

Notes on the Song of Songs

This document examines key words in each verse of the Song of Songs by focusing upon the significance of their meanings as revealed through the Hebrew language in which it was composed. It is not so much a commentary in the traditional sense as a list of reflections upon these Hebrew words accomplished in the distinctive spirit of *lectio divina*. It is for this reason that in the title the loftier term “commentary” is avoided, preferring the more unassuming term, “notes.”

Of primary importance in this study is focus upon the Hebrew words within the context of their verbal roots, a method peculiar to Semitic languages, which allows for a broader interpretation of the text at hand. In comparison with other languages, Hebrew has a somewhat limited vocabulary and emphasizes verbs more than nouns and adjectives. This accent upon action implies a fluid or dynamic way of looking at things. For example, the verbal root approach allows one word to suggest a number of different...even contradictory...meanings and interpretations, all of which are interconnected to one degree or another.

People raised in Western culture are accustomed to a logical progression of thought, that is commencing from point A and then proceeding to point B, and so forth. This strategy is generally foreign to the biblical and therefore Hebrew way of thinking. In the latter case, emphasis is placed upon associations where the difference between various words and ideas can be more easily reconciled; in brief, this biblical approach is more synthetic or inclusive by nature. Within the context of *lectio divina* emphasis is placed upon reading Scripture with a view towards entering the silence of prayer which transcends concepts and thought. Examining the Song of Songs through the verbal roots of its words has the advantage of making connections, of harmonizing first words and then concepts. Practice and familiarity with this method makes it more easy to dispose oneself for contemplative prayer which is the chief goal of these notes.

On the other hand, an analytical approach to Scripture has the advantage of revealing historical circumstances and figures which may have been obscured by the telling and retelling of stories and parables. It can dispel the heavy mist of allegorical interpretations favored by earlier centuries of Christian interpretation, a practice which later fell out of favor but which is currently enjoying a resurgence. This literal or scientific approach is still prevalent in schools, universities and seminaries. While its benefits are undeniable, a strictly literal and historical approach to Scripture often fails to inspire; that is to say, in its quest to demystify texts, people trained in

this method can find themselves well-informed about Scripture but lacking insight with regard to its deeper meaning. Such deeper meaning may be denied or remain undiscovered, but the function of Sacred Scripture is to show how we are to relate to God and to one another.

These notes on the Song of Songs encompass two poles: first, a desire to arouse the readers' attention with regard to possible avenues of perusing the sacred text. Often conventional or "spiritual" commentaries adopt a moralizing and devotional stance; this posture is avoided, though the reader may apply the observations in this document towards this end and according to his or her needs. Secondly, while avoiding an allegorical strategy, the fluid nature of the Hebrew language in the spirit of *lectio divina* will allow readers to see how this Semitic way of perception may be put at the service of pointing to Jesus Christ.

Hopefully these notations which rest to a certain extent upon the Hebrew verbal system will enable the reader to see deeper patterns which only make sense in the light of prayer. The associations made are intended to lead to periods of quiet reflection which hopefully under divine guidance will lead to the repose of contemplative prayer. Over the course of time, a reader will freely be able to alternate between these two modes, namely, of reading the text with slow deliberation and engaging in period of silence. There are no special techniques involved nor should we submit to the constrictions of time, that is, of being anxious to cover material, etc. The only requirement is a burning, persistent desire to contact the living God through his Son, Jesus Christ.

Some more obvious features (for example, the attribution of the Song's composition to King Solomon) are omitted; many commentaries refer to such matters, each in their own way. By pointing out a number of avenues to follow based upon a prayerful reading of the Song's text, abundant possibilities open up for reflection in the spirit of *lectio divina*. Also, one may wish to access material on the Gregory of Nyssa Home Page which forms a part of the current one. It contains studies associated with the Song Commentaries by Origen, Gregory of Nyssa and Bernard of Clairvaux. These three texts are important in the history of Christian mysticism, and it is highly recommended to read them. Another document which may prove helpful on the same Home Page containing an exhaustive list of all scriptural references to Commentaries by these three authors. Examination of these citations can be beneficial to anyone wishing to write a commentary on the Song of Songs within the traditional Christian framework.

It should be observed that many commentaries on the Song of Songs, ancient and modern, proceed to a given point in the text and do not complete the text for one reason or another. Some authors claim the restraints of time or other such circumstances; part of the reason for incompleteness could be that having progressed into the Song for several verses or chapters, they have expressed all they wished with regard to the text. Perhaps an added complication is that after having commented on the Song to a greater or lesser degree, the prospect of dealing with a constant flow of allegories and symbols is quite daunting, despite one's best intentions to muddle through them.

As with all other biblical documents on this home page, **The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha** is used (New York, 1973), that is, the Revised Standard Version.

Chapter One

1-1: The Song of Songs which is Solomon's.

Most commentators, ancient and modern, have noted that the repetition of words which forms the title "Song of Songs" suggests a certain exaggeration or excellence. The Hebrew way of attributing authorship of the text is *leshelomah*, literally, "to Solomon" in the sense of direction towards, of recognizing a close unity between the poem and its author. The excellency of this poem is further augmented by each of the four Hebrew words containing the letter *shin* or *sh*. Thus these letters serve to grab the attention of the reader right at the start by imparting a sense of exuberance and vitality of the author's intentions. Even the frequent repetition of the word *shin* shows that the author wants to utter his words as quickly as possible: *shyr hashyrym 'asher lishelomah*.

Also note the relative pronoun, 'asher or which in conjunction with the *syr hashyrym* ("Song of Songs"). It derives from the verbal root 'ashar, to be blessed, happy and suggests a transitional mode or being in a state of constant motion with regard to happiness. We have a similar example in the opening words of Psalm One: "Happy ('ashrey) is the man (*ha'ysh*)." The identification of happiness with mankind is interesting in that it suggests that our being made in God's image and likeness (cf. Gen 1.26) is the very foundation for such well-being.

1-2: Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your love is better than wine.

The observation regarding the letter *shin* (*sh*) in the section above carries over into this verse's first two words: "Let him kiss me with the *kisses*" (*yishaqeny minshyqoth*).

Here we may draw a parallel with the title, "The Song of Songs" and "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth." that is to say, the bride who is speaking wishes an abundance of kisses from her spouse whom Christian commentators have traditionally taken as Jesus Christ; the bride often represents his Church. Note that the text literally has, "from his mouth," a direct smack on the lips, as it were. The verbal root for kiss, *nashaq*, means a joining or putting in order; the noun *nesheq* means arms or weapons, although it is uncertain whether this noun derives from the same verbal root as kiss. Right at the Song's beginning we may say that the bride wishes to arm herself in accord with St. Paul's exhortation, "Put on the whole armor of God" (Eph 6.11).

As soon as the bride has made her bold request regarding kisses, she shifts attention from the bridegroom's mouth to his very nature, love: "for your loves are better than (*min*, 'from') wine." Here we have another instance of direct emanation of his love as with "from his mouth" regarding the kisses. The word for love here is *dod* whose root implies a bubbling up; the proper name "David" comes from this same root. *Dod* is often used in the plural form; associate this with the plural of Songs, kisses and good, all of which bubble up from the loving atmosphere immediately communicated by the Song's opening words. Other references within the Song to wine are 1.4, 4.10, 5.1, 7.9, 8.2. Because wine is alcoholic, its intoxicating affect is symbolic of ecstasy.

1-3: Because of the savor of your good ointments your name is as oil poured forth; therefore do the maidens love you.

The source for these anointing ointments is not explicit from the text; i.e., they do not come from any bodily member such as the bridegroom's mouth or breasts. Emphasis is upon the sense of smell ('ointments,' *shemen*) and its association with name, *shem*. In the biblical context, the name of anyone or anything is important as we see in Moses' request to know God's name (cf. Ex 3.13). God grants his with the famous "I am who I am" of vs 14, so we may equate this name with oil being poured out.

Note the parallel between ointments and name, *shemen* and *shem*; the essence of this name seems that it is poured out which is true of God's name originally revealed to Moses and passed down through latter generations of Jews and Christians. Even the

proper name “Christ,” *Christos*, means anointed one in Greek. We may say that this oil stopped flowing (in the sense of having achieved fulfillment) with the revelation of Jesus Christ. Parallel such flowing with this New Testament vision of Christ as consummation of the Old Testament regarding his genealogy in Mat 1.1-16; here the flow of oil, as it were, begins from Adam and passes down to successive generations.

Another example of oil’s nature is the anointing of Jesus at Bethany: “A woman came up to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head as he sat at table.” Compare this with Ps 133.2: “It [unity of brothers] is like the precious oil upon the head, running down upon the beard, upon the beard of Aaron,” a gesture symbolizing the priesthood.

The maidens or *halamoth* are not virgins strictly speaking (*bethulah* is the word) but are more properly girls of marriageable age. With this in mind, we may see them as under the tutelage of the bride as she commences her marital relationship so well described in the Song of Songs. The verbal root for maiden is *halam*, to hide or to conceal; such concealment has certain sexual overtones. Note that the maidens love the bridegroom just like his spouse; the word for love here is ‘*ahav* which differs from the *dod* of vs 2. ‘*Ahav* is the more conventional term which connotes a breathing after or desire.

1-4: Draw me after you, let us make haste. The king has brought me into his chambers. We will exult and rejoice in you; we will remember your love more than wine; the upright love you.

Note the singular “me” and plural “let us.” The plural could refer to either the bridegroom and bride (the most obvious choice among commentators because the king brings his spouse to be alone with him in his chambers), the bride and maidens or all three. Despite the private nature of a marital relationship and the notion of maidens as young women in training, as it were, with regard to such a relationship, we may say that all three parties are involved.

In this verse the bride desires to be drawn after her spouse, not alongside (with) him. *Mashak*, “to draw,” connotes the taking possession of someone or something; contrast this notion of appropriation with a similar sounding verb, *mashach*, to spread over, from which comes the word Messiah or Jesus Christ, *Christos*. Such drawing desired by the bride is a natural response to her husband’s nature (i.e., Christ) to flow out (*mashach*). Thus we have two motions: her advancement towards him...going

upstream, as it were...into the downstream or outpouring of love (*mashach*) by the bridegroom.

As soon as the bride utters these opening words of vs 2 she quickly adds that “the king has brought me into his chambers.” Here we have the bridegroom identified as a king, an easy association to make with the lordship of Jesus Christ. Such chambers or *chader* may apply to the bridal chamber (cf. Sg 3.4 for another use, this time with regards to the bride’s mother). For a parallel reference, see Prov 24.4: “By knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches.” The fundamental meaning of *yadah*, the verbal root of knowledge suggests sexual relationship; it is thus knowledge of an intimate kind.

“We will rejoice and exult in you:” Note the plural “we” as mentioned above with regard to the maidens who accompany their mistress. “Rejoice” comes from the verbal root *gyl* from which derives the Hebrew word for circle. Therefore the bride’s rejoicing can be associated with a type of circular dance around her beloved. Accompanying this rejoicing is her second exultation, “and we will rejoice” with the root, *shamach*. Note the similar sound of this verb with “draw [me]” above, *mashak*. Thus the bride rejoices at the same time she is drawn. Furthermore, she does this rejoicing in (*bak*, ‘in you’) her spouse. Being “in” him as well as “in” his chambers are similar. Perhaps being “in” the bridegroom is equivalent to being “in” the inmost part of the Temple at Jerusalem as opposed to being “in” the Temple itself, the chambers.

“We will remember your love more than wine:” The word for remember here is *zakar* which is also a noun meaning a male because it is through a male that the memorial of his parents is passed on to future generations. That is to say, the bride begets...sets up a memorial...of her beloved even at this early stage of their relationship. But as just noted, such a memorial is much more than a reminder but is a living remembrance, a carrying forth into the future, of their love. This notion of the remembrance of love is so powerful that transcends the intoxicating effect of wine, its second mention in just a few verses; the same was implied in vs 2 where the bridegroom’s love is “better than wine.”

“The upright love you.” Such righteous persons are the maidens of the Song who share the bride’s ‘*ahav* or love; i.e., by reason of their association with the bride, they participate in the *zachar* or memorial of him.

1-5: I am black but comely, O daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon.

Shechorah for “black” suggests a “breaking forth” or the “morning” as revealed by its verbal root, *shachar*. Traditionally, commentators posit such discoloration as the bride’s sinfulness who is nevertheless loved by her spouse. However, the Hebrew sense alludes to a different sense as just mentioned. Most likely the darkness associated with dawn is that of twilight darkness. Note that Ps 63.2 reads, “O God, you are my God, I seek you,” where seek comes also from *shachar*. The time of dawn’s twilight is when a watchman is most apprehensive; although he dimly perceives the coming light, this first glance makes him seek its full realization more earnestly.

The “daughters of Jerusalem” are a more specific designation for the maidens; the bride declares her black color to them, not to her spouse, after which she compares it with the “tents of Kedar” and then the “curtains of Solomon.” The proper noun Kedar derives from the root *qadar*, “to be black,” in the sense of being dirty or tarnished; compare it with her declaration of being black” from the above mentioned verbal root with quite a different meaning, *shachar*. Kedar is a tribe sprung from Ishmael (cf. Gen 25.13), and Ishmael was a son of Abraham who God rejected in favor of Isaac (cf. Gen 21.10). Thus the tents refer to those nomadic tribes whose black colored tents wave in the desert wind.

Note the association of “tents” with the desert or wilderness in contrast first to the “daughters of Jerusalem” and then to the “curtains of Solomon.” Both connote the center of civilization for the Jews as well as the place to worship God (i.e., in the Temple). Despite these two facts, the bride also unhesitatingly associates her coloration with the “tents of Kedar” or that which lies outside the more specific holy center of the Temple and hence the more general holy center of Jerusalem. Such disfiguration may be associated with Christ who was crucified outside Jerusalem; also, refer to Is 53.2: “He had no form or comeliness that we should look at him.”

In addition to being *shachorah*, the bride claims that she is comely or *na’wah*. This latter adjective derives from *na’ah*, a verb suggesting to sit, to dwell. For two other references which demonstrate these two aspects of the same verbal root, see Is 52.7: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings” and Ps 23.2: “He leads me beside the waters of rest.”

The bride then compares her blackness to the “curtains of Solomon” which were located in (Solomon’s) Temple at Jerusalem, perhaps the same curtains which later were rent at Christ’s death (cf. Lk 23.45). Note the association with Solomon who was known for his great wisdom. This correspondence is appropriate, again considering the verbal root of curtain, *yarah*, which means to trembl” as well as to be evil. Most likely the Hebrew curtain is named such because curtains move or tremble in the wind.

