*, 369) interprets the word to mean "sexual potency," on the basis of Akkadian *mushartu*, which he interprets as "paramour," and *musharu*, "membrum virile." However, the etymology which he proposes is not borne out by the Akkadian (cf. M. Weir, *Lexicon of Accadian Prayers*, pp. 39, 221). Ben Jehudah also gives the word a sexual connotation, but his derivation is likewise doubtful (*Thesaurus*, VI, 2980 f.). Our word may, however, well mean "vigor, virility, strength," on the basis of indigenous Hebrew usage. Cf. the common Rabbinic phrase יִשְׂרָאֵל, "May your strength be firm" (B. B. 14b), and the Biblical source *Sefer Hayašār*, probably "The Book of Heroes" (Josh. 10:13; II Sam. 1:18). The stich may therefore mean, "For thy manliness do they love thee."

1:5. The verse exhibits "alternate parallelism," a, b, a', b' (cf. Ex. 29:27; Deut. 22:25-27; Hos. 3:5; Ps. 33:20 f.; Ps. 113:5-6; Eccl. 5:17 ff., and cf. Gordis, "Al Mibneh Hashirah Haivrit Haqedumah," in *Sefer Hashanah Lihude Amerika*, 1944, pp. 151 f., and *KMW*, p. 246). The opening stich does not mean "dunkel und doch hell" and is not a reference to the moon-goddess (against Hal., Wit.). Nor is the view that *šelômāh* here refers to an Arab tribe *Shalmah* (e. g., T. H. Gaster, in *Commentary*, vol. 13, April, 1952, p. 322) acceptable. Not only does this hypothesis propose a strange meaning for a common Hebrew name, creating a *hapax legomenon*, but it destroys the alternate parallelism of the verse, "swarthy" being completed by "tents of Kedar," and "comely" by "Solomonic curtains." Since the first stich is antithetic and not synonymous, "swarthy but comely," the second must follow suit. Similarly, in Ps. 113:5-6, המבדי לשבח המטפילי לראות, "dark-brown or black, and would be particularly familiar to the country-dwellers." "Solomon's curtains" is a generic term like וקן אהרן, Ps. 133:2, "an Aaronic beard;" cf. a "Van Dyke beard," "Louis Quatorze furniture," etc.

1:6. נִחְרֵי, from חרה, a variant vocalization for נִחְרֵי; cf. the reverse phonetic process in Judg. 5:28, נִחְרֵי for נִחְרֵי (against Hal.). For the vineyard as a symbol of the person of the beloved, cf. Isa. 5:1 f.;

Song 2:15; 8:12. The last-named passage, as here, employs "vineyard" in both the literal and the symbolic meanings.

1:7. *לָמָּה*, literally, "for why?"; a Hebrew equivalent for the Aramaic *למא*, "lest," the use of *ל* being principally, but not exclusively, North Israelite. Cf. *לָמָּה לָמָּה* (Dan. 1:10). *אֵשֶׁר לָמָּה* a) has been rendered "wayward woman," from the verb *עָטָה* I, "cover, wrap" (cf. I Sam. 28:14), hence "a robed woman, sign of a harlot" (cf. Gen. 38:14, and b) from *עָטָה* II, "delouse" (cf. Jer. 43:12 LXX; Von Gall, *ZATW*, 24, p. 105). It is best taken as a metathesis or a scribal error for *טָעָה* (Sym., P, V, Tar.), "wandering one." The Kaph is asseverative, "Why indeed should I be a wanderer"; cf., for example, Num. 11:1, and see Gordis, in *JAOS*, vol. 63, 1943. The usage occurs again in our book in 8:1 and probably in 7:1.

1:8. The verse is a quotation of the speech of the shepherd's comrades used without a formula of citation, as Tur-Sinai recognizes, p. 366. On the entire usage of quotations, cf. R. Gordis, in *HUCA*, 1949.

1:9. On the Judean origin of this song and on this type of simile, see the Introduction. *לְמָרָה*, "to a mare," with paragogic Yod; cf. Lam. 1:1.

1:12. *עַד*, "while, so long as"; cf., for example, Job 1:18. *בְּקַסְבוֹ*, not "table," but "couch"; cf. the Mishnaic use of *הַקֵּב*, "to recline."

1:14. *בְּכַרְמֵי*, perhaps "from the vineyards," rather than "in the vineyards"; cf. this meaning of Beth in Ugaritic. Engedi, on the western shore of the Dead Sea, was famous for its vineyards; cf. Pliny, *Historia Naturalis*, XII, 14 and 24.

