

## Chapter Five

**5-1: I come to my garden, my sister, my bride. I gather my myrrh with my spice. I eat my honeycomb with my honey. I drink my wine with my milk. Eat, O friends and drink: drink deeply, O lovers!**

Chapter Five begins with the bridegroom who does not speak again until verse nine. Here we have King Solomon, the one who came up from the desert, and addresses his beloved as my sister, my bride, two titles already encountered in the Song of Songs. This garden or *gan* is the same one with which he described the bride in Sg 4.12 ('a garden locked'), so we may assume that the *gan* is simply another way of praising her beauty. Surely she must be thrilled to have him say "my garden," signifying his total possession. The purpose of the bridegroom's coming there, however, indicates a somber note because he is gathering myrrh, symbolic of death as pointed out above with regard to myrrh being one of the three offerings by the Wise Men to the Christ child. Since the garden is equivalent to the bride and her spouse indicates his possession of it, it is obvious that myrrh was already present and one of things that attracted him there. I.e., the bride has cultivated myrrh, the symbol of death or mortification, which implies that she has put to death everything except a burning desire for her spouse.

"I have gathered:" this verb comes from the root *'arah* which means, to pluck and occurs only one other time, Ps 80.12: "Why have you broken down its walls, so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit?" The psalmist's complaint is addressed to God himself; transferring it to the Song of Songs, we may say that God has broken down the garden's wall, i.e., has taken the bride to himself and plucks her fruit instead of those who pass along the way.

Note that the spouse gathers myrrh with spice or *besem* which also means a sweet smell. That is to say, the pungent scent of myrrh in the garden, characteristic of the bride, is united with this *besem*; rather, it begets the bride's *besem* or transforms her into a sweet odor.

Next the bridegroom eats "my honeycomb with my honey;" note that he uses the possessive pronoun twice to emphasize that they belong to him alone and to no one else. Sg 4.11 mentions honeycomb (*nopheth*) as associated with the bride's lips. However, in this verse the word used is *yahar* whose exact meaning is unclear, that is, whether a honeycomb or honey itself. Its primary meaning is thicket of trees. Note a use of the former, "But Jonathan had not heard his father charge the people with the oath, so he put forth the tip of the staff that was in his hand and dipped it in the honeycomb and put his hand to his mouth, and his eyes became bright" (1Sam 14.27). The last phrase is interesting, that is,

the honey refreshed Jonathan allowing him to see clearly, the first impact of honey's healing quality. This verse is reminiscent of Ps 34:8: "Taste and see that the Lord is good." First comes tasting which results in vision. The same may be applied to the bridegroom; having eaten his honeycomb with his honey, he then clearly sees his spouse. This is quite different from Gen 3:7: Then the eyes of both were opened and realized that they were naked after the man and woman had eaten the forbidden fruit.

After having eaten the honeycomb and honey, the bride drinks wine with milk, an unusual combination. As pointed out above, the former is symbolic of inebriation, of ecstasy (cf. Sg. 1.1, 'Your love is better than wine') whereas milk is nourishment for infants: "I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it" (1Cor 3.2). The combination of these two liquids may therefore represent that the bridegroom embraces both the beginning (milk) and maturity (wine) of the bride's progress. Note, however, the positive aspect of milk with regard to the spiritual life: "Like newborn babes, long for the pure spiritual milk" (1Pt 2.2), that is, milk which has the capacity for maturing into wine.

Thus far we have seen the bridegroom eating and drinking in his garden, that is, feasting on his bride. He now commends his friends to do the same. This noun comes from the verbal root *rahah*, to pasture, as found in Sg 1.7 ('where you pasture your flock') and vs 9 ('I compare you, my love'). Consequently, love and pasturing have the same connotation, only in Sg 5.1 the bridegroom applies it to his friends who differ from the bride's companions. These friends or *rehym* appear to have the same status as the bridegroom in his spouse's garden. Not only are they bidden to eat but to drink deeply or *shakar*, that is, to become thoroughly drunk. He also calls his friends *dodym* whose verbal root *dod* is found in Sg 1.2, "For your love is better than wine." With this verse in mind, we may say that the bridegroom asks his *dodym* to enjoy that *dod* which transcends the intoxicating nature of wine.