1-6: Look not upon me because I am black, because the sun has looked upon me. My mother’s children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I did not keep.

These words could be addressed either/or to the bridegroom or the bride’s companions and betray a bit of shame in contrast to her boasting of black color in the previous verse. The verb to look upon derives from a little used root (cf. Job 20.9 & 28.7 where it is used as eye), *shazaph*, which means to scorch, to burn. Here we have two references to looking: one when the bride does not want to be seen and the other as a result of having been scorched by the sun. Keep in mind that we have another use of the verbal root *shachar* previously in vs 5.

“My mother’s children were angry with me:” I.e., here her brothers and sisters are perhaps insinuating children from a previous marriage, another existing husband or lover. Refer to Gen 21.1-21, the story of Hagar’s rejection (and her son Ishmael) by Abraham’s wife Sarah whom God protected; such children were angry at the bride. In their hostility towards the bride these children made her “keeper of the vineyards,” a domestic or sedentary occupation alien to the children’s nomadic existence. As part of her job of attending to the vineyards we may say that the bride made wine, the same wine which brought to remembrance her spouse whose “love is better than wine” of vs 2. Note the reference in Sg 8.12 to “my vineyard;” instead of being compelled to work there, the bride has appropriated it as opposed to Solomon’s vineyard in vs 11.

1-7: Tell me, O you whom my soul loves, where do you feed, where do you make your flock rest at noon? Why should I be as one who turns aside by the flocks of your companions?

Now the bride directly addresses her spouse, rather, her soul or *nephesh* addresses him. She makes a distinction here between her own person and her soul, the latter being the animating principle as well as mind which gives life to the body. This

faculty operates within yet independent of the senses and is not subject to deceptive information coming from them, especially with regard to the object of the bride's love. Note that this *nephesh* is doing the loving or '*ahavah*'; although both words come from different verbal roots, their basic meaning applies to breathing and longing after something thereby revealing the *nephesh* as a spirit-ual faculty. On the other hand, the bride's self, if you will, independent from *nephesh*, is asking the question composed of three parts, feeding, resting of flocks and her turning aside. Two of these refer more specifically to the bridegroom and the other to the bride.

The reference to feeding (*raha*) refers to sheep and can also apply to a sense of delight. We find that Christ as shepherd is a dominant theme in the New Testament as the famous words of Ps 23.1 foretell, "The Lord is my shepherd (*rohy*)."

The second question, "Where do you cause your flocks to rest at noon?" obviously refers to the intense noonday heat as intimated by the verbal root for noon, *tsahar*, which means to shine. Since it is a question of sheep or animals in this verse, we may locate this laying down, as it were, within Noah's ark where Noah acted as a shepherd not only for sheep but for all other creatures. Consider the word for window in Gen 6.16: "Make a window (*tsohar*) for the ark." Note the singular form as opposed to a number windows which you would expect for such a large vessel as the ark.

With this image of Noah's ark in mind as representative of the Church, refer to Jn 19.34 where a soldier pierced Christ's side with a lance: "at once there came out blood and water." Note that the saving blood and water came out from Christ's side on the new ark (or his cross), whereas with Noah, the destructive water remained outside. Also, the laying down in the Song (*ravats*) generally refers to quadrupeds. The bride's request for knowing her spouse's place of repose is the Cross where he lies down.

"Why should I be as one who turns aside by the flocks of your companions?" The bride communicates her frustration at not being with her lover; furthermore, she is counted along with his companions or *chaveray*. These attendants are the bridegroom's equivalent to the bride's maidens; while helpful and indeed necessary, they are impediments to the bride's *nephesh* or soul which is engaged in intense longing. Note the verbal root for turning aside" *hatah*, whose primary meaning is to cover, to become languid. With the alternate notion of coverin" in mind, refer back to vs 5 with mention of the "tents of Kedar" and "curtains of Solomon," both of which serve as coverings; they conceal the bride and do not allow her spouse to see her.

1-8: If you do not know, O fairest among women, follow in the tracks of the flock and feed your kids beside the shepherds' tents.

Here are the very first words addressed by the bridegroom to his spouse are less than enthusiastic in comparison to her opening statement. They are reminiscent of Christ's apparently detached response to Mary Magdalen, the "fairest among women," "Do not hold me" (Jn 20.17). Note the fundamental meaning of fair (*yaphah*) as "to be bright, "to shine" which stands in contrast to the bride's complaint of having been darkened by the sun.

Since the bride does not "know," the bridegroom bids her to find this knowledge not with himself for whom "her soul loves" but with the "footsteps of the flock." Such knowledge seems neither directed towards herself, her spouse nor to anyone else; it is a simple, all-inclusive knowing minus a subject-object relationship. These footsteps are even one step removed from the flock itself which makes the bridegroom's response seem even bleaker. Be this as it may, she undoubtedly follows his command. Keep in mind that the next two verses which contain heartening words encourage her.

The word for footsteps derives from *haqav* (to take hold of, to supplant) which is also the verbal root for the proper name of Jacob, "the supplanter." We find a reference similar to the Song's in Ps 77.19, "Your way was through the sea, your path through the great waters, yet your footprints were unseen." This verse gives the bride a clue for that self-knowledge requested by her spouse, and it suggests that it takes place within the redemptive act of Israel's departure from Egypt. The psalm verse more specifically reads, " your footprints were not known," that is, not known in the sense of self knowledge required by the bridegroom. Verse 20 continues with a reference to flocks: "You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron," that is, through the Red Sea.

"Feed your kids beside the shepherds' tents:" In light of Ps 77.20 just above, these shepherds may be equated with Moses and Aaron. Note that later in the desert Moses put on a veil after speaking with God (Ex 34.33), that is, when he exited the tent of meeting. We could say that the people assembled there "to feed beside the shepherds' tents" or to hear God's words spoken to Moses. In this instance the people were afraid to gaze upon Moses' face, whereas God said to Moses that "you cannot see my face and live" (Ex 33.20); i.e., we have among the people a handing-down of this inability to perceive God's face or a human face which has been in his presence.

A brief note about “kids, *gedy*: they are young goats used by nomadic people in the desert for milk and are a prime source of nourishment.

1-9: I have compared you, O my love, to a company of horses in Pharaoh’s chariots.

Here are the first words of encouragement by the bridegroom after his rather harsh rejection of his spouse’s advances. His image of horses in the Egyptian king’s army is at first unusual, for Egypt is the traditional enemy of Israel. This strange comparison, however, makes better sense in light of those two verses from Ps 77 above regarding footprints. The Song’s reference to Pharaoh’s chariots, though, is unusual because they were drowned at the Red Sea. On the other hand, such a formidable array represented the height of military strength at the time, so the bridegroom’s allusion to it is equivalent to someone today looking for the most powerful symbol of military might with which to compare his beloved.

Note the word for love, *rahyah*, from the verbal root *raha*, to pasture. It is easy to apply this notion to Jesus Christ who calls himself the good shepherd: “I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me” (Jn 10.14). However, in the context of this Song verse, it is the bridegroom who calls his spouse a *rahyah*, not the other way round. Given the mutual exchange of intimate knowledge implied here (‘I know my own and my own know me.’), it is not surprising that titles and functions strictly proper to the bridegroom be applied to the bride at his discretion.

“I have compared:” to make a comparison is the most basic gesture one can make when beholding something extraordinary; it is a process of making what is unusual familiar. The Hebrew verb here is *damah* whose alternate meaning is to be silent, perhaps due to the sentiment of astonishment. Also from this root comes the noun image (*demoth*) as in Gen 1.26: “Let us make man in our image and likeness.” Consider these horses with the flocks of vs 8; apparently the bride goes in their footsteps with the speed and might characteristic of horses trained for military action.

1-10: Your cheeks are comely with ornaments, your neck with chains.

Here is the second statement of encouragement to the bride which is not entirely removed from being compared with horses; the cheeks and neck which are embellished can apply to those horses prepared for war; they can also be used to strike terror into the enemy.

Cheeks were considered as a prime location of beauty, for example, with regard to David: “Now he was ruddy” (1Sam 16.12). The bride’s cheeks are “comely, that is, *na’uw*, which comes from the verbal root *na’ah* as found in vs 5 where this adjective pertains to the bride’s general appearance. Not only are her cheeks *na’uw*, but they contain ornaments or *tur* which suggests something more like a row of jewels and whose verbal root means to search out. Similarly, turtledove comes from this verb, *tur*, so perhaps the bridegroom perceives the image of a dove in his beloved (cf. Sg 2.12).

“Your neck with chains:” This is the only reference to chains (*charutym*) in the Bible and suggests something punctured. The word gold is not in the text but may be presumed. See Sg 4.4 & 7.4 for two other instances of neck. Prov 4.9 has a reference to neck worth citing: “For they [teachings of one’s father and mother] are a fair garland for your head and pendants for your neck.”

1-11: We will make for you borders of gold with studs of silver.

Note the plural form of the verb, as though the bride’s companions had joined her spouse to collaborate in embellishing her. Here is the second instance of *tur* or boarder with explicit mention of gold. From the same verbal root (*tor*, to travel about, spy) comes the noun *tor* or dove. Compare a similar sounding word but from a different verbal root, *torah* (law) most often associated with the Law or Torah. *Noqed* or studs is the only instance in the Old Testament but refer to *noqed*, sheep marked with points, as in Gen 30.32.

1-12: While the king was at his table my spikenard sent forth its smell.

Here the king is at table presumably eating, whereas Sg 1.4 has him in his chambers. This is the only instance where *mesav* is used for table; it derives from the verbal root *savav*, to surround. Since we are dealing with a person of royal stature and thus someone divine, consider another use of *mesav* pertaining to the Temple, 1Kg 6.29: “He [Solomon] carved all the walls of the house round about with carved figures of cherubim and palm trees and open flowers, in the inner and outer rooms.”

While at table the bride’s spikenard odor permeates the house (we might say in light of the last paragraph, ‘round about’), obviously intimating Mt 26.6 where a woman anointed Jesus’ head with “very expensive ointment.” Also, refer to Jn 12.3 where Mary does the same only here John says that “the house was filled with the fragrance

of the ointment.” Although both Gospel accounts refer to a supper prior to Christ’s passion, we may say that fragrance here may be associated with the Last Supper.

Note that the spikenard sends forth its smell or *reych*, from the same verbal root as *ruach* or spirit. Keeping in mind the Last Supper to which was just alluded, it is while Jesus was at table that he spoke most eloquently of the Holy Spirit which he will shortly send or in the Song’s words, “send its smell.”

1-13: A bundle of myrrh is my well beloved to me; he shall lie all night between my breasts.

Myrrh is symbolic of death and is one of the gifts brought to the child Jesus by the Magi: “Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh” (Mt 2.11). Applied to Christ, such myrrh was used at his burial (cf. Jn 19.39). Note that it was Nicodemus who brought it, “who had at first come to him by night,” an association which may apply to the second half of Sg 1.13, “he shall lie all night...” It was during this night that Jesus spoke to Nicodemus of the Holy Spirit (“The wind blows where it wills...but you do not know from where it comes or where it goes,” Jn 3.8). Thus we may say that Nicodemus is a maiden or companion of the bride in the Song; Jesus “laid all night between Nicodemus’ breasts” while he discoursed (at night) on the Holy Spirit.

This verse contains the first reference to the bridegroom as beloved or *dod* although we find reference to it in Sg 1.1, “for your love is better than wine.” Note that the bridegroom is not simply myrrh but a bundle of myrrh (*tseror*, from the verbal root *tsarah*, to compress” and hence to be distressed). Thus the notion of sorrow is doubled.

The bride says that her spouse or beloved shall lie between her breasts, that is, she speaks of an action referring to the coming of night. The verb *lun* or *lyn* does suggest a tarrying, especially at night. One example of such residing is Gen 32.13: “So he [Jacob] lodged there that night,” that is, the place where he contested with the mysterious, divine being responsible for changing his name from Jacob to Israel.

Observe the place-where of the spouse’s lodging, between the breasts of his bride and parallel it with Jn 13.23: “One of his disciples [John] whom Jesus loved was lying close to the breast of Jesus.” The Greek is more descriptive, “in the breast, *en to kolpo*.” Note that “breast” or its construct form, *shadey*, sounds quite similar to *Shaday*, Almighty, a common name for God.

1-14: My beloved is to me like a cluster of camphire in the vineyards of En-gedi.

Here we have the second consecutive mention of *dod* (beloved) who is compared to a cluster of camphire. *Kopher* or camphire also means pitch by reason of it being spread over something (the verbal root *kaphar* means this). Since *kaphar* suggests the general idea of covering, we may say that the bride intimates a hidden presence of her beloved, to continue the theme of vs 13, “He shall lie all night between my breasts.” Cluster or *‘eshkol* also denotes cluster of grapes which are opposite in nature to pitch. By way of note, refer to Gen 6.14: “Make yourself an ark of gopher wood; make rooms in the ark and cover it inside and out with pitch.” I.e., make the ark well resistant to the flood waters about to cover the earth.

The bride locates this cluster of camphire “in the vineyards of En-gedi,” literally, “fountain of the kid,” which is located in the Judean desert and abounds with palm trees. That is to say, her spouse is a place of refreshment, a well or *heydn* within the wilderness, the isolation of which is protected by the pitch-like nature of camphire just described. The bridegroom’s identification with a well or source of water in parched land has its New Testament equivalent with Christ’s words in Jn 4.14: “but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

1-15: Behold, you are fair, my love, behold, you are fair. Your eyes are doves.

Note the different word for “[my] love,” *rahayah*, in contrast to the just mentioned *dod* which we first saw in 1.9. With regards to the attribute fair, it derives from the verbal root *yaphah*, to shine, to be bright, and the bridegroom mentions it twice in conjunction with the exclamation, behold (*hinak*) which expresses admiration coupled with astonishment. He then compares her eyes with those of doves, traditionally symbolic of purity and innocence among commentators of the Song. Furthermore, a dove represents the Holy Spirit, the *Ruach*, who “blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know from where it comes and to where it goes” (Jn 3.8).