1:15. The deletion of *יָמִים* deprives the verse of its third stich. Note the three stichs in the next verse.

1:16. *עֲרֻשְׁתִּי*, generally rendered "couch," may possibly mean "arbor." Cf. M. Kil. 6:1, *עָרִים*. Deleting the third stich is unjustified. See v. 15.

1:17. *קִרְוֵי בָתֵּינוּ* is the plural of *קִירוֹת בָּתֵּינוּ*, formed on the Mishnaic model, where the plural of *בַּיִת כְּנֻסִיּוֹת* is *בָּתֵּי כְּנֻסִיּוֹת* (Ehr.). Hence the MT is to be rendered, not "the beams of our houses," but "the beams of our house." *בְּרוּשִׁים*, a dialectic pronunciation for the classical *בְּרוֹשִׁים*, probably influenced by the Aramaic; cf. *sibōleth-šibbōleth*, Judg. 12:6, and see the Introduction and note 78. It is the cypress (I. Löw) or the Phoenician juniper-tree (Koehler, *Lexicon*, s. v., according to Pliny, XII, 78).

2:1. *הַחֲבַלְלָה* has been identified with the narcissus (Dalman), the *colchicum autumnale*, a flower of pale lilac-color (I. Löw), the saffron (Jastrow), and the rose (Tar., Ibn Janah, Ibn Ezra). *שִׁשְׁקָה*, generally

rendered "lily," is probably a red or dark purple flower; cf. 5:13. *שְׂרוֹן*, from *שָׂרוֹן*, "a valley, plain," was originally a common noun, and then was applied to the fertile central valley in Palestine, a process paralleled by *Carmel*; cf. the Commentary on 7:6.

2:2. *בָּנוֹת* = "girls"; cf. Prov. 31:29. On *רַעֲיָתִי*, "beloved," see the Introduction, sec. XI.

2:3. *הִשְׂדֵּתִי וְיִשְׂבֹּתִי*, "I delight to sit." Cf. Deut. 1:5; Hos. 5:11 for examples of this paratactic variant of the complementary infinitive.

2:4. *וְדָנְלוּ עָלַי אֶהְרָה*, a difficult phrase which may perhaps contain a reference to a custom unfamiliar to us today. The traditional rendering, "His shield" (so Hal.) or, "his banner over me is love," is a bold and striking figure. The emendation *וְדָנְלוּ*, taken as an imperative plural verb, "serve me with love," on the basis of the Akkadian *dagālu* (Del., Jastrow), does not commend itself, because we expect a singular verb addressed to the lover and, in addition, the preposition is unhebraic.

2:5. *אֶשִׁישׂוֹת*, "dainties," perhaps "raisin-cakes" (see Hos. 3:1). *רָפְדוּי*, not "spread out" (Job 17:13; 41:22), but "strengthen," on the basis of the Arabic (Ibn Ezra, JPS). There is no need to change the imperative verbs to the perfect singular, "he has strengthened me" (against Hal.), since she is addressing the company in the banquet-hall. Note the plural in v. 7. Raisin-cakes, which were used in fertility rites (cf. Hos. 3:1), served, like the apple, as an erotic symbol on the subconscious level, while on the conscious level they refer literally to a source of physical refreshment. See the Introduction, sec. XIII.

2:7. On the oath and the symbolism employed, see the Introduction. *תְּעִירוּ* and *תְּעוּרוּ* most naturally mean "arouse, stir up love" (JPS), on the basis of which Bettan interprets the passage to mean that the maiden opposes rousing love by artificial means in favor of gentle, natural love. This is not likely. Not only is there no reference to these artificial means in the text, but the context implies that she is already experiencing passionate love in all its fullness. Hence the verbs are best rendered "disturb, i. e. interfere with love" (so most commentators). *עַד שֶׁתִּשְׂקָץ*, "until love wishes" (*scilicet* to be disturbed, because it has been satisfied).

2:8. *קוֹל* = "hark." Cf. Gen. 4:10.

2:9. This verse is replete with Aramaisms and late Hebrew words. For *נִתְקַל*, a *hapax legomenon* in the Bible, see the Targum to Lev. 1:15; for *תְּרַבִּים* see the Targum on Prov. 7:6. *שִׁשְׁיָתִי* is also an Aramaism; cf. Isa. 14:16; Ps. 33:14.

*תִּצְיֵץ*, in earlier Hebrew "sprout" (cf. Ps. 90:6) and "shine" (Ps. 132:18), here means "look, peep"; cf. the Mishnaic usage *הִצִּיץ* generally