**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**Shir Ha-Shirim**

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**Shiur #10: *Shir Ha-Shirim* 2:4-3:5**

In our previous two *shiurim*, we saw the impassioned, reciprocal paeons of the *dod* and *raya*, which, despite their soaring poetry, reference concrete items, such as the couple’s home and bed. Upon first glance, we might think that the following verse extends this theme:

He brought me to the banquet room, And his banner of love was over me. (2:4)

The motif of the banquet room seems to pick up on the king and party referenced in the previous verses. Yet a careful reading of this opening verse, coupled with the upcoming verses, suggests that these verses are, in fact, different in character than the previous section. The *pesukim* continue:

Sustain me with raisin cakes, Refresh me with apples, For I am faint with love.

His left hand was under my head, His right arm embraced me.

I adjure you, O maidens of Jerusalem, By gazelles or by hinds of the field: Do not wake or rouse Love until it please! (2:5-7)

Numerous elements in these verses suggest that the woman finds herself in a dream-like state. In contrast to the previous set of verses, there are no concrete references at all. Instead, she imagines him bringing her to the “banquet house,” literally “house of wine,” and spreading some sort of banner of love over her, clearly a symbolic image. (Indeed, the imagery is so unusual that some modern scholars suggest, based on the Acaddean, that the term “*ve-diglo*” might refer to sight, meaning that he gazes upon her lovingly; see *Da’at Mikra*, p. 16.) And while in these verses, like the previous ones, there is reference to apples, here the request is for raisin cakes and apples that will help her to recover from her love-sick state, as opposed to the apple tree that provided shade for the *dod* and *raya*. As *Da’at Mikra* (p. 17) comments regarding verse 6, “His left hand was under my head, His right arm embraced me,” this seems less like a factual description and more like an image she sees in her reverie-like state.

There is also a key literary point that differentiates this dreamlike scene from the previous section: There is no reference to the terms “*dod*” and “*raya*.”

Following this set of observations, we may return to her request for raisin cakes and apples and inquire to whom she is speaking. While *Da’at Mikra* (p. 16) suggests that the entire section, including verse 5, is addressed to the man, it seems far more likely that all the verses, at the very least verses 5 and 7, are addressed to the Daughters of Jerusalem, whom she asks for support. Indeed, Rashbam (2:5, s.v. *samechuni*) explicitly states that the request is to the Daughters of Jerusalem. Moreover, the third-person references and her conversation with the Daughters of Jerusalem suggest that the man is not present.

What is the essence of her dream? Quite simply, she is completely overtaken by love. Similar to the threefold repetition of kissing in 1:2-4, the word *ahava* repeats three times in these verses, suggesting that it is the primary motif. The possible play on words of “*heviani*” and “*ahava*” in 2:4 (see *Da’at Mikra*, p. 18) may implicitly reinforce the pivotal nature of love in these verses. And the constant repetition in verses 5-7 – “Sustain me with raisin cakes, Refresh me with apples”; “His left hand was under my head, His right arm embraced me”; “By gazelles or by hinds of the field”; “Do not wake or rouse love” – reinforces the dream-like state in which she finds herself.

All this leads us to the final verse of this section – the woman’s adjuration of the Daughters of Jerusalem. This verse, along with its counterparts later in *Shir Ha-Shirim*, is regularly quoted in connection with the debates surrounding modern Zionism, but is poorly understood in its original context. Indeed, Rashi (s.v. *ve-im*) makes the point poignantly, noting that “there are many midrashic tales, but they do not fit with the context.”

On the level of *peshat*, what exactly does the woman adjure the Daughters of Jerusalem? Furthermore, how are we to understand the seemingly odd reference to “the gazelles and hinds of the fields?” Rashbam (s.v. *hishbati*) explains that her friends had been trying to dissuade her from pursuing her long-lost lover. In response, she declares that if they continue to try and stop her, they will become ownerless like the animals of the field, bereft of her friendship.

Ibn Ezra (*peshat*, s.v. *ve-hayiti*) maintains that she is lovesick because she misses him – recall that he does not seem to be present in these verses – and tells her friends not to wake her up from her slumber until her beloved has arrived. What of the reference to the animals? Ibn Ezra notes that women are compared to these animals elsewhere in *Tanakh*. Thus, she is essentially adjuring the women to take an oath “in themselves.” Alternatively, Metzudat David (s.v. *hishbati*) explains that she fears the other women will try to entice the man to care for them, and she is adjuring them not to awakening his potential feelings *for them*.

But in light of our assertion that she finds herself in a reverie-like state, it would appear that we may interpret the verse somewhat differently. In context, as *Da’at Mikra* (p. 18) suggests, this appears to be a request that the woman not be awakened her from her state of love until she is ready to emerge back in the “real world.” In other words, if her love is not easily realized in her “real life,” she should at least be permitted to daydream.