With this image of modesty in mind, we can say that the dove is not ignorant but is fully aware of “where it [Spirit] comes and where it goes.” Such knowledge related to a locality resembles the Spirit of Gen 1.1 who “was moving over the face of the waters.” Perhaps it was not so much the dove or Spirit moving in the physical sense but her eyes glancing back and forth. Compare this movement with Satan’s when

asked by God “from where have you come?” His response: “From going to and fro on the earth and from walking up and down on it” (Job 2.2). Such going to and fro derives from *shut*, meaning to row, the image of which suggests quick, noisy splashes or commotion. Note the connotation of *shut*, a term associated with water, in contrast with the Spirit “moving over the face of the waters.”

1-16: Behold, you are fair, my beloved, indeed, pleasant. Our bed is green.

Now the bridegroom shifts his wonder to another term for his spouse which was already discussed, *dod* or love, and again calls her fair. Only this time he adds the adjective, pleasant or *naham*. For an example, refer to Ps 27.4: “to behold the beauty of the Lord.” Note that although the psalmist requests “one thing,” it contains a total of three: 1) to dwell in the house of the Lord, 2) to behold the beauty of the Lord and 3) to inquire in his temple. We may insert the psalmist’s three-fold request in the bridegroom’s mouth in admiration of her loveliness.

Allusion to bed or *harash* implies a marital relationship; this noun derives from an unused root and suggests a couch with a hanging curtain as well as a tent. This *harash* is green or verdant in the sense of being fruitful; there is an obvious correlation between the bride’s beauty and the bed’s fertile character.

1- 17: The beams of our house are cedars and our rafters are of fir.

This verse brings to conclusion Chapter One and is the second verse describing the spouses’ residence, only here we have clear reference to their house. The bridegroom glories in the qualities of its beams and “rafters, suggesting that he is contemplating the house’s very structure. A beam (*qorah*) connotes a ceiling and its verbal root, *qarah*, means to meet, to lay beams, perhaps from the fact that beams meet or join with each other to form a secure overhead structure. Such beams are made of cedar, a wood noted for its durability and resistance to corruption. Their chief source is Lebanon, and 1Kg 5.6 mentions Solomon’s request from King Hiram to “command that cedars of Lebanon be cut for me,” that is, to adorn the temple about to be constructed.

Next the bridegroom adds, “our rafters are of fir.” The meaning of the Hebrew word for fir is unclear but includes the word *nahym*, “pleasant things.” With this in mind, we can say that the rafters which are usually smaller in form than larger beams, are a form of adornment for the ceiling. They are “pleasant things,” that is, add beauty to the fact that “our bed [below] is green.”

Chapter Two

2-1: I am the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valleys.

We begin Chapter Two with the bride's confident statement by which she compares herself with two types of flowers, a rose (better, crocus) and a lily. Keep in mind that flowers yield a scent as in Sg 1.12 ('my spikenard sent forth its scent' or *rayach*), and it is characteristic for a bride to adorn herself with it. Refer to 2Cor 2.16, "For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing." Note the two-fold nature of this single aroma which belongs to Christ, and keeping in mind the association of *rayach* with *ruach* (spirit), it is not difficult to realize here the action of the Holy Spirit.

Such a rose or *chavatseleth* is a white colored flower tinged with saffron growing in meadows; the only other biblical reference is Is 35.1, and we may parallel the Song verse with it: "The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon." Note mention of Sharon and definition of *chavatseleth* as crocus. This rose is located in Sharon, an area noted for its fertility.

The other flower to which the bride compares herself is a lily or *shushan* whose color is white. Furthermore, like the rose, this lily has a location, valleys, which serves to enhance its nature. Note the plural form, valleys, which suggests an abundance of fertile places. Because a valley is deep, it serves to enhance the lily's bright color. The singular form of lily coupled with the just mentioned plural valleys implies that the lily is of unique quality, that it stands out among numerous valleys.

2-2: As the lily is among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.

After comparing herself to a lily in vs 1, the bride assigns a similar designation to her spouse, thereby highlighting his attractiveness by contrasting it with thorns whose equivalent, at least in her perception, are the maidens. Her boast of the previous verse connotes a tinge of arrogance in that she considers herself to be superior, but any boasting derives from the fact that her spouse has singled out her beauty.

To enhance the benevolence of her spouse, the bride aptly again calls him my love or *rahyaty*, the same word as in Sg 1.9 where she was compared to “a company of horses in Pharaoh’s chariots.” Just as this association with the Egyptian cavalry has hostile overtones, the same may be applied to the daughters (*habanoth*) who are different from virgins (*halemoth*) of 1.3. The former suggests a paternal association, a father (the Song’s bridegroom) to his female children. We may ascribe this notion to Lk 13.34: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children [that is, the ‘daughters’] together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!” Jesus’ image of a hen is reminiscent of Gen 1.2: “and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters” where moving or *rachaph* suggests a cherishing or a mother’s close relationship with a newborn child. Both images therefore can apply to Christ’s incarnation within the limited and sinful world of human beings.

2-3: As the apple tree is among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.

Because this verse contains two sentences, comments are divided into two sections, I and II as follows:

I. Now the imagery shifts from one of desolation to abundance with attention focused upon the word apple or *taphuach*, from the verbal root *naphach*, to blow, breathe. Not only that, but this tree is compared to “trees of the wood” or all other kinds of trees. With the verbal root for apple in mind, we observe that the bride’s first response to her beloved centers upon the sense of smell of whom she has gotten a trace. She is like Isaac whom Jacob deceived Isaac to obtain Esau’s inheritance. Just before imparting his blessing, Isaac, despite his doubts about the veracity of Jacob being Esau, said, “and he [Isaac] smelled the smell of his garments and blessed him...’See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord has blessed” (Gen 27.27)! Note the four mentions of smell, all of which come from the verbal root *ruach*. Although this scent denotes Esau’s presence, it is erroneous as opposed to the more accurate faculty of vision which Isaac lacked.

Be this as it may, this incident is helpful in conjunction with the Song’s verse because *ruach* immediately awoke Isaac from his listless state; it was more appealing that the sense of touch and sound (‘The voice is Jacob’s voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau,’ Gen 27.22). As soon as he perceives this scent, Isaac imparts his blessing in vs 28 with mention of “the dew of heaven and the fatness of the earth,” that is, rich

benedictions with strong associations of scent. Most likely if Jacob did not receive this blessing, there would be no dream where God said, “The land [i.e., with its scent which implies extension through future generations] on which you lie I will give to you and to your descendants” (Gen 28.13).

Note the comparison, “as the apple tree is among the trees of the wood” and “so is my beloved among the sons.” Thus apple tree may be equated with beloved and trees of the wood with sons. Compare it with the previous verse which accentuated a somewhat negative view of female offspring, “As the lily is among thorns, so is my beloved among the daughters.” The preposition among (*beyn*) can also mean in between, that is, a being-present-with while not necessarily partaking of those same objects or persons.

II. In this second sentence of Sg 2.3 we have the bride taking rest “under his shadow with great delight.” This familiarity with her spouse stands in contrast with the immediate ramifications of our first parent’s disobedience (cf. Gen 3.6-7) when they “hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden” (vs 8). Here their immediate response was a direct consequence of hearing “the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.” Contrast it with their newly discovered self-awareness upon eating the fruit in vs 7: “Then the eyes of both were opened.” Note that the form were opened (*tipaqachnah*) suggests something happening to the man and woman as opposed to bringing it upon themselves. Such opening was not a violent event; its very passivity served to introduce a manner by which the man and woman perceived themselves as distinct individuals with respect to each other. God, who comes on the scene later, is not earlier mentioned as having present in the garden; his later arrival is a temporal gap which did not exist prior to their disobedience.

The Song of Songs represents a restoration, an *apokatastasis*, of Eden, but with the crucial difference of a marital relationship having been rediscovered through suffering. It is for this reason that the bride sits down (*yashavty*), that is, takes up a position implying repossession. She resembles Moses when conversing with God: “and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by” (Ex 33.22). Moses being in this cleft or hollow spot parallels that shade of the Song’s shadow or *tel* in which the bride sits. Ps 17.8 enhances this *tel* where a shadow connotes assumption of the reality of which it is a kind of image: “Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings.” Note that apple here is not the same notion of Sg 2.3; the definition of ‘yshon is more specifically the middle of something and is a diminutive form of ‘ysh or man

where the image of a person is not only reflected in one's eyes but partakes of the person engaged in the act of beholding. Thus this Song's verse implies that the bride becomes an image of her beloved and is appropriated by him through her act of sitting down.

The bride desired to rest in her spouse's shadow, that is, *chamad*, whose verbal root suggests pleasantness and intense longing. This aspiration leads her to say, "his fruit was sweet to my taste." Again, note the contrast between his fruit (*piryu*) and the fruit (same Hebrew word) of Genesis mentioned above which led to the demise of our first parents. This sweet (*matoq*) fruit is instrumental for an understanding of the next verse where the bridegroom brings his spouse into his banqueting house. Note the two dynamics at work: tasting the forbidden fruit of Genesis leads to an expulsion from Eden whereas tasting the Song's fruit leads to admission of the same reality only now perceived under the image of a banqueting house or place symbolizing opulence.

On a final note, one cannot help but view this sentence in light of Ps 34.8: "O taste and see that the Lord is good!" Note the sequence...first comes taste followed by seeing which parallels our first parents' response to the tree in Eden but with a vastly different outcome. The verse just before eight reads, "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him and delivers them." Here the angel plays a beneficial role as opposed to the preventive one played by the cherubim in Gen 3.24: "and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim...to guard the way to the tree of life."

2-4: He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.

As noted in the last verse, the bride enters her spouse's banqueting house after tasting his fruit, an image which is reverse to the banishment wrought by our first parents' disobedience. Taste or *taham* is responsible for her entry as implied in Ps 34.8 above. A more accurate translation of this location is house of wine, *beyth hayahen*. Wine is usually associated with the negative effects of intoxication where a person lacks control of his or her faculties, but its positive significance suggests ecstasy or full absorption in the divine presence symbolized by Eden prior to the "fall."

Such inebriation was associated with the Apostles at Pentecost when people observed them speaking in tongues: "But others mocking said, 'They are filled with new wine'" (Acts 2.13). Note that this observation comes right after many onlookers heard the Apostles speak in their native tongues, a straight-forward observation usually not

ascribed to a drunken state. Here is the paradox symbolized by the house of wine. While we readily associate its outward meaning with the degrading behavior of alcohol, it represents a state of awareness beyond the comprehension of anyone unfamiliar with the ways of the Holy Spirit.

Continuing with the theme of Pentecost, Peter quotes from the prophet Joel with the opening words, “And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh” (Acts 2.17, Jl 2.28). This surging of grace from God resembles the liberal use of wine; as observed in the last paragraph, effects of the Spirit or *Ruach* can have a negative impart at least for those unaffected by it. Observe that while the *Ruach* is perceived by hearing (as hearing the diverse languages at Pentecost), wine primarily is apprehended by taste.

“His banner over me was love:” banner connotes military victory (cf. Sg 6.2, 3) and is derived from *dagal*, to cover over. For an example, refer to Ps 20.5: “May we shout for joy over your victory, and in the name of our God set up our banners.” Such an emblem of victory has special meaning here because it is a victory of and by love, ‘*ahavah*’; as pointed out earlier, it comes from the verbal root ‘*ahav*’, to desire, to breathe after. One passage which parallels the meaning of the Song’s verse is Is 62.5: “and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you,” i.e., set up his banner.

It should be noted that within Jewish history this notion of a military triumph has special meaning in light of God’s victory over Egyptian forces at the Red Sea. It is a perpetual banner unfurled, as it were, each year at Passover.

2-5: Stay me with raisins, comfort me with apples, for I am sick with love.

We may assume that the bride utters this statement including two requests of support within her spouse’s house of wine. The first request contains raisins, ‘*ashyshah*’, more specifically, cakes made from dry raisins or grapes and comes from the unused verbal root ‘*ashash*’, to press together. They were often associated as offerings made to pagan gods as in Is 16.7: “Mourn, utterly stricken, for the raisin-cakes of Kir-hareseth.” It is with these offerings the bride wishes to be supported or *samak* which implies a constant sustenance.

The bride’s second request is “comfort me with apples” or *tapuch*, from the same verbal root as apple tree, Sg 2.3, to which she compared her spouse, i.e., among the sons (Refer to this verse for remarks with regard to *tapuch*). It is with this fruit she

requests comfort, from the verbal root *raphad*, to strew, to spread out. The basic idea is to give rest as on a couch for one who is weary. Both raisins and apples are instrumental in comforting the bride; we should not see these two items in isolation but as coming from her bridegroom who bestows them with supreme value.

The reason for the bride's request is that she is "sick with love." The fundamental notion behind the verbal root for to be sick *chalah*, is to polish, to be smooth, perhaps due to the fact that illness tends to level down one's health and spirits. Note that the verbal root *chalah* (*'ahavah*) appeared in 2.4 ('his banner over me was love'). Perhaps between that point and now, vs 5. Could we say that the banqueting house makes the bride sick despite the fact that her spouse's banner is unfurled over her? She seems to have drunk some of his wine and became intoxicated; drinking this special type of wine does make one sick or *chalah* because it increases the desire for more as noted above in conjunction with the apparent intoxication of the disciples at Pentecost.

2-6: His left hand is under my head, and his right hand does embraces me.

Here the bride receives support from her spouse in her sickness, if you will. Instead of curing her, these two hands, left and right, intensify her mysterious condition of being in a state of continuous desire and its fulfillment with respect to the bridegroom's love. There seems to be no negative association in Hebrew with left as there is in Latin (the word is *sinister*, with obvious overtones), for example, see Prov 3.16: "Long life is in her [wisdom] right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor." Perhaps these words of Wisdom can be applied to the bridegroom; his right hand imparts long life, whereas his left hand imparts riches and honor.

While the bride's left hand supports his spouse's head, his right hand does the embracing or *chabaq* also found in Gen 29.13: "When Laban heard the tidings of Jacob his sister's son, he ran to meet him and embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his house." This corresponds to the prodigal son of Lk 15.20: "But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him." Here the Greek for embrace literally reads "fell upon his neck," *epepesen epi ton trachelon autou*. Note the five stages here: saw, had compassion, ran, embraced and kissed which correspond to the three stages of spiritual advancement proposed by Origen, Gregory of Nyssa and Bernard of Clairvaux. Following this outline, reconciliation begins with vision, passes through several intermediate stages which pertain to restoration of a condition that has disintegrated and results in union as symbolized by the Song's embrace.

2-7: I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the hinds of the field, that you stir not up nor awaken love until he pleases.