**5-2: I sleep but my heart was awake. It is the voice of my beloved knocking. Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one; for my head is wet with dew, my locks with the drops of the night.**

Now we have the bride speaking who apparently was asleep while her spouse came into his garden in the previous verse. "I slept but my heart was awake" (*hur* also means to be ardent, to be naked, to be blind): the same verb used in Sg 2.7 with reference to the bridegroom, "that you stir not up nor awaken love until it pleases." Presumably the bride has drunk the wine mentioned in the previous verse, the one mixed with milk. This unique blend makes her sleep (wine) yet remain awake (milk). I.e., we have her an example of that special type of attention without a subject-object regard resembling sleep. While

slumbering, the bride's being awake or *hur* is also ardent, naked and blind, that is, desirous of her beloved, stripped of any extraneous desires and blind to them.

In Sg 2.14 the bridegroom requests to hear his spouse's voice or proclaim her love for him. In this verse notice that while asleep in body (that is, from wine), the bride is attentive not simply to her beloved but to his voice, that is, in such a condition sound remains active and alert and can discern the source of sounds. Immediately she recognizes her beloved, not just his voice but his voice knocking or *daphaq* which also means to drive a flock as in Gen 33.13: "and if they are over driven for one day, all the flocks will die." Thus *daphaq* implies urgency of the beloved's voice but observe that it lacks an object on which it is knocking; such *daphaq* resembles the being awake of the bride where the attentiveness without an object attributed to both spouses are one and the same. Compare Sg 2.8 which has "The voice of my beloved!," that is, his voice, pure and simple.

The second sentence of this verse has the bridegroom's voice utter "Open to me," again an opening without reference to a door or similar entrance. However, he uses the familiar forms of address coupled with the possessive pronoun, "my sister, my love, my dove and my perfect one." We encountered these expressions numerous times, but this is the first instance of my perfect one (*tamaty*). This verbal root suggests perfection in the sense of completion, of having achieved a goal. Similarly, it has a moral sense as in Ps 15.2: "He who walks blamelessly and does what is right." With this in mind, we could say that the three preceding words (sister, love, dove) form a progression which culminates in *tamaty*. He begins with the closest type of relationship other than that of spouse, sister, who is obviously his love. We have already noted that dove or *yonah* (cf. Sg 2.12, "The voice of the turtledove is heard in our land") is representative of the Holy Spirit, bond of love between Father and Son. Such a dove is indeed my perfect one.

Next we have the reason why the bridegroom asks his spouse to open: "my head is wet with dew, my locks with the drops of the night." *Tal* is characteristic of early morning which forms spontaneously on grass and has a special freshness before the sun dries it up. It's found in blessings as the one given by Isaac to Jacob: "May God give you the dew of heaven and of the fatness of the earth and plenty of grain and wine" (Gen 27.28). Similarly, *tal* is associated with manna: "And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as hoarfrost on the ground" (Ex 16.14). Transferring this image to the Song, we can say that the bridegroom implies the presence of manna when stating that his head is wet with dew.

In addition to dew which appears to cover the bridegroom's head, there is a more specific type of wetness, "drops (*resysym*) of the night." Such drops seem to result in being outside all night, not just an association with morning's dew. They are on the bridegroom's locks

or *qewutsoth* (cf. vs 11), from the verbal root *quts*, to cut off. The noun thorn is also derived from this root. In brief, the bridegroom is like this because he has stood outside all night, rather, it was his voice mentioned earlier in this verse. Such voice is that of a watchman not guarding a city but constantly summoning the bride to be attentive like the wise virgins ready to meet the bridegroom who came at night: “But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him’” (Mt 25.6). These virgins were fully attentive during the night, the time when the bridegroom’s locks acquired the drops which are the equivalent of his oil imparted to them.

**5-3: I have put off my coat, how could I put it on? I have bathed my feet, how could I soil them?**

The bride seems perplexed here but can take her cue for preparedness from the wise virgins mentioned at the close of verse two; they were ready even at midnight to meet the bridegroom. Vs 3 has the bride asking herself about putting on her coat and reveals a certain bewilderment; the same applies when she has washed her feet. Her attitude is something like that found in Lk 11.7: “Do not bother me; the door is now shut and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.” In other words, she has prepared herself for the night and does not wish to be disturbed, yet something bothers her, hence the reason why she asks herself these two questions.

When the first man and woman disobeyed God, the man was nevertheless considerable of their plight which manifested itself in concern for their naked condition. To prepare them for exile from the garden, God made for Adam and for his wife “garments of skins and clothed them” (Gen 3.21). Here we have the same word, *kutoneth*, for garment, only in Genesis it is composed of skins (*hor*). Note that *hor* is derived from *hur* as seen above with regard to “I sleep but my heart is awake.” With this in mind, we can say that despite their disobedience, God provided for Adam and his wife a type of awareness or recollection of their former state in the garden which they and their descendants would always carry with them. One symbolic fulfillment of this Gen 37.3: “Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a long robe with sleeves.” Note that it was Joseph the dreamer who was responsible for Israel’s care in Egypt, a theme touched upon earlier in this notes.