This is reinforced by the reference to the *tzevaot* or *ayalot*, which live in nature, not “civilization,” and were seen as signs of love and fertility (Twersky, p. 161). She begs her friends not to awaken her to the realities of the challenges in consummating and living real relationships. “Let a girl dream!” she exclaims to them.

If so, it would appear that for all their apparent beauty, beneath the surface these verses (like 1:5-8) point to the complexities inherent to the shepherd-shepherdess relationship. She is lovesick precisely because he is not present. She adjures the Daughters of Jerusalem because she prefers the simplicity of dreams to the difficult realities of attempting to build a home together.

We will see that this passage is far from isolated. The passages in *Shir Ha-Shirim* in fact vacillate between realistic depictions of the loving relationship between the *dod* and *raya*, and the woman’s dream-like – and increasingly nightmarish – visions of their relationship. Indeed, as we will argue, this back-and-forth forms the literary and thematic backbone to the book, and it dovetails nicely with the two parallel relationships we have previously identified – the royal relationship and the shepherds’ relationship – running throughout the *sefer*.

Thus, it is almost as if the various sections of *Shir Ha-Shirim* themselves are in dialogue with one another, much as are the *dod* and *raya*. The book opens with the woman’s depiction of a love that is pristine and focused on the actual, lived relationship between the two, which is described without any hint of underlying drama or complexity (1:2-4). Yet the very next set of *pesukim* suggest that the woman is a shepherdess who has confronted personal trauma and continues to struggle; she sees the need to “explain” herself and is even rebuffed by the shepherd the next time she sees him (1:5-8). Then we are suddenly whisked back into a world in which all is well, and the relationship between the man and woman has blossomed and been consummated (1:9-2:3). Finally, we see the woman describe the pristineness of their relationship to the Daughters of Jerusalem, but beneath the surface she experiences significant anxiety concerning the reality of their potential relationship.

**2:8-17**

If the conclusion of chapter 1 and opening three verses of chapter 2 tell a realistic love story about the couple, and 2:4-7 relay the dream-like reverie of the woman, at first glance the final ten verses of chapter 2 return us into the heady world of reciprocal romantic praise:

Hark! My beloved! There he comes, Leaping over mountains, Bounding over hills. (2:8)

The immediate reference to mountains and hills – recall that the *dod* was previously described as a shepherd – and his leaps and bounds suggest that we still find ourselves in the story of the shepherd, who is repeatedly referred to as the *dod* in these verses: *Kol dodi*, *Domeh dodi*, *Anah dodi*. (This suggests that the term *dod* is used to refer to both the king and shepherd, as opposed to the term *raya*, with is exclusively used in reference to the shepherdess who loves the king.) As such, we have already come to anticipate that matters may not be so smooth. And so we continue reading:

My beloved is like a gazelle, Or like a young stag. There he stands behind our wall, Gazing through the window, Peering through the lattice. (2:9)

The beloved remains handsome, and the opening phrases continue the themes of leaping and bounding in nature. Yet to attract the *raya*, the *dod* cannot proposition her directly; he can merely glimpse through the cracks. Indeed, the midrashic readings of this passage reinforce this point, suggesting that the Jewish People or individual religious seeker can only gain a glimpse of God, but can never see Him clearly (see *Shir Ha-Shirim Rabba* 2:22).

It seems likely that this relates to some of the challenges the woman had described in the opening sections of the book. She notes that she has been mistreated by her half-brothers, who appointed her in charge of other vineyards. As a consequence, she has not been able to take care of her own vineyard or herself (thus her discolored skin). The reader gets the sense that, perhaps due to her brothers or some other unknown cause, she is highly restricted in her ability to interact with others. Yet he perseveres, and, calling out through the lattice, invokes the beauty of nature, beginning with the change in seasons in *Eretz* *Yisrael*:

My beloved spoke thus to me, “Arise, my darling; My fair one, come away!

For now the winter is past, The rains are over and gone.

The blossoms have appeared in the land, The time of pruning has come; The song of the turtledove Is heard in our land.

The green figs form on the fig tree, The vines in blossom give off fragrance. Arise, my darling; My fair one, come away! (2:10-13)

That the narrative is situated in *Eretz Yisrael* has been evident throughout *Shir Ha-Shirim*, but the point is made especially sharply here: “*Stav*” refers not to fall (as it does in Modern Hebrew), but winter, the rainy season in Eretz *Yisrael*. The blossoming, as it functions throughout many forms of literature, simultaneously provides a literal reference to the springtime and a metaphor for the blossoming of their relationship.

What exactly does the *dod* urge? In verse 10, the *dod* twice urges his beloved to flee “for herself.” Similar to some explanations of “*lekh lekha*” (*Bereishit* 12:1, 22:2) and “*shelakh lekha*” (*Bamidbar* 13:2), this might simply be a typical turn of phrase. Alternatively, he might in fact be urging her to flee her difficult situation for once and for all. Her exit is good for her not only because she may be reunited with her beloved, but also because she will escape her difficult circumstances. Moreover, there is a clear A-B-A chiastic structure through which these verses are organized. The *dod* opens by urging her to flee for herself, explains that nature itself suggests that the moment is right, and returns to his call, “Arise, my darling; My fair one, come away!” with an emphasis on this being for her own benefit. The call for acting in her own interest envelopes this cluster of verses.