Vs 6 has the bridegroom embracing his spouse whereas vs 7 has the bridegroom sleeping in her arms. We may assume that if the five stages of spiritual advancement briefly noted with regards to Lk 15.20 are realized, the qualities of one person can apply to the other and visa versa. The bride charges the daughters of Jerusalem, first encountered in Sg 1.5 to whom she says, “I am black but comely.” She implies that they are irritating with demands upon her beloved, hence the command. Such charging derives from *shevah*, to swear (an oath); from it derives the number seven (*shevah*), usually considered a holy number as we see with the siege of Jericho, Jos 6 with repeated mention of this number. Furthermore, the number seven achieves its special status from Gen 2.2: “On the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day.” It is not difficult to associate this divine rest (from *yashav*, the verbal root for sabbath) with the bride’s wish for the daughters of Jerusalem to leave her spouse at rest.

The bride’s command to leave her spouse undisturbed is defined by gazelles or hinds of the field. It seems she presents them with an option designated by the conjunction or (‘o). The word gazelles (*tsevoth*) is derived from the verbal root *tsavah*, to go out, “to shine; an alternate meaning for this noun is splendor, glory. I.e., the bridegroom has the quality of a gazelle’s splendid form which appears shining when in motion. Note that she uses the plural form; not just one gazelle but an indeterminate number of them as well as with the hinds.

The second animal which the bride presents to the daughters of Jerusalem (that is, as an option) to make them keep her spouse undisturbed is the hind or ‘*ayalah*. Prov 5.19 compares a wife to this animal as follows: “and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely hind, a graceful doe,” implying delicacy combined with speed. Again, reference to this animal is found in Ps 18.33 but this time with military overtones: “He made my feet like hinds’ feet, and set me secure on the heights.”

We may take the daughters of Jerusalem as custodians of the Temple whom Jesus addresses on the way to his crucifixion: “But Jesus turning to them said, ‘Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for children’” (Lk 23.28). Applied to the Song text, we may view this statement as Jesus telling them not to weep over his impending doom, i.e., not to “stir up nor awaken” him in his

redemptive suffering and death. Instead, he issues a foreboding statement as to Jerusalem's future in vs the next few verses.

Observe the bride's two directives: "do not stir up" and "do not awaken." The verbal for both is *hur*, to be hot, ardent, implying that one is fervent in watchfulness. The first is in the qal or simple form of the verb whereas the latter is in pilel, an intensification of qal. However, in this verse an opposite form of attentiveness is requested with regard to the beloved (*ha'ahaveh*) which, as the last paragraph suggests, indicates that no one should interfere with the bridegroom's activity, not necessarily meaning that he is asleep. The verbal root of the second directive, "do not awaken," is the same form or in Hebrew, polel, or future as opposed to the former being hiphil, a different degree of futureness. Thus the daughters of Jerusalem are bidden not to rouse the bridegroom in the future which may be interpreted here as a command for them not to disturb Christ en route to his redemptive death.

"Until he pleases:" that is, until in the future the bridegroom decides that his redemptive work is fulfilled; however, it is not complete at the moment for the daughters of Jerusalem. The verbal root here is *chaphats* which combines both the act of willing and desiring. Traditionally, the commonly used phrase "God's will" has been used when referring to the acceptance of trials and has a passive if not negative overtone. However, references to will in the Gospels (usually applied to 'the one who sent me' or the Father) allude to the Hebrew concept of delight as in Is 62.4: "You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My delight (*chephtsy*) is in her." Note that this verse is addressed "for Zion's sake" and "for Jerusalem's sake" (vs 1) which refer to none other than the "daughters of Jerusalem."

2-8: The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills.

Here the bride is excited at her spouse's voice (*qol*) which to her has as much validity as his actual presence. For example, consider Elijah's recognition of the Lord: "and after the fire a still small voice. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle...and behold, there came a voice to him and said, 'What are you doing here, Elijah'" (1 Kg 19.12-13)? This voice has two peculiar qualities, still and small, *demamah* and *daqah*, which may be applied to the bridegroom's. The verbal root for the former (*damah*) is interesting in that it has two meanings, to become like (from which comes the word likeness) and to be silent, the latter being used in this verse. The verbal root for *daqah* means something beaten or reduced to small pieces. We

may say the bridegroom's voice has these two delicate qualities which his spouse recognizes prior to his leaping and bounding.

Also note that Christ's baptism and transfiguration are ratified by this same type of heavenly voice: "and lo, a voice from heaven saying, 'This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased'" (Mt 3.17); "and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased, listen to him'" (Mt 17.5).

After the bride recognizes the two above mentioned qualities of her beloved's voice, she exclaims "lo" (*hineh*) as if to express not so much her astonishment as immanent fulfillment of her desire where the voice gives way to actual and full presence of her spouse. Consider two references to the bridegroom's first act, leaping (*dalag*): "then shall the lame man leap like a hart" (Is 35.6). Here hart is the same word as in Sg 2.7 and 2.9. The second reference is Ps 18.30: b"y my God I have leaped over a wall, that is to say," the lame man of Isaiah is cured by Christ (as in Mt 15.31) who now leaps over a wall or obstacle, most likely having in mind a fortified city's wall.

Note that instead of the just mentioned wall, the bridegroom leaps over mountains, that is, lofty obstacles more formidable than any man-made barrier. Both in the Old and New Testaments a mountain symbolized divine transcendence, the place where God revealed himself. Because a mountain peak starts with a broad base and tapers off to a small point at its summit, there is little room there for a person to move about. In this situation one is at the mercy of the elements where the sky or heavens open up in dramatic fashion above. Now for the bridegroom to leap over such a hurdle is powerful testimony to his love for the bride; it is something like Ps 97.5 "where the mountains melt like wax before the Lord."

The second obstacle separating the two spouses is hills over which the bridegroom skips or *qaphats* whose verbal root means to shut, to be gathered; the noun *qets* means end. Perhaps this verbal root's sense of termination, of ending, refers to the sudden shutting of a hand which springs close like a trap. Hills are certainly smaller than mountains, but their multiplicity...there are generally many before a mountain range...suggests something like an obstacle course over which the bridegroom must come. Nevertheless, "he comes forth like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and like a strong man runs its [the sun] course with joy" (Ps 19.5). As just noted, *qaphats* with its derivative *qets* suggests an end to this course and the immediate embrace of the two spouses.

2-9: My beloved is like a roe or a young hart. Behold, he stands behind our wall, he looks forth at the windows, showing himself through the lattice.

Roe and young hart are appropriate analogies for the beloved (*dod*) after the vigor of his leaping and skipping of vs 9 which come to the bride's mind: *domeh*, I have compared, a verb encountered twice earlier with two variant meanings, 1Kg 19.12-13 (still, small voice) and Sg 1.9 ('I have compared you...to a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariots'). Such a roe is another term for gazelle as in vs 7; note that this same term is used both before and after the bridegroom jumps over the mountains and hills.

The second animal similar to the first is a young hart or *hopher* (cf. Sg 2.17, 4.5, 7.4, 8.14), the same verbal root for dust, assuming that the vigor of a hart's bounding kicks up considerable dust, thereby obscuring its path, a tactic similar to God's preference for obscurity when he reveals himself: "And Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke (*hashan*) because the Lord descended upon it in fire" (Ex 19.18).

This roe, whose verbal root as noted in 1.9 is *tsavah* and from which is derived glory, *tsevy*, stands behind our wall. Note our wall, which may be assigned to both spouses. One picture which emerges here is that the bride stands on one side of this wall and the bridegroom on the other, hence both remain separated. It seems as though despite the bridegroom's leaping and skipping over such towering obstacles, he cannot jump over the relatively insignificant wall, *katal*, whose only other Old Testament use is in Ezr 5.8. Earlier in this same Song verse we have the "voice of my beloved" which again may apply here where he communicates his presence through this wall. Another way of looking at this wall is that the bride saw her beloved leaping and skipping, that is, she caught glimpses of him in this act over the wall.

The bride seems to state with some delight that her spouse looks forth at the windows, that is, looks through into the room in which she is awaiting him much like Rahab at Jericho who received Joshua and the Israelite spies: "Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was built into the city wall, so that she dwelt in the wall" (Jos 2.15). Note that Joshua gave Rahab a scarlet cord to attach in her window as a sign that she and her household would be spared (vs 18). With this image in mind, the bridegroom looking in through his spouse's windows recognizes this scarlet cord, a token of their mutual love.

Such looking (*shagach*, an unused root) is also found in Ps 33.14: "From where he sits enthroned he looks forth on all the inhabitants of the earth." God's position in

heaven, traditionally located in the sky, a symbol of transcendence, is a type of wall through or from (*min*) which he does this looking, *min* representing a place located in a place different than the activity which emanates from it; that is, the looking is directed from heaven or from the windows towards the earth.

Window derives from the verbal root *chalal*, to pierce, as in Gen 8.6: “At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made and sent forth a raven.” Note that this was after the flood waters covered the earth, rather, “they prevailed so mightily upon the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered” (7.19). That is to say, these mountains covered by water at God’s command parallel those of Sg 2.8 over which the bridegroom leaps. When turning to the New Testament, we see that a soldier pierces Christ’s side...a window into his divinity...“from which flow blood and water” (cf. Jn 19.34) as noted with regard to Sg 1.7 above. Christ on the cross resembles Noah’s ark caught between heaven and earth (leaping over the mountains); instead of a raven there comes from his side blood and water, symbolic of the Church’s birth through the medium of the Holy Spirit. This action fulfills Zech 12.10: “when they look on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him.” Such piercing is gazing into the new ark, Jesus Christ, which had its precedent in Noah gazing from his ark.

Sg 2.9 concludes with showing himself through the lattices, that is, through a type of grating which gives a partial view of the bridegroom. Lattices or *charakym* suggests a net as with the Septuagint *diktua*. Keeping in mind the image of Noah’s ark floating upon the flood waters, the image of such nets follows appropriately. However, instead of casting them upon water, the bridegroom shows himself, i.e., *tsuts*, which primarily means to shine. In conclusion, we may say that the bridegroom shines through these lattices or nets, whereas he looks forth (*min*, from) the windows.

2-10: My beloved spoke and said to me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.

Note that this verse does not, as one would expect, have the bridegroom enter his spouse’s home; instead, he remains outside and summons her to exit. Here the verb for to speak (*hanah*) implies singing as well as responding to a statement or question. This is enhanced by the fact that the bridegroom also said, where the conventional verb ‘*amar* is employed.

Here the bridegroom’s first words since Sg 1.8 (‘If you do not know’) imply that she does know now; this verse does not refer to knowledge of herself or anything else,

just plain knowing as noted with regard to this passage above. Between 1.8 and the present verse the bridegroom reckons that she knows to a sufficiently advanced degree, and he can summon her from the confines of her chamber.

Note that the summons “rise up” (*qumy lak*, literally, ‘rise to you,’) appears directed towards imparting the bride with awareness of her innate capacity for such rising. It is precisely this ascent that her spouse wants to entrust, hence his apparent remoteness before her ardent desire for his face to face presence. Also, observe that he is “my beloved” or *dody*, and she is “my love” or *rahyty*, so when she hears this term of endearment, she immediately knows that she is obliged to rise. Furthermore, the bride is called “my fair one” or *yaphaty* as in Sg 1.15; remembrance of this other term of affection is certainly enough to inspire the bride to take the proper action of rising.

Not only is the bride bidden to rise, a further command is added, “come away,” which assumes the same form of “rise to you,” that is, “come to you” (*leky-lak*). Such coming is a refinement of rising; it suggests that this activity is one of coming home, of realizing her nature as made in her beloved’s image and likeness (cf. Gen 1.26).

2-11: For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone.

This statement rounds out, as it were, the bridegroom’s words of vs 10, for it gives reason for his spouse’s rising and coming...to herself (*lak*). Mention of “lo” (*hineh*) as in 2.8 is not so much astonishment as an expression of the bridegroom getting his spouse’s attention with respect to what is going on at the moment. What does he want her to realize? Namely, the cessation of both winter and rain, the latter being the chief attribute of this season. The word for winter here is the only occurrence in the Old Testament, of *setaw*.

Winters in the Mediterranean world are characterized by rainy periods which nourish crops for the hot summers, and vs 11 is a herald of spring, of renewal and new growth for the bride. Such rain associated with the Hebrew *geshem* is violent, usually not the gentle variety of spring. Perhaps it is for this reason there was need in vss 8 and 10 of the bridegroom’s voice; only it was loud enough to be heard over the fierce pounding of rain on the roof of bride’s house. Indeed, the fearful words of Ex 19.19 do not apply to her, “And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him in thunder.” God or the bridegroom can speak as loud as he wishes and it is a pleasant sound to her ears.

2-12: The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land.

An appropriate sequence referring to spring following vs 11 which speaks of the heavy winter rains without which the flowers, birds and turtledove would not flourish. Flower derives from the verbal root *natsats*, to flourish, to shine, the sense of which is transferred to feathers as well as its other meaning, to fly. A parallel to this verse is Gen 8.11: “and the dove came back to him in the evening, and lo, in her mouth a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the waters (i.e., the ‘rain is over’ of vs 11) had subsided from the earth.” Indeed, this olive leaf brought by the dove is the time of the singing of birds.

The time of singing is reminiscent of Ps 119.54: “Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage,” that is to say, the bride’s pilgrimage within her very own house before the arrival of her spouse which consists in learning how to wait for him. In another sense she is beginning her pilgrimage, only now it takes place outside her house in response to the bridegroom’s voice. We may keep this in mind while reading the remaining verses of chapter two.

Singing derives from *zamar* whose alternate meaning is to pluck, to prune, and may be said to resemble pruning because during the act of singing words are cut off. Now Christ’s words assume a more complete meaning, “Every branch of mine that bears no fruit he [the Father] takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit” (Jn 15.2). Indeed, this is the time of singing, keeping in mind the verbal root *zamar*. “It has come” (*nagah*), that is, it has reached or has fully arrived.

We next read, “the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land.” This bird (*tor*) has the same verbal root as ornament (cf. Sg 1.10) and means to travel about or to spy. Also the word law or *torah* comes from this root implying that when reading the Torah or Divine Law, you coo over it much like a *tor* or dove, thereby giving one’s full loving attention to its contents. Hence, a reading of the Torah is quite different from the ordinary sense of reading and is a good image of *lectio divina* (contrast this word, *tor*, with another, *yonah* (Sg 1.15, 2.14, 4.1, 5.2 & 12, 6.9). Although Gen 8.11 uses the latter term, we may say that this dove is heard in our land or in the new creation after the flood of which the dove was a herald. Note that while the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters in Gen 1.2, Noah’s dove was, as it were, moving over the face of our land, our being the common property of both bridegroom and bride.