Joseph was despoiled of his *kutoneth* through his brothers’ jealousy (cf. vs 23), so the words “I have taken off my garment, how could I put it on?” apply to him. Of course Joseph could not put on this *kutoneth* but later received something better, namely, appointment of ruler over Egypt after pharaoh. This verse from the Song may also apply to Gen 39.13: “And when she [Potiphar’s wife] saw that he had left his garment (*biced*) in her hand and had fled out of the house, she called to the men of the household.” That is,

Joseph was unable to put it on and suffered imprisonment, yet this was but a prelude to his future greatness. As a sign of his new position upon release from prison, Joseph exchanged, as it were, this garment and the one his father Jacob made: “Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph’s hand and arrayed him in garments of fine linen (*bigdy-ses*) and put a gold chain about his neck” (Gen 41.42). Hence, the transformation of the garments of skin woven by God to the noble vesture of Joseph.

“I have bathed my feet:” a symbolic gesture especially meaningful in a desert climate: “Let a little water be brought and wash your feet and rest yourselves under the tree” (Gen 18.4). Here Abraham is speaking to the mysterious three men whom God sent to destroy Sodom. Abraham’s display of hospitality also applies to Jesus Christ at the Last Supper: “Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet” (Jn 13.5). Note that this verse is preceded by vs 3, “Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands.” Such awareness was the precondition, as it were, not only of the washing but of all that followed right up to his death. Putting the Song’s words in the disciples’ mouths after Jesus had washed their feet, they could ask why they had soiled them...that is to say, how could they be unfaithful to all they had witnessed and were about to behold. Paul in Rom 10.15 quotes Is 52.7, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news!” Such feet Jesus had washed and are transformed into “words [reaching] to the ends of the world,” Ps 19.4 again quoted by Paul in vs 18.

#### **5-4: My beloved put his hand by the latch, and my heart was thrilled within me.**

While the bride was pondering her dilemma in vs 3, we now have her spouse make know his presence without uttering a word. This latch or *chor* on which the bridegroom puts (*shalach*, to send) his hand by (*min*) derives from an unused root which pertains to a hollowing action; the word white (*chur*) also comes from it. The image presented is one of a hole in a door which suggests partial entry into her house. One important example of a door (NB: *chor* is the only instance of this word) is Ex 12.22: “Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood which is in the basin and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood which is in the basin; and none of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning.” Here the Israelites purify their homes with a lamb’s blood which creates a sacred boundary, of separation between a holy in and a profane out. Instead of God putting his hand by the latch, “he will pass over the door” (vs 23) upon seeing the blood.

Christ calls himself the “door of the sheep” (Jn 10.7) by which people will go in and out and find pasture (vs 9). Note the association of Christ as lamb and the lamb’s blood on the doors of the Israelites; his blood enables people to go in and out; finding pasture is not specified with regards to this going in and out. With Christ, emphasis is put upon him being a door, that is, he abolishes the difference between such in and out, of a distinction

between what is holy and profane. To him applies the words, “Lift up your heads, O gates! Be lifted up, O ancient doors that the King of glory may come in” (Ps 24.7)!

Clearly, the bride can say “my heart was thrilled within me” in light of the above scriptural references. Note that the text literally says on him (*halaw*) which corresponds to the bridegroom putting his hand by the latch. His hand is not specifically on the latch, rather, the context of this verse seems to have him place it in the vicinity. Thus the bride’s specific response to a less particular nearness of her beloved. However, she was sufficiently roused to say that her heart was thrilled, a verb which comes from the verbal root *hamah*, to shake, and is generally associated with emotional upheaval. An interesting use of this verb appears in Prov 1.21: “On the top of the walls she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks.” This is the personification of Wisdom summoning people to herself, and use of *hamah* for speak suggests it is a heart-felt cry of appeal.

**5-5: I arose to open to my beloved and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh upon the handles of the bolt.**

Here we have the direct result of the bride’s *hamah*, of her being deeply moved at her spouse’s hand by the latch. Apparently she was sleeping, rather, her heart was awake in anticipation of this long awaited moment. We may parallel this verse with Christ lying in the tomb; at the moment of resurrection, he arose to open to my beloved and his hands dripped with myrrh, etc. The reason lay in the fact that after having been taken down from the cross, “Nicodemus came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes” (Jn 19.39). Christ, as it were, had liquid myrrh upon the handles of the tomb immediately after his resurrection. Note that it was Nicodemus who brought this myrrh, the one who had at first come to him by night, that is, like the bride at night “he rose to meet Jesus and talked with him about the Holy Spirit” (cf. Jn 3.1-15).