Yet, despite his call, he has difficulty accessing his beloved:

O my dove, in the cranny of the rocks, Hidden by the cliff, Let me see your face, Let me hear your voice; For your voice is sweet And your face is comely.” (2:14)

And, in one of the more cryptic verses in the *Megillah*, she responds:

Catch us the foxes, The little foxes, That ruin the vineyards — For our vineyard is in blossom. (2:15)

Ibn Ezra (*peshat* s.v. *amrah*) and Malbim (s.v. *echezu*) explain that the woman seeks to create opportunity for her to be alone with the *dod* by sending others – particularly the Daughters of Jerusalem – to watch over her vineyard. The strength of this reading is that it flows directly into the following verse, in which she declares her and the *dod*’s full commitment to one another:

My beloved is mine, And I am his, Who browses among the lilies. (2:16)

This verse – which also harks back to the beginning of chapter 2, in which the *dod* referred to his beloved as a lily among the thorns – suggests that 2:15 sets up the couple for intimate time together.

Yet others read 2:15 as referring back to the dialogue between the *raya* and her half-brothers, who had appointed her to watch their vineyards. She is explaining that she is unavailable to the *dod* because, especially during the blossoming of springtime, she must vigilantly guard the fields to ward away the foxes. She simultaneously scorns her half-brothers, whom she calls “small foxes” that stand between her and her beloved, symbolized by a blossoming field.

On this reading, the final two verses of chapter 2 comprise a unit:

My beloved is mine, And I am his, Who browses among the lilies.

When the day blows gently, And the shadows flee, Set out, my beloved, Swift as a gazelle, Or a young stag, For the hills of spices! (2:16-17)

The language is again reciprocal and pastoral, and, consistent with the shepherdesses' adjuration of the daughters of Jerusalem (2:7), the gazelle and stag again figure prominently. Yet as beautifully and romantically as the chapter ends, the couple is not able to fully consummate their relationship. At most, they can only be together during midday – “when the day blows gently and the shadows flee.” And the concluding verse is ambiguous. She might be suggesting that he flee to a place where she will meet him; yet, as Ibn Ezra (s.v. *ve-ata*) claims, she might instead be recommending that he flee without her.

Ultimately, she desires to be with her beloved, but at best can only do so in a partial fashion. Their love is beginning to blossom, yet due to external pressures she is not fully free to be with him. And so, just as in 1:8 he had concluded their dialogue by coyly suggesting that she “go follow the tracks of the sheep and graze your kids by the tents of the shepherds,” here she lovingly yet ambiguously directs him to set to set out himself “for the hills of spices.”

**3:1-5**

The opening five verses of chapter 3 recall the dreamy state the woman experienced in 2:4-7, including her adjuration of the Daughters of Jerusalem:

Upon my couch at night I sought the one I love— I sought, but found him not.

“I must rise and roam the town, Through the streets and through the squares; I must seek the one I love.” I sought but found him not.

I met the watchmen Who patrol the town. “Have you seen the one I love?”

Scarcely had I passed them, When I found the one I love. I held him fast, I would not let him go, Till I brought him to my mother’s house, To the chamber of her who conceived me.

I adjure you, O maidens of Jerusalem, By gazelles or by hinds of the field: Do not wake or rouse Love until it please! (3:1-5)

“Upon my couch at night I sought the one I love— I sought, but found him not.” This opening verse signals that she has returned to her sleepless nights. She seeks him in her mind, not physical reality. Her roaming through the town, encounters with mysterious watchmen, and (unrealistic) ability to immediately find her beloved and bring him to her mother’s house all reinforce this reading of the story.

Here, as in 2:7, our explanation of the oath fits quite nicely. Invoking exotic animals that live beyond civilization, she begs the Daughters of Jerusalem to allow her to continue dreaming, and not to compel her to confront the harsh realities of the challenges inherent to their relationship.

Yet this dream departs from its earlier counterpart in some important ways. The second dream is not as utopian as the first. In 2:4-7, she declares her obsession with her beloved and imagines that “His left hand was under my head, His right arm embraced me.” Here, however, she initially cannot find her beloved. Ultimately she finds him, and the section ends on a high note. Yet for the first time in her periodic reveries, her unconscious suggests that not all is well and that she fears allowing her beloved to slip away. When we turn to the third reverie, which appears in chapter 5, we will see her fears manifest in a far more dramatic way. For the meantime, though, her dream ends with a positive resolution, enabling us to turn to the end of chapter 3 – one of the most perplexing sections in all of *Shir Ha-Shirim*.