2-13: The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.

In Gen 3.7 we read that our first parents sewed fig leaves (*te'edah*) together and made aprons for themselves, a gesture they did upon having the eyes of both opened. Awareness of physical nakedness, it being associated with shame, was the first thing that struck their eyes, and they took immediate action to cover it. However, Mal 4.4 counters this, if you will: “every man shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and none shall make them afraid.” Also note the use of vine with Sg 2.13.

As for the putting forth of figs, the verbal root is *chanat* whose fundamental meaning is to season, that is, to come to maturity or fullness. *Chanat* also means to embalm as with regards to Israel's (Jacob) body: “So the physicians embalmed Israel; forty days were required for it, for so many are required for embalming” (Gen 50.2-3). Note the use of Israel or Jacob, as if the entire nation in Egypt were being embalmed or preserved for the duration of its stay until the Exodus. Such figs are put forth...*chanat*...during this extended time of captivity until Moses' birth. The root for to put forth is *pagah* whose fundamental meaning is to hit upon, to meet. Thus when the fig tree gives its fruit, this *pagah* signifies a sudden, immediate blossoming which parallels the direct and sudden liberation of Israel from Egypt. Note the similarity of this verb with *nagah* of vs 12, the flowers appearing on the earth, i.e., their instant arrival.

Similarly, the vines are in blossom, and vines is symbolic of the land's abundance from which wine is made. The noun for tender grapes is *semadar* (cf. Sg 2.15, 7.13), the only references being in the Song of Songs. Such tender grapes yield a scent or *reyach* from whose verbal root comes *ruach*, spirit. This *reyach* extends throughout “our land” (Sg 2.12), again suggesting those remarks above in conjunction with Gen 9.13, the dove's movement over the land in comparison with the *Ruach* of Gen 1.2 moving over the waters at the first creation.

It is as though this *reyach* directs the bride to arise at her spouse's word and like the wind, she “blows where she wills” (Jn 3.8). Not only is she bidden to arise but to come away...no specific direction is given, just the command to become like the wind. To rise up is a vertical movement after which this coming away assumes a horizontal direction signifying that she lives now on a higher plane above her previously inferior or unfulfilled one, symbolic of the resurrected life. Here again the

bridegroom calls her “my love” (*rahvyaty*) and “my fair one” (*yaphaty*), two terms encountered earlier.

2-14: O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the cliff, let me see your countenance, let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet and your face is comely.

The bridegroom calls his spouse a dove or *yonah* from which is derived the proper name Jonah. Note the location of this dove, in the clefts of the rock, which has its counterpart in Jon 1.17: “and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.” Christ quotes this passage as referring to himself: “For as Jonah was three days in the belly of the whale, so will the son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Mt 12.40). Immediately after this reference Christ alludes to “the queen of the South who came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and, behold, something greater than Solomon is here” (vs 42).

We have here the image of a dove taking refuge in a rocky precipice much like the psalmist who says, “O that I had wings like a dove (*yonah*)! I would fly away and be at rest; yes, I would wander afar, I would lodge in the wilderness” (Ps 55.6-7). *Chagor* is the word for clefts, from an unused verbal root whose other two references have negative tones of pride’s loftiness (cf. Jer 49.16, Obad 3). They are located in the rock or *selah* which phonetically resembles *selah*, pause, a word used in the psalter to indicate an interval with musical associations.

Perhaps the best reference to such a cleft is Ex 33.22 although a different word is used: “and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by.” Here its *naqarah* which is from the verbal root *naqar*, to bore, to pierce. It is an analogy to God’s hand is Ps 63.7: “and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy.” Perhaps it was to this *naqarah* that Isaiah referred when saying, “Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug” (Is 51.1).

As for the secret places of the cliff, the noun for the latter is *madregah* which literally means a steep mountain one ascends by steps as from the verbal root *darag*. The bride or dove is located here which we may presume is her house outside which her spouse peers as noted in 2.9. It is secret (*satar*) in that this locale is known only by the two lovers and no one else.

The bridegroom makes two requests of his spouse, to see her countenance and to hear her voice, that is to say, first to have sight of her and then to hear her speak. Compare with Moses in that cleft mentioned above who desires to see God who replies “but my face shall not be seen” (Ex 33.23). Although this statement is true with regards to God, the bridegroom in his stead can demand to see his spouse’s face.

As for the bride’s sweet voice, *harav* is the adjective and is derived from the verbal root whose fundamental meaning is to pledge; thus her voice is a type of pledge on behalf of their mutual love.

Finally, the bridegroom testifies to his spouse’s countenance which he finds to be comely, *na’weh* whose verbal root (to sit, to dwell) was noted in Sg 1.5. It is as though her voice were to him a dwelling place in which he could repose.

2-15: Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines, for our vines have tender grapes.

Here we have two animals of the same genus but of different sizes, foxes and little foxes, where the same term, *shuhalym*, is used for both. Many commentaries see these foxes as symbolizing threats of various sorts with regard to the spiritual life supposedly due to their being a figure of craftiness. *Shuhalym* derives from *shahal*, to be hollow because such animals dig or burrow in the ground. Christ calls Herod a fox, “Go and tell that fox, ‘Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course’” (Lk 13.32). Indeed, Herod was responsible for killing the first born male children (cf. Mt 2.16) as well as John the Baptist, so he is appropriately called a fox which attempts to spoil Christ’s vineyards. We may take the diminutive form as Herod’s associates who actually carried out his plans.

Such vineyards are indeed in blossom, that is, they have tender grapes or those *semadar* of vs 13 which give a good fragrance. Again, reference to Herod/foxes is appropriate because much of his destructive attempts to foil Jesus Christ transpired at the beginning of his career. Because John the Baptist was prominent at the inauguration of Christ’s ministry, he too came under Herod’s wrath and he, a *semadar*, was beheaded.

2-16: My beloved is mine, and I am his; he feeds among the lilies.

The bride confidently makes this simple statement of mutual possession after he proves his love by going after both the foxes and little foxes. Note that he feeds (*rahah*) among the lilies, first encountered in Sg 1.9, “my love.” Thus loving is a type of feeding which both spouses have expressed through their affection in the Song, and the statement My beloved is mine, and I am his affirms that such feeding has reached its climax; i.e., both spouses have devoured each other.

Lilies or *shushanym* are the sustenance of the bridegroom (cf. Sg 6.3 for another reference of the bridegroom’s feeding). We find them in the inscriptions to Psalms 45, 69 and 80; note the last psalm whose first verse reads “Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel.” The noun for shepherd here is *roheh*, the one who feeds and is identified as the guardian of Israel. The bride’s question in Sg 1.7 (‘Where do you feed?’) is thus answered...he feeds among the tribes of Israel.

2-17: Until the day breaks and the shadows flee, turn, my beloved, and be like a roe or a young hart upon rugged mountains.

Animals like roes or harts (deer) usually feed at twilight, morning or evening, when there is a special tranquility in the air. Perhaps this is why the Genesis account of creation says with regard to each day God had made, “there was evening and there was morning,” i.e., the time of twilight, the time of transition. God himself “was walking in the garden in the cool of the day or evening” (Gen 3.8) just like Isaac when he was about to encounter Rebekah. In latter case the scene is lovely as opposed to what God discovered during his walk (i.e., our first parents hiding from his presence): “And Isaac went out to meditate in the field in the evening; and he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, there were camels coming. And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she alighted from the camel” (Gen 24.63-4).

The verse at hand takes place at night or the onset of that evening twilight already mentioned. Reference to day breaking and shadows departing are reminiscent of Gen 32.24: “And Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day” (*had haloth hashachar*). Note the contrast of this phrase with the Song’s, *had sheyaphuch hayom*, the latter more accurately reading, “until the day breathes.” Such breathing keeps in line with the just noted remarks on twilight which forms a type of breathing in between two cycles, day and night.

“And the shadows flee:” the word for shadows is *tselalym* which comes from *tsalal* and has two meanings, to be shaded and to be rolled down.

A key word in vs. 17 *had* or until, that is, until the activity of day breaking and shadows fleeing comes to a stop. Then the bride asks her spouse first to turn away and be like a roe or a young hart upon the rugged mountains. Such movement (*savav*; also to go round) implies that she wishes him not necessarily to turn aside but to come round again. Her second wish is that he be like the just mentioned two animals, roe or young hart encountered in Sg 2.9 as he stands behind our wall.

Not only does the bride desire her spouse to be like one of these two animals but upon the rugged mountains or better, mountains divided by valleys (*vater*).

Chapter Three

3-1: By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loves. I sought him but did not find him.

The bride seeking her spouse by night on my bed continues the theme of his mysterious interplay between presence and absence referred to in the Commentary thus far. Note the previous mention of bed in Sg 1.16, Our bed is green, and the different terms, the latter being *heresh* and the former, *mishkav* (from the verbal root *shakav*, to lie down). From this root also comes the noun tent (*mishkan*) encountered in Sg 1.8 as it refers to shepherds. Keeping in mind this dual notion of bed-tent, we may infer that the bride is within her *mishkav* seeking her spouse; more specifically it is not the bride but her soul (*nephesh*) which is doing the seeking.

As for *nephesh* (whose verbal root means to breathe) is the faculty by which the body lives: “You whom my soul loves” (Sg 1.7). Since *nephesh* is doing the loving, it is only natural that this faculty continues the same activity in the verse now under consideration. Note that while *nephesh* loves, the bride (her ‘I’, as it were) does the seeking. Already we encountered the verb to love (*ahav*) in Sg 1.3 with reference to the maidens, and its primary meaning is to long, to breathe after. Thus it is natural for the soul...the *nephesh*...to do this breathing or loving.

The bride is careful to state that she seeks the bridegroom at night, that is, during the time when activity is at a minimum and her mind is more sensitive to movements of which she is generally unconscious at other times. Refer to Jacob’s dream when he dreamed of “a ladder set on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it” (Gen 28.12).

The primary notion of to seek or *baqash* is that of feeling, of touching. We find a parallel to this sense of touch regarding Jesus Christ in 1Jn 1.1: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life.” *Baquash* applied here does not necessarily mean actual possession but a state of continual advancement. The bride uses *baquash* a second time in the same verse but only with regard to her not finding him. She says this to indicate frustration at her incomplete knowledge. Nevertheless, the verb to find (*mats’a*) connotes more a reaching out and is not unlike that touching with our hands which John has noted just above.

3-2: I will rise now and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him who my soul loves. I sought him, but I did not find him.

Since the bride could not find her beloved, she decides to rise (*gom*), not simply move from her present location (presumably from behind the wall of 2.9). Perhaps this getting up is in imitation of her spouse’s leaping and bounding already described after the example of a roe or hart. She decides to go about the city in the streets and in the broad ways having as a guide her soul (*nepshesh*). Also rising indicates night when she hopes to hit upon her beloved in these public places which are deserted of people except for him.

What method of searching does the bride follow? A clue lies in Ex 12.23: “For the Lord will pass through to slay the Egyptians; and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to slay you.” Note the two passings: the first is to destroy the Egyptians, *havar*; the second is not to slay the Hebrews, *pasach*, from which is derived the word Passover. We may say that the bride follows her spouse in accord with the second passing or *pasch*; i.e., she is right behind him. It would be better to say that she imitates her beloved by taking note of the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts mentioned above. Note, too, that the bride follows in her own unique way: “It was a night of watching (*lyl shimurym*) by the Lord” (Ex 12.42).

This *pasch* to which the bride rises takes place in streets (*bishwoqym*) and broad ways (*varchokoth*). The former derives from the verbal root *shoq*, to run after, to desire; from it comes the noun leg. Surely the added meaning of desire applies to the bride in her *pasch*. Note Prov 1.20: “Wisdom cries aloud in the street” where we find a different word for street, *chots* which comes from the root, to surround.

“Him whom my soul loves” is a phrase already encountered several times in the Song and as pointed out earlier, represents the bride’s inner being, the directing part of her soul which is motivated by desire for her spouse. Note, though, that her soul did not find him; this verse ends with these suspenseful words because as observed above, the bride follows in the tracks of her spouse’s *pasch* right behind him as though the blood on the door posts were traces of his love urging her on in her search.

3-3: The watchmen who go about the city found me. Have you seen him whom my soul loves?

Watchmen (*shomrym*) fulfil the important function of keeping guard, especially at night, to protect against both intruders and unruly conduct within the city. This noun derives from the verbal root, *shamar*, frequently used in the psalms with regard to the divine Law or Torah as in Ps 119.8, 17, 34, 44, 55, 88, 101, 134, 146. The watchmen of Sg 3.3 who find the bride would not understand her question, “Have you seen him whom my soul loves?” because their focus of attention is not, like the bride’s, upon the object of her love, her *‘ahavah*. We get no response from them; most likely they jeered her, even roughed her up a bit, and then passed on.

3-4: Scarcely had I passed them when I found him who my soul loves. I held him and would let him go until I had brought him into my mother’s house and into the chamber of her that conceived me.

Use of the word “scarcely” contains a lot for a short interval between having been roughed up by the watchmen and the bride meeting her spouse. Perhaps he heard the commotion in the dead of night and came rushing to her aide. As for the meeting of the two spouses, no words are exchanged between them for the rest of chapter three. So while the watchmen went about their business having amused themselves with the bride who was unaccompanied, she is rewarded with suddenly having meet her beloved. Given the situation, the two must have flown into each other’s arms.

Note that the bride finds her lover whereas the watchmen do not; this theme of finding is central to the first few verses of chapter three as anyone can readily observe. She holds the bridegroom...rather seizes him...a more forceful grasp as indicated by the verb used here, *‘achaz*. The bride adds, “I would not let him go;” the verbal root is *raphah* which means she won’t relax her embrace. Obviously the same applies to the bridegroom.

The bride is not content with simply apprehending her spouse but brings him into the chamber of her who conceived me. Note the important role of the small word *had*, until: indeed she grasps him in the streets and in the broad ways (vs 2), the making their way in the semi-darkness and deserted streets to the home of the bride's mother, a safe place to spend the night and avoid the marauding night watchmen. Not only does she bring him to this safe house, if you will, the two spend the night in a chamber or *cheder* which means an inner room or bedroom as in Sg 1.4, "The king has brought me into his chambers."

3-5: I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and by the hinds of the field, that you do not stir nor awaken love until it pleases.

Shavah is the verb for charge which means to swear an oath and from which derives the number seven, this being noted in conjunction with 2.7 which she had done already with the daughters of Jerusalem. In that verse the daughters were posited as custodians of the Jerusalem temple, not unlike the Vestal Virgins of ancient Rome. Here the *shavah* is not unlike the earlier one which consists of a singular roe and a singular hart. Now we have plural roes and plural hinds, the latter not mentioned in 2.7. Also the two instances at hand have the same verb forms, the root being *hur*, the first in qal and the second in pilel.

The verb *chaphets* for pleases also means to take sheer delight or joy which here applies to the bridegroom as far as his sleep goes. In the meanwhile, the bride is awake yet taking delight in seeing her spouse at rest.

3-6: Who is this coming up from the wilderness like a column of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the fragrant powders of the merchant?

Certainly it is Solomon's bed (next verse) ascending from the desert, but no mention of Solomon himself is made. The wilderness or *midbar* is traditionally both a place of terror and of communication with God; its verbal root is *davar*, the common word to speak. With this in mind, we may say that the desert is a place where God speaks to his prophets. Thus Isaiah's words assume new meaning as applied to John the Baptist: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness" (*midbar*, 40.3). Another interesting derivative of *davar* is *devyr*, the inner sanctuary of the Temple at Jerusalem: "and he [Solomon] built this within as an inner sanctuary as the most holy place" (1Kg 6.16).

By way of addition to these remarks, Solomon used cedar from the floor to the rafters (vs 16) as in Sg 1.17: “the beams of our house are cedar.” We may thus say that the *midbar* was, like the desert experience of Israel in Sinai and like her prophets, an enclosed desert...a *davyr*...in which God spoke to the people. 1Chron 5.10 shows that the ark of God’s covenant was located in the *davyr*; in this ark there was nothing except the two tables which Moses put there at Horeb. Obviously these two tables, the ten commandments, are God’s essential communication or speaking to Israel.

The person coming up from the wilderness of the Song may be comprehended as the temple of Solomon...the *davyr* (location of the two Mosaic tables). After all, Solomon is both author of the Song and the Temple’s architect; for one person to be responsible for them, his wisdom indeed had to surpass “the wisdom of all the people of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt” (1Kg 4.30), two traditional repositories containing the best of human wisdom. The source of such genius is his request for discernment (cf. 1Kg 3.9) and God’s pleasure with it. Solomon resembles Moses in the latter’s request for divine help in guiding the Israelites as received through the person of Jethro (cf. Ex 18.13-27). Indeed, Jethro was for Moses a pillar of smoke when he came with his sons and his wife to Moses in the wilderness where he was encamped at the mountain of God (Ex 18.5).

The one arising from the desert has the chief feature of essentially being like pillars of smoke. Such a pillar or *tymarrah* derives from the verbal root *tamar*, to stand erect, and is the source for *tamar*, palm tree. Possibly this association is due to the fact that the leaves located on the very top of a palm tree wave...sway...like rising smoke. Consider Ps 92.12: “The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon” which is followed by “They are planted in the house of the Lord, they flourish in the courts of our God. Note the location, house of the Lord and courts of our God,” namely, the Jerusalem Temple built by Solomon, location of the *davyar*, holy of holies. No small wonder that such palm trees flourish. Observe the role cedar plays, image of these prospering trees: they come from Lebanon, same location as the wood mentioned above in connection with 1Kg 6.16 and the *davyar*: with boards of cedar from the floor to the rafters.

These *tymaroth* or pillars have two qualities: “perfumed with myrrh and with all the powders of the merchant,” both of which allude to the sense of smell. Exodus has numerous references to God’s presence as a pillar of smoke (usually *hamod*) but does not explicitly say that it emitted a scent. However, for our purposes, we may say that such a *hamod* in the desert gave an odor; also, smoke almost always has an odor, and

the Song says it consisted of myrrh and frankincense. A New Testament association is the birth of Jesus Christ to whom the wise men were directed by a star: “When they heard the king they went their way; and lo, the star which they had seen in the East went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was” (Mt 2.9). Two of the three gifts they brought were myrrh and frankincense (the third being gold, vs 11); the former is traditionally associated with Christ’s future suffering and the latter as incense to his divinity. These facts are quite obvious, yet we may focus attention on the correspondence between the Song’s pillar and the star, two guiding principles to God’s presence. In addition to this, when Solomon dedicated the newly dedicated temple, “a cloud filled the house of the Lord so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord” (1Kg 8.10-11).

The last quality attributed to the bridegroom is that he ascends from the desert with all the powders of the merchant. The bride saw a bunch of camels which meant that it was a caravan loaded with exotic spices, etc. Some such merchants were dubious, trying to get the most for their product. At the same time they caused considerable excitement, everyone knowing that the camels were laden with rare and valuable items not generally available.

3-7: Behold, it is the litter of Solomon! About it are sixty mighty men of the mighty men of Israel.

Only when the far-off commotion which caught the bride’s attention becomes visible as pillars of smoke does the bridegroom at last recognize the merchant as Solomon himself. As the litter approaches she recognizes it as belonging to Solomon who presumably is inside, given the armed guard about it. Such a litter or bed (*mitah*) means anything spread or laid out, from the root *natah*. Usually one associates such a *mitah* a sense of mystery, for it almost always is enclosed by curtains hiding the occupant within who almost always is a wealthy person or king. Such a *mitah* may be compared with ‘*aron*, ark or chest which is identified with the ark of the covenant.

Due to the dangers traditionally associated with deserted places, it is only natural that Solomon have an armed guard, “sixty valiant men of the mighty men of Israel.” Such *giborym* receive their strength from King Solomon himself who, upon seeing his bride, “comes forth like a bridegroom leaving his chamber [i.e., the *mitach*], and like a strong man runs its course with joy” (Ps 19.5). As for the number sixty, suffice it to say that this number is divisible into four units, that is, twenty warriors on each side of Solomon’s litter or *savyv*, around it.

3-8: All girt with swords and expert in war, each with his sword at his thigh against fear in the night.

The bride could not help be struck by the sight of these armed men, more specifically, their swords. Note that they have their weapons girt, that is, in scabbards, not drawn, which would be the case if they expected immediate battle. Such an armed royal escort is *melumdy milchamah*, expert or trained for war. The command of Ps 45.3 may be applied to them: “Gird your sword upon your thigh, O mighty one, in your glory and majesty!,” this psalm celebrating a royal wedding which is the case here in the Song of Songs. With this in mind, we may say in the words of vs 1 of the same psalm that the bride’s words here as well as throughout the Song, “My heart overflows with a goodly theme; I address my verses to the king. My tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe” (which pen, it might be added, is sharp like the swords of Solomon’s retinue). Indeed, Psalm 45 is a good canticle to compare with the Song of Songs itself.

The reason for such a fearsome escort is due to the “fear in the night,” that is, we may surmise that Solomon has just ascended from the desert, the time of his arrival at or around dawn.

3-9: King Solomon made himself a palanquin of the wood of Lebanon.

Again we have no explicit mention of the person of King Solomon, just his litter and now palanquin or ‘*aphiryon*, the only use of this term in the Bible. Perhaps the specialized use of this term signifies its exceptional nature, further description of which continues in vs 10; note that while the not yet recognized person comes from the desert in vs 6, the bride fully realizes that Solomon had made this ‘*aphiryon*; this is re-enforced by the addition, “for himself” (*lo*).

Construction of this ‘*aphiryon* is significant, wood from Lebanon, considered at the time to be the very best material available. Already it was observed with regard to Sg 1.17 (‘The beams of our house are cedar’.) that the cedars came from Lebanon. Cf. 2Kg 5.6: “Now therefore command that cedars of Lebanon be cut for me.” This verse applies to the Temple’s construction which explicitly contains elements of incorruptible cedar, whereas Sg 3.9 only has the indefinite wood, *hets*.

A harbinger of both the Temple and Solomon’s palanquin is Noah’s ark (*tevah*) which saved the human race from destruction by flood. Note that this ark was made

prior to the flood, whereas the ark of the covenant (*‘aron*) was made in the wilderness of Sinai after having passed through the flood waters of the Red Sea. All elements contain the notion of mobility which readily apply to nomadic existence. Even the ark in its permanent residence in Jerusalem’s Temple suggests the nomadic origins of Israel and even more significantly, that life itself is temporary as opposed to God’s eternity. Noah’s *tevah* was constructed of gopher wood (gopher, cf. Gen 6.14), which means a type of pitch used for preservation against the corrosive effects of water. Thus both Noah’s ark and Solomon’s palanquin are constructed of durable, permanent material for protection against external hazards.

3-10: He made its posts of silver, its back of gold, its seat of purple; it was lovingly wrought within by the daughters of Jerusalem.

In verse 9 it was noted that Solomon’s palanquin and Noah’s ark were made of wood from Lebanon and gopher wood respectively, durable elements intended for external protection. Now vs 10 shifts attention to the palanquin’s interior consisting of three parts: posts, back and seat, all associated with different colors. Furthermore, vs 9 explicitly mentions King Solomon as the builder of his *‘aphiryon* whose three sections are also associated with his work. Yet note that the interior’s construction belongs to the daughters of Jerusalem who had special access compared with everyone else.

Note that the princess’ glory is within or *penymah*, more specifically referring to the inner wall of a house. It is used in 1Kg 6.27-8 as follows: “He [Solomon] put the cherubim in the innermost part of the house; and the wings of the cherubim were spread out so that a wing of one touched the one wall, and a wing of the other cherub touched the other wall; their other wings touched each other in the middle of the house. And he overlaid the cherubim with gold.” As for the cherubim, they may represent the sixty warriors about Solomon’s palanquin.

The seat of purple is another aspect of the palanquin; though important, its role appears secondary to the *rephydath* or back (bed) which signifies a place where the bride and bridegroom consummate their marriage. As for the color purple, it signifies Solomon’s royalty, this color also being incorporated into priestly garments (cf. Ex 39). *Merkav* more specifically applies to a chariot’s seat, thus bestowing a certain military demeanor to Solomon’s palanquin. Also the color purple assumes more an air of Solomon as military commander who ascends from the desert after having achieved victory there much like Jesus Christ at the end of his forty days in the wilderness.

The daughters of Jerusalem who played a part in the palanquin's construction appear more important than Solomon's role as its architect and builder who made the first three elements just discussed. The Song says that these daughters made the palanquin lovingly (*'ahavah*) within or *betok* which more precisely means in the middle of.

3-11: Go forth, O daughters of Zion, and behold King Solomon with the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, on the day of the gladness of his heart.

This last verse of Chapter Three both sums up and concludes the meaning of Solomon coming from the desert and the subsequent description of his palanquin. From where do the daughters of Zion go forth? First, note the shift from of Jerusalem to of Zion, the latter (first mentioned in 2Sam 5.7) often being interchangeable with the former and just as often associated with an elevated place (e.g., Mount Zion). The bride of the Song addresses Zion's daughters, telling them to go forth, that is, go forth from Solomon's palanquin after the daughters of Jerusalem have lovingly constructed its interior or *betok*. Thus Zion represents the summit...the center (*betok*)...of Jerusalem; summit in the sense of being not only central to this holy city but elevated and therefore clearly visible.

A New Testament association is interesting with Jesus' words, "Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on the colt of an ass" (Jn 12.15), a quote from Zech 9.9 and uttered upon Jesus' entry to Jerusalem one week before his passion, death and resurrection. These daughters went forth to greet Jesus and the new daughters of Jerusalem, his disciples, went forth during this event yet they did not understand this at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that this had been written of him (vs 16).

The bride urges the daughters not only to go forth but to see the crown bestowed upon Solomon by his mother. Technically speaking, Solomon was illegitimate, being the son of David by Bathsheba whose husband he had murdered (cf. 2Sam 11). Furthermore, the bestowal of a crown, symbol of kingship over Israel, is here suggested as given by Bathsheba when the record says that David directly appointed him. Yet according to 1Kg 1.11+, Nathan urges Bathsheba to persuade David to make Solomon his royal heir. The Song thus reveals a close affinity between Solomon and his mother, a relationship most likely as a result of her intercession with David. The words of Ps 21.3 apply here: For you met him with goodly blessings; you set a crown of fine gold upon his head.

Bathesheba bestows her son with a crown on the day of his wedding, an ironical statement in light of 1Kg 11.1-2: “Now King Solomon loved many foreign women...from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the people of Israel, ‘You shall not enter into marriage with them.’” Nevertheless, the Solomon depicted by the Song of Songs is symbolic of God’s relationship with Israel. Keeping in mind this theme of a wedding and Solomon, we may say that his true wedding was the dedication of the temple at Jerusalem (cf. 1Kg 8).

“On the day of the gladness of his heart:” Surely the bride does not refer to Solomon’s numerous relationships with foreign women just mentioned; rather, she refers to the Temple’s dedication: “On the eighth day he sent the people away; and they blessed the king, and went to their homes joyful and glad of heart for all the goodness that the Lord had shown to David his servant and to Israel his people” (1Kg 8.66). Note the reference to David his servant as opposed to King Solomon here at the end of the temple’s dedication. Despite his death, the people still held David in the highest esteem. The people returned home joyful and glad of heart just like Solomon on the day of the gladness of his heart. I.e., this happiness is achieved on the eighth day, symbolic of the completion of the seven days of creation.

Chapter Four

4-1: Behold, you are beautiful, my love, behold you are beautiful! Your eyes are doves behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats moving down the slopes of Gilead.

This chapter begins with the bridegroom expressing his admiration of the bride with a double exclamation, behold. He adds to this her beauty (*yaphah*, first used in Sg 1.8) and is the first instance when he speaks.. The second sentence, “Your eyes are doves behind your veil” is reminiscent of the bride’s wonder over her spouse coming from the wilderness in Sg 3.6 in the palanquin which most likely was also veiled. We can imagine King Solomon saying these words upon alighting from his palanquin much like Isaac at evening when he recognized his bride to be, Rebekah as mentioned with regard to Sg 2.17: “‘Who is the man yonder walking in the field to meet us?’ The servant said, ‘It is my master.’ So she took her *veil* and covered herself” (Gen 24.56). Thus a veil represents modesty as well as a sense of mystery, a fact which immediately catches King Solomon’s attention.

Although use of the adjective beautiful (*yaphah*) applies to the bride's loveliness in general, Solomon is immediately captivated by her eyes which are "doves behind your veil." The first allusion to this bird (*yonah*) is in Sg 1.15 coupled with the same two-fold exclamation, "Behold you are fair," and the reader can refer to this section for an explanation. The veil or *tsamah* behind which the bride's are concealed derives from the unused verbal root *tamam*, to twine, to weave. The basic notion is something woven, reveals the intricate nature of that which conceals the bride's eyes.

"Your hair is like a flock of goats:" Note the use of goats (*hahizym*) as opposed to sheep, an animal we have come to associate through New Testament usage as representative of evil: "as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats" (Mt 25.32). By their very nature, goats are independent and intelligent, yet in this context their unruly behavior and dark color can signify something like the bride's disordered hair. It may have become like this because she had been outside looking for her beloved ascending from the desert.

The bridegroom specifies that his spouse's hair/goats are moving down the slopes of Gilead, that is, most likely referring to the area south of the river Jabbok: "He [Jacob] fled with all that he had and arose and crossed the Euphrates and set his face toward the hill country of Gilead" (Gen 31.21). Here Jacob flees from Laban who claimed to have been cheated by him (cf. Gen 31.26). Note that vs 10 refers to goats, the source of controversy between Laban and Jacob. Anyway, the Jabbok is river which Jacob crossed prior to his wrestling match with a mysterious being (cf. Gen 32.22+); this situates us within sight of the slopes of Gilead, location of the Song's goats. Such animals Solomon has as moving, that is, *galash*, the only Old Testament use of this word which means more something like to sit down as opposed to actually running down (the slopes of Gilead).

4-2: Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes that have come up from the washing, all of which bear twins, and not one among them is bereaved.

The bridegroom continues with comparing his beloved to domestic animals, this time her teeth to a flock of shorn ewes. Observe the contrast here between ewes and goats of vs 1, the latter most likely being white in color as opposed to the dark haired goats and is associated with flock yet no specific mention of ewes is made, only implied in this verb.

The ascent of these ewes from the washing implies that they have first descended to a river or body of water. It is interesting that the bridegroom says the ewes have come

up, something reminiscent of coming from the waters of baptism as in Jesus' case: "And when Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him" (Mt 3.16).

4-3: Your lips are like a scarlet thread, and your mouth is lovely. Your cheeks are like a piece of pomegranate behind your veil.

Now the bridegroom begins his praise of the bride with the loveliness of her lips, focusing upon the general area of her mouth. Such lips or *sephty* can also apply to a garment's border (cf. Ex 28.32) or seashore (cf. Ex 14.30). In brief, lips are the gateway of speech between one's inner life and the outer world, and from what we have seen thus far of the bride's words, they express her ardent love for her spouse. Furthermore, lips are sensuous and capture the bridegroom's attention. He compares them to a scarlet thread or *chut hashany*. One cannot help but recall that Joshua ordered Rahab to suspend a scarlet cord (*chut hashany*, Jos 2.18) outside her window, a sign to spare her and her family in the impending attack. Such a *chut* was also used to let Joshua and the Israelite spies down in order to escape from the city of Jericho. Keeping in mind this theme, Rahab could say that Joshua's mouth is lovely, that is, his words of deliverance when the Israelites were to invade Jericho and spare her and her family.

Next the bridegroom's attention switches to his spouse's cheeks or *raqath* (cf. Sg 1.10) which he says are like halves of a pomegranate, alluding, no doubt, to the ruddiness of the fruit when split open as opposed to the fruit before it is cut. Note that Moses adorns the priestly *ephod* with this fruit: "On its skirts you shall make pomegranates of blue and purple and scarlet stuff" (Ex 28.33). The *ephod* is intended for Aaron, vs 35, whom the Lord chose as Moses' spokesman: "And you shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and will teach you what you shall do" (Ex 4.15). Note the emphasis upon mouth, reminiscent of this verse of the Song. Thus Moses and Aaron were the halves of a pomegranate in their role as mediators between God, Israel and the Egyptian pharaoh.

These two pomegranate halves were located behind the bride's veil or *tsamath* as seen in Sg 4.1. Keeping in mind Moses and Aaron just mentioned, refer to Ex 33.34: "And when Moses had finished speaking with them he put a veil on his face because of God's majesty which the people could not behold shining on Moses' face," vs 35. It is this veil or *paroketh* which was located in the holy tabernacle separating the holy

place from the Holy of Holies: “And you shall make a veil of blue and purple and scarlet stuff and fine twined linen; in skilled work shall it be made with cherubim” (Ex 26.31). In a sense, the cherubim are representative of Moses and Aaron guarding the sacred place.

4-4: Your neck is like the tower of David built for an arsenal on which hang a thousand bucklers, all of them shields of warriors.

The bride’s beauty described thus far pertains to her head and face; now her beloved moves to a contemplation of her neck, *tsawa’r*, which she proudly holds erect for him to see. He compares it to the tower of David, the identification of which is unclear except for Neh 3.25: “the tower projecting from the upper house of the king at the court of the guard.” A New Testament association, though explicit mention of tower is lacking, is Lk 4.9: “And he [the devil] took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple.” Note that the devil wants Jesus to worship him...on the pinnacle of the temple, i.e., the highest point of the holiest place in Israel.

The tower is associated with David, King Solomon’s father, and serves as an armory or *tilpyoth*, the only biblical occurrence of this word and whose meaning is uncertain. Nevertheless, a thousand bucklers specifies the structure more clearly; this armor perhaps is booty taken from past victorious battles and put on display for future generations. Since the *tilpyoth* is King David’s, the bucklers or *magen* come from his victories and represent the establishment of his kingship in Jerusalem.

We see reference to such a *magen* in one of the many psalms attributed to David: “Take hold of shield and buckler and rise for my help” (Ps 35.2)! He is appealing to God, that he may enter his *tilpyoth* and take these instruments of protection from there. Mention of thousand does not refer to this number of military victories which would be impossible for a single person; rather, it seems to be a way of implying a great number of illustrious triumphs of which Solomon, the Song’s author, is the direct heir.

This verse specifies the bucklers even further: “all of them shields of warriors.” Here shields or *shelet* is a different word from *magen* but has the same essential meaning. It derives from the verbal root *shalat*, to obtain power, and can infer that such warriors were not only infantrymen but function as rulers. Joseph was such a *shalat*: “Now Joseph was governor over the land [Egypt]; he it was who sold to all the people of the land.”

4-5: Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, that feed among the lilies.

In Sg 1.13 the bride boasted that her spouse would lie all night between her breasts, and the verse now under consideration shows that he indeed is captivated by the loveliness of her breasts or *shedy*. Note the similarity of this word with a proper name for God, El-shady. The bridegroom compares these breasts with two fawns, *hapharym*, whose verbal root is *haphar*. An image that comes to mind here is that the bride's breasts bounce like fawns when she walks.

Such fawns are like twins of a gazelle; we encountered this word in Sg 2.7 by which the bride commanded her companions not to wake her beloved. A gazelle is renowned for its exceptional speed and agility, further praise of which possible is suggestive of the bride's gait. We may associate her swiftness with her going about the city (cf. Sg 3.3 & 4) in search of her spouse. These gazelles feed among the lilies. In Sg 2.16 it is the bridegroom who feeds there, and now the image is transferred to the bride. Breasts are for nourishing newly born infants yet no mention is made of this. One view of this image is that the bride, while gathering lilies, bends over them; hence, her breasts come in contact with the lilies, the place where her spouse feeds. In brief, such lilies are the meeting place of bride and bridegroom; their joy at mutual recognition can be summed up by the words of Gen 2.23: "This at last in bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh."

4-6: Until day breathes and the shadows flee, I will go to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense.

The time of night is suggestive here or more accurately, that time prior to dawn when daybreak is most anticipated: "I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning" (Ps 130.5-6). Surely the bride's desire is articulated here, especially with three mentions of wait and two references to watchmen anticipating dawn. The Hebrew lacks a verb in vs 6 and reads, "My soul to the Lord" (*naphshy la'dony*); this being a straight-forward expression of the bride's desire for her beloved. It is accentuated by from watchmen (*mishomrym*), that is, her desire is much greater than their waiting for daybreak.

It is during the night that the bride journeys to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense, two locales lacking historical reference but suggestive of her desire for the beloved. Note the literal manner by which she expresses her journey, "I will go to me" (*elek ly*), a way of expressing resolve to herself, not necessarily to other persons

such as the Song's companions. The bride also intimates a certain urgency in her passage by the words "until the day breathes and the shadows flee," suggestive of Israel's hasty departure from Egypt and the crossing at the Red Sea, two events which occurred at night. Similarly, her urgency is that of the divine being who wrestled with Jacob: "Then he said, 'Let me go, for the day is breaking'" (Gen 32.26), that is, before daylight reveals this being's mysterious nature.

As for the bride's destination, we she journeys to where her spouse had come, that is, the mountain of myrrh which brings to mind the three wise men who came bearing gifts (two of which were frankincense and myrrh) to the Christ child. Instead of following a star, the bride follows the desire of her heart; i.e., she is immediately driven into the wilderness like Jesus in Mk 1.12. Her time to reach her destination is limited, that is, "until day breathes and the shadows flee." Such breathing or *naphach* is a blowing, a time when dawn stirs the air which can also take place in dawn's twilight.

As for the shadows, it seems here they are identified with the night which lacks them. However, the bride could be referring to any dreamlike phantoms that come out at night. During this time such shadows (*tselalym*) substance, and the bride must push on in her pressing desire to reach her destination. She keeps in mind Christ's cautionary words, "Let your loins be girded and your lamps burning and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the marriage feasts, so that they may open to him at once when he comes and knocks...If he comes in the second watch or in the third and finds them so, blessed are those servants" (Lk 12.35-6, 38)! The bride is also keenly awake that this third watch, the one prior to dawn, requires extra watchfulness because the night is advanced and the onset of dawn, that is, twilight, can give rise to illusions.

4-7: You are all fair, my love; there is no flaw in you.

The bridegroom's words resemble those of Christ in Mt 24.43 which implies continuation of the theme of night, "Blessed is that servant whom his master when he comes will find so doing," that is, maintaining fidelity over his possessions, especially being on guard in the night against thieves (cf. vs. 43.4). He calls his spouse fair or *yaphah* as in Sg 1.8 which is connected with the words "If you do not know [yourself]."

Any flaw or *mum* has liturgical overtones as in Lev 21.17: "Say to Aaron, none of your descendants throughout their generations who has a blemish may approach to

offer the bread of his God.” The bride has achieved such loveliness in her spouse’s eyes because the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense are symbolic of her offering.

4-8: Come with me from Lebanon, my bride; come with me from Lebanon. Depart from the peak of Amana, from the peak of Senir and the peak of Hermon, from the dens of lions, from the mountains of leopards.

Note the two comings (Lebanon) and five goings (Amana, Senir, Hermon, lions’ dens, mountains of leopards).

After beholding his spouse’s beauty, the bridegroom asks her to leave with him from the five locations of Amana, Senir, Hermon, dens of lions and leopards, three of which are high peaks. As for Lebanon, he ask her to come from there and does so twice which indicates a certain urgency. Why Lebanon? Although cedars came from there for construction of the temple in Jerusalem, it and the other places are north of Israel, and the bridegroom wants his spouse near him. How she arrived in Lebanon and the other places isn’t specified though over time she must have strayed there more or less unwillingly.

Some remarks concerning the other five locales may shed light on the destination of the bridegroom and bride may help. As for Amama, it’s the only mention in the Bible and hence remains unknown. The second and third places from which the bridegroom bids his spouse to depart is the peak of Senir and the peak of Hermon. We have mention of the former in Dt 3.9: “So we [the Israelites] took the land at that time out of the hand of the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, from the valley of the Arnon to Mount Hermon (the Sidonians call Hermon Sirion, while the Amorites call it Senir).” Thus Senir and Hermon most likely refer to the same peak, the latter being more familiar to us. Ps 133.3 mentions this peak: “It [unity of brothers] is like the dew of Hermon which falls on the mountains of Zion. For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forever.”

“Dens of lions” may allude to the dangerous haunts of such animals in the Lebanon area, symbolic of the devil “who prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1Pt 5.8). Also, dens are reminiscent of Daniel: “Then the king was exceedingly glad and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den” (Dan 6.23). Added to these lions are mountains of leopards, again suggestive of evil: “The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them” (Is 11.6).

4-9: You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride, you have ravished my heart with a glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace.

This verse contains the essential reason why the bridegroom wishes his spouse to depart with him, namely, that he is overcome with joy at her loveliness. Note his expression “ravished my heart” which forms one word, *libavteny*, from the verbal root *lavav*, to be hollow, and from which comes *lev*, heart. We might even translate this word as “you have heartened me” which is stronger than “you have given me heart.” It seems as though the bride has imparted her *lev* to the beloved; he mentions the fact twice, calling her my sister, my bride.

Observe that the bride ravishes her beloved in two ways, a glance of her eyes and with one jewel of her necklace, the two being similar in that they emit a certain sparkle which captivates him. Note the literal reading, “in one from your eyes” (*bi’achad meheynayk*) which intimates that her glance penetrates him directly. A sentence suggestive of this is Ex 34.10: “And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses whom the Lord knew face to face.” The expression *panym el-panym* does evoke the ravishing of the bridegroom by his spouse, and has its first precedent in Gen 2.23:” This at last is bone of my bones (*hetsem mehatsamy*) and flesh of my flesh (*vasar mibsary*).” Note the use of the preposition *min* (*m-*) indicating direct contact without any intermediary.

It seems that the gleam in the bride’s eyes is like a jewel of her necklace which enchants the bridegroom just as much. Jewel or *hanaq* also means neck. Prov 1.9 reads, “for they [parental instructions] are a fair garland for your head and pendants for your neck.” With this in mind, the bridegroom is struck by his spouse’s adornment with such teachings which he also finds in her eyes.

The word for neck (*tsaua’r*) derives from the verbal root *tsur*, to press upon, to besiege, and we first encountered it in Sg 1.10: “Your neck with chains [of gold].” Thus this golden hue together with the jewels of Sg 4.9 enhance the bride’s lovely bearing. This praise of her neck implies royal dignity, for often after battle the victors would place their feet upon the necks of vanquished kings. Similarly, yokes were laid upon the necks of captives, and to have them removed is a blessing: And in that day his burden will depart from your shoulder, and his yoke will be destroyed from your neck.

4-10: How fair is your love, my sister, my bride! How much better is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your oils than any spice!

Here the bridegroom praises his spouse's love, in an overall way which isn't centered upon one particular aspect of her person. Her love or *dod* is fair or *yaphah*, a word encountered in Sg 1.8, "fairest among women," whose verbal root means to shine, to be bright. It seems that the gleam of her eyes and chain of her neck in vs 9 are amplified to her entire person. He calls her both sister ('*achoth*) and bride (*kalah*), two contradictory terms in normal circumstances of human relationships. The former clearly connotes parents common to both spouses, whereas the latter is a person not from one's family but one to whom we feel attraction. Both relationships entail love, the former due in part to the sharing of common experiences from birth and the latter due to attraction, physical and otherwise. The verbal root to bride (*kalah*) means to be completed; again referring to Gen 2.23 already quoted twice above, the man finds completion not in his relationship with created, non-human beings nor even with God himself; rather, he discovers it in his bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh. Thus the first woman is his sister as well as his spouse.

The second part of this verse "How much better is your than wine" is the same expression in Sg 1.2, only there it was used by the bride with regard to her beloved; here the compliment is repaid, strengthening the already existing bond between the two lovers. Note the parallel between his having been ravished in vs 9 and the use of wine: both terms suggest a type of ecstasy, of that going out of Adam upon catching first sight of his newly (and divinely) formed wife. Similarly, Paul exclaimed of such ecstasy, "I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know" (2Cor 12.2). Also refer to the Apostles in Acts 2.13 where people observed that they are filled with new wine. Without a doubt, such ecstasy was a direct result of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

The third aspect of this verse deals with the smelling of ointments, *rayach shemanyk*. Refer to Sg 1.3 for the use of the verbal root *rayach*, from which derives *ruach* or spirit, only here it applies to the bridegroom's ointments, not his spouse's. Mention of this spirit or scent again is suggestive of the two words, sister and spouse in this verse and in the previous one. Note that *rayach* applies to her oils which she most likely bought from the bridegroom, the merchant who was perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, "with all the fragrant powders of the merchant" (Sg 3.6). She is now permeated with these precious spices (oils) and is like Peter who similarly wished to be permeated with them, "Lord, [wash] not my feet only but also my hands and my

head” (Jn 13.9)! Most likely Peter made the same remarks at Pentecost to the Holy Spirit, only this time desiring to be permeated with fire.

4-11: Your lips drop as the honeycomb, my bride; honey and milk are under your tongue; the scent of your garments is like the scent of Lebanon.

Again we have an instance of vivid, sensuous language so typical of the Song, only here we move from the sense of scent in vs 10 to that of taste (which concludes with scent pertaining to Lebanon). This honeycomb or *nopheth* derives from *nuph*, to wave, to shake, suggesting the issuing forth of honey: “More to be desired are they [divine ordinances] than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb” (Ps 19.10). A negative aspect of *nopheth* is Prov 5.3: “For the lips of a loose woman drip honey” which surely is not the case with the Song’s bride. Such sweetness alludes not only to the bride’s lips but her manner of speech or her words of love towards the bridegroom; her nectar dropped (*nataph*) as in Ps 68.8: “The earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain at the presence of God.”

“Honey and milk are under your tongue:” the *nopheth* represents honey’s source, the bride’s lips, the location of which is further specified as being under your tongue together with milk. This is reminiscent of Ex 3.8: “I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey.” In addition to honey’s sweetness there is milk or *chalav* whose verbal root implies fatness and therefore cream, the fat of milk.

The rest of vs 11 pertains to the sense of smell as applied to the bride’s garments (*salmoth*) which encompass her. Note the use of *reyach* or scent which as mentioned several times above has the same verbal root as spirit. In Ps 104.2 we have an identification of this *salmoth* with light as opposed to the sense of smell: “who clothes yourself with light as with a garment.” Such a *salmoth* that clothed Jesus Christ during his Transfiguration: “And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light.” Although the image of light is used again, we may infer that Christ’s garment issued various scents about which the disciples could say, “Draw me, we will run after you” (Sg 1.4).

Note that the Song specifies the scent of the bride’s garment, that is, like the scent of Lebanon. On several occasions Lebanon is mentioned in conjunction with its famous cedars used for construction of the Jerusalem temple. Because this type of wood is

renowned for its incorruptibility and gives off a distinctive scent, we may say that it draws people to the Holy of Holies, the place of God's dwelling. Lebanon also means frankincense (*levonah*) which is derived from *lavan*, to be white. Thus this image allows us to associate the whiteness of Christ's transfigured presence with the scent of Lebanon cedars; i.e., his immortality yields a scent in which the disciples revel.

4-12: A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a garden locked, a fountain sealed.

While the sense of smell pertains to the diffusive nature of the bride's ointments, this verse manifests another feature, her enclosed nature or that side of the bride not exposed to view except by her husband. The image of a garden obviously suggests that of Eden, the prototype of all gardens which was similarly locked or *nahal*. The fundamental meaning of this root is to bolt. When our first parents disobeyed God, cherubim were stationed at Eden's gates to bolt them from entrance to the garden.

Note that the bridegroom uses the phrase pertaining to her being locked twice as if he were boasting that this garden belonged strictly to himself and to no one else. He then adds a fountain sealed, namely, the river which flowed from Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers (cf. Gen 2.10). This sentence implies that the subterranean ocean, an image of chaos (cf. Gen 1.2), emerged in the garden and then flowed from it. It is as though this image of chaos were transformed within Eden to become four rivers...symbolic of the earth's four corners...in order to nourish life. Thus we have a movement from chaos to life.

Indeed, the Garden of Eden is indeed a fountain sealed, that is, allowing only for a one way flow which cannot be reversed. The verbal root for fountain (*hyn*) is also the source for eye in that it resembles the sparkle of a fountain.

4-13: Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates with all choicest fruits, henna with nard.

Here begins a catalog of fruits and related items continuing through the next verse. The shoots or *shikchym* come from the verbal root *shalach*, to send, and the Septuagint uses the term *apostolai* which, in turn, is related to the Greek for apostle. Although shoots are the visible beginning of a plant, the bridegroom implies that they are mature insofar as they are an orchard. With the Septuagint *apostolai* in mind, we may say that the Apostles represent the Church's beginning; despite this, the Church is already mature in that these men bore witness to Christ's life, death, resurrection, ascension and descent of the Holy Spirit. I.e., they immediately beheld all the

essential elements which compromise the Church's teaching as they developed and expanded down through the centuries.

Such shoots form an orchard or *pardes*, from which comes our word paradise, and association with the garden of Eden is easy to make although this term of Persian origin is not used for it. We already encountered pomegranates in Sg 4.3 ('Your cheeks are like two halves of a pomegranate') and noted that they were used as decorations for the temple at Jerusalem. This fruit's reddish hue may be taken as maturity of the shoots, keeping in mind the theme of the Church's maturity while still young as just observed.

The pomegranates are associated with all choicest fruits to indicate the variety of spirits which emerged from the Holy Spirit's descent at Pentecost. Choicest comes from the verbal root *magad* and is found several times with reference to Moses' blessing of the tribes of Joseph; it was Joseph who played an instrumental role as Moses' predecessor in caring for Israel while exiled in Egypt: "And of Joseph he said, 'Blessed by the Lord be his land with the choicest gifts of heaven above and of the deep that couches beneath'" (Dt 33.13). Note the all encompassing nature of this blessing which is more inclusive than that belonging to the other tribes blessed by Moses.

We also have in this verse henna with nard, *kepharym him-neradym*. The former is derived from *kaphar* and also means camphire (pitch), the material Noah used to waterproof his ark: "Make yourself an ark of gopher wood; make rooms in the ark and cover it inside and out with pitch" (Gen 6.14). Note that henna is associated with this material; with regard to the ark, both suggest a kind of covering and protection. Such are the choicest fruits with which the bridegroom compares his bride.

4-15: A fountain of gardens, a well of living water, and flowing streams from Lebanon.

Now the bridegroom's praise of his spouse shifts from fruit to that which is essential for nourishing them, water. At first glance "fountain of gardens" (*mahyn ganym*: note play on words) seems unintelligible and should be reversed to garden of fountains. However, such a fountain is so abundant that it yields not one garden but a multitude of them; instead of the original Eden of Genesis, the Holy Spirit's division into tongues as of fire (cf. Acts 2.3) are new fountains which water the Church in the person of twelve Apostles whose "voice (i.e., fountains) goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world" (Ps 19.4).

Not only do we have a unique fountain, but the bridegroom calls his beloved a well of living water. Usually a well is distinguished from a fountain or spring in that it is man-made and requires considerable effort to dig, especially in a desert environment. We can easily associate this well with Jn 4.6: “Jacob’s well was there, and so Jesus, wearied as he was with his journey, sat down beside the well.” However, it should be noted that this is no ordinary well but one associated with the patriarch Jacob. “No one shepherd could remove the stone protected its mouth, but Jacob had the strength to remove it” (cf. Gen 29.4-10). Furthermore, Jacob was impelled out of love for Rachel to do this because it was her for whom he performed the task. When Jesus speaks to the woman at this well in reference to living water, perhaps he had in mind Jacob’s strength; it is as though Jesus’ words regarding himself as living water was a type of rolling back the stone to water the sheep.

Both the fountain of gardens and well of waters are supplemented by flowing streams from Lebanon. Such streams (*nozlym*; note use of the verbal root in the next verse) have their source in Lebanon, north of Israel, location of mountains and hence a supply of fresh water. Refer to Prov 5.15 which parallels this verse of the Song: “Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water (*nozlym*) from your own well.” I.e., the true Lebanon or source of pure water is found within each person who must turn attention back to the source from which these *nozlym* issued. Should one be faithful to this, the waters of the Red Sea will part: “At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up, the floods [i.e., the *nozlym*] stood up in a heap” (Ex 15.8).

4-16: Awake, O north wind, and come, O south wind! Blow upon my garden, let its fragrance be wafted abroad. Let my beloved come to his garden and eat its choicest fruits.

This concluding verse of chapter four is like a final blessing or invocation of the wind or Holy Spirit uttered by the bride to her spouse and sets the stage for further exchange between the two lovers in chapter five. The bride summons wind from two directions, north and south, omitting east and west, the direction of the sun’s passage. For the region of Palestine, north represents the cold and south warm or desert heat. The verb *hur* or awake occurs in Sg 2.7 (‘nor awaken love’) also means to be hot in the sense of being ardent. Note the absence of a word referring to wind; only the directions north and south are given.

Like the bride, the psalmist makes a threefold summons using the verb *hur*: “Awake, my soul! Awake, O harp and lyre! I will awake the dawn” (Ps 57.8)! The first applies

to his soul; the second to musical instruments which in turn are used to rouse the dawn with singing. Here is a unity between the human person and nature through the medium of music which is analogous to the bride's words in reference to north and south, two unfavorable directions (cold and heat as noted above). Another similar example is Ps 108.1-2: "Awake, my soul! Awake, O harp and lyre! I will awake the dawn!" Again, music is the bridge between the psalmist and the dawning of a new day just like the bride's summons to wake the north and south.

Despite the negative climatic association with north and south, the psalmist nevertheless says, "The north and the south, you have created them" (Ps 89.12). North or *tsaphon*, the first direction mentioned by the bridegroom, designates a place of cold and is derived from the verbal root, *tsaphan*, to hide, alluding to the darkness connected with that direction. Furthermore, there is a curious phrase in Ps 48.2 which puts a positive slant on north: "Mount Zion, in the far north, the city of the great King." Most likely this refers to the Canaanite mountain of the gods which is called North or Zaphon. We can even take Zion's location in the far north as facing there, the place of idol worship, and as a signal for such worshipers to turn to the true God of Israel.

The second direction, south (wind) is symbolic of the desert and therefore the right side of the Jerusalem Temple. That is, right when one looks towards the east or rising of the sun. These two directions are important for the Song's bride in that they serve to orient her with regard to the Temple, mythic center of the earth, from which all directions emanate. When she summons both the north and south, she thereby collapses this axis in favor of the east-west one or from sunrise to sunset. Furthermore, the queen of Sheba is associated with the south; "she visited Solomon in Jerusalem and was impressed with his wisdom, so much so that there was no more spirit in her" (1Kg 10.5).

Once the bride has summoned north and south, she bids them to blow upon her garden, the verb *puach* being found in Sg 4.6, "until the day breathes." This latter use suggests that time of night prior to dawn, reference to which is mentioned several times above in other contexts, and we may parallel it with the use in Sg 4.16. The direction of such *puach* is upon the bride's garden or *gan*, again suggestive of Eden, especially evening when God "was walking in the garden in the cool of the day" (Gen 3.8). Apart from the transgression of our first parents associated with this verse, its positive side shows us that God favors evening which is not difficult to understand because the day's tumult has passed in preparation for the hush night when he can make himself more readily known.

The sole purpose for summoning the north and south is that its fragrance may be wafted abroad, that is, to the four cardinal points exterior to the garden, symbolic of the Jerusalem temple. Rev 21.22 provides insight into this partition between inside and outside the garden/temple: “And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.” Apart from revealing the transition from Judaism to Christianity, this lack of sacred structure demonstrates the unity between heaven and earth which may apply to the marital relationship depicted in the Song of Songs.

This fragrance is obviously something perceived by the sense of smell and is therefore suggestive of the Holy Spirit’s action. It is wafted abroad or *nazal*, the same verbal root found in the previous verse (“flowing streams from Lebanon”). Refer to Is 48.21: “He made water flow for them from the rock,” most likely referring to Moses and the Israelites in the Sinai desert. With this in mind, the Song combines the sense of smell (fragrance) with a means usually suggestive of fluid, of water.

The first sentence of vs 15 was intended to prepare the garden for the bridegroom. The bride’s final invocation here is exhortatory, that is, he wishes her spouse to enter the garden from which its spices flowed out. Not only does she wish him to enter but to eat its choicest fruits, many of which were already described above. Only the bridegroom can enter the garden of Eden or bypass that “flaming sword which turned every way” (Gen 3.24), a feat impossible for our first parents to perform. Perhaps this is why Christ was buried in a garden after his crucifixion; in death he entered Eden and restored humanity to the happiness it symbolized, but it is a happiness come to fruition in the person of Jesus Christ.