In Sg 5.5 note mention of two distinct but related elements: hands dripped with myrrh and fingers with liquid myrrh. The former has the verb *nataph* (to drip) as in Sg 4.11: “Your lips drop as the honeycomb.” The latter or fingers are apparently soaked with liquid myrrh, literally, passing over (*havar*) myrrh which implies an abundance of this solution. Because fingers form individual parts of a hand and are more adapt at delicate work, it seems more appropriate to have them filled with a liquid instead of a powder. It is as though these fingers were moist and slippery fingers to make them more sensitive for delicate or intricate work. This is in response to the bridegroom having put his hand by the latch in the previous verse; the bride prepares her hands and fingers to open the door as quickly as possible to snatch him.

Note that this verse has handles of the bolt as opposed to the bridegroom in vs 4 having put his hand by the latch. Bolt or *manhul* comes from the root *nahal* as found in 4.12, A garden locked. With this latter image in mind, it seems as though the bride were trying to exit the garden; despite its beauty, the garden was kept *nahal*, locked, and the long expected bridegroom was outside. Indeed, she delights in hearing the words, Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him (Mt 25.6), and comes out for this very purpose with sufficient oil or in the Song's words, with sufficient liquid myrrh so that she could open the door to the marriage feast (cf. vs 10).

**5-6: I opened to my beloved but my beloved had turned and was gone. My soul failed when he spoke. I sought him but found him not; I called him but he gave no answer.**

Despite her eagerness in opening the door, the bride discovers that her spouse had turned and was gone. This verse resembles the disciples on the road to Emmaus: "And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight" (Lk 24.31). Certainly both their eyes and those of the bride were opened to receive him for whom they longed but true to his risen nature, Christ vanished as quickly as his friends recognized him. At first this seems harsh treatment, but he acts this way in order to teach them that his physical nature, although risen, is not inferior to his spiritual nature. I.e., this strategy is a preparation or initiation for the Holy Spirit to come fifty days later at Pentecost.

Note the similarity between the bride's words and the disciples: "My soul failed when he spoke" and "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road while he opened to us the scriptures" (Lk 24.32)? Here Christ opens the scriptures, whereas in the Song it is the bride who opens the door; surely her intent is for her beloved to have the scriptures opened or explained to her which is why like the disciples, her heart burned within her or in her own words, "My soul failed when he spoke."

"My beloved had turned:" the verbal root here is *chamaq*, to go around which is a kindred root to *chavaq*, to embrace. In the Song's context, we also see that the bridegroom has gone (*havar*) or more accurately, has passed by. We get the image of a spouse quickly embracing his wife, that is, in great haste, and moving on to something apparently more important than this marital embrace which is quite distressing for the bride. Nevertheless, judging from the verbs *chamaq* and *chavaq*, the bridegroom, like Jesus' apparent rejection of Mary (cf. Jn 20.17), wishes to elevate his spouse's desire beyond the comings and goings in physical form.

The bride's soul failed when he spoke, literally, went out at his word. It is as though he soul or *nephesh* (cf. the remarks on *nephesh* regarding 'whom my soul loves,' 1.7) followed her spouse in his turning and in his passing by mentioned above. She seems to have



grasped the meaning of the scriptures (cf. Lk 24.32 discussed earlier). Indeed, we can say that the bride fully realizes her words uttered towards the Song's beginning, "Draw me after you, let us make haste."

The Song of Songs is a constant interplay between numerous presences and absences of the bridegroom to his bride which are representative of genuine growth or deepening of love between a person and God. The next part of verse six reads like a complaint, "I sought him but I could not find him" (etc). To those on the spiritual path this apparent grievance sets in motion something we encountered earlier (Sg 3.3) and stated in the next verse, "The watchmen who went about the city found me..." The bride adds to her lament, "I called him but he gave no answer." These words resemble one standing at the edge of a high cliff both calling out and intently looking; without such an absence after a presence (of the bridegroom), the bride's love would ebb.

**5-7: The watchmen found me as they went about in the city; they beat me, they wounded me. They keepers of the walls took away my veil from me.**

Apparently this verse brings the bride back to her starting point but instead of simply finding her as in 3.3, these *shomrym* treat her harshly. "They beat me:" *nakah* can also mean beating with the act of killing as in Ex 12.29: "The Lord smote all the first born in Egypt." Thus the bride receives very rude, even life threatening treatment, at the watchmen's hands. On the other hand, these *shomrym* or angels, if you will, accompany the Lord as he makes his way through the streets of Egyptian towns to slay the first born. While not actually killing the bride, their rough handling, much like the Israelites in their forced labor before the Passover event, is intended to shake her up.

"They wounded me:" the verbal root *patsah* implies making a fissure as in the kindred root *batsah*, to cut into pieces; it also means to complete. One example of *patsah* is Prov 27.6, a theme which applies here: "Faithful are the wounds of a friend," the friends being the watchmen. For an example of *batsah*, "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also complete it" (Zech 4.9).

"The keepers of the walls:" note the distinction between them and the watchmen. The former are similarly called *shomrym* but here are assigned to the city walls as opposed to the latter who go about the city. Obviously those assigned to the walls are more intent upon keeping their eyes focused on what is going on outside the city and anyone who may approach it. It is these *shomrym* who remove the bride's veil or *radyd*, from the verbal root *radad*, to spread, to subdue. Most likely they encounter her on or about the city walls as opposed to in the city, scene of their assigned task of keeping guard. Compare the bride's location here with vs 5, "I opened to my beloved..." that is, she opened the city



walls in a desperate attempt to see her beloved. Also keep in mind that it is night when the bridegroom stealthily departs.

The bride's veil or *radyd* has one other reference, Is 4.23: "In that day the Lord will take away...the garments of gauze, the linen garments, the turbans and the veils." Although a different term, the Temple curtain (*tsamah*) bears a certain parallel to the bride's veil; refer to Sg 4.1 for a discussion on this term. At Christ's death the curtain was torn in two, whereas in the Song the bride's veil is removed. Obviously the watchmen wanted to see who was on their walls because it was unusual for an un-escorted woman to be out at night.

**5-8: I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, tell him that I am sick with love.**

We encountered these daughters of Jerusalem on several occasions above but here may identify them with the watchmen on the city walls. Once they have removed her veil, she solemnly charges them with an oath. As we have seen, they keep an eye open for anyone approaching the city at night, so she intimates that he may return at night. Such an oath implies not only desperation but expectancy. The bride is familiar with meeting her spouse at night, so her certainty about his return is unwavering. Apparently the bride remains here for some time because the daughters of Jerusalem ask her several questions in the next verse to which she replies with a detail description to the conclusion of chapter five. In that way the watchmen may identify anyone fitting her description and inform her. We may assume that upon completion of these words the bride returns (it is still night) to her home in great anticipation.

"Tell him that I am sick with love," love being derived from the verbal root *chul* which has multiple meanings such as to turn, to tremble, to be strong, to wait. Most likely the notion of being ill originates from the fact when in such a state, one turns in pain or trembles. Thus the bride is *chul* with love or '*ahavah*, a word discussed earlier in several instances. We may say that '*ahavah* causes her to writhe in agony yet in the words of Is 54.1 such *chul* is beneficial, "Sing, O barren one, who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, you have not been in travail!" The daughters of Jerusalem or watchmen on the wall respond to her, "Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him" (Ps 37.7), the verb being *chul*.

Rahab the prostitute had her dwelling in the city wall (cf. Josh 2.15) and let down Joshua and the spies by means of the scarlet cord which also was a signal for the Israelites to spare her and her family when they attacked the city (cf. Sg 4.1 for a discussion of this). Thus Rahab is a type of the Song's bride a watchman on the city walls; she eagerly awaited the attack which signaled redemption for her.

**5-9: What is your beloved more than another beloved, O fairest among women? What is your beloved more than another beloved, that you thus adjure us?**

Here the daughters of Jerusalem or the watchmen question the purpose of the bride's oath or more precisely and at least to their eyes, his value. She does not refute their challenge but simply proceeds from here to the end of chapter five to describe his loveliness. In this way she hopes to win them over, not to dispute with them which would be fruitless.

The watchmen could now call the bride "fairest among women," that is, they have removed her veil mentioned in vs 7 and clearly behold her beauty, a beauty of her spouse reflected in her face due to her intense longing. The phrase "fairest among women" first occurred in Sg 1.8 as spoken by the bridegroom himself where he bids her to follow in the tracks of the flock and pasture [her] kids beside the shepherds' tents. Obviously this command relates to activity outside the city (keeping in mind the guards or daughters of Jerusalem). The guards, who are really allies of the bridegroom though the bride may not be aware of it, hope to jog her memory by using the same words as her beloved, namely, those of Sg 1.8. The guards/daughters repeat their question in the same verse to emphasize their sincerity and desire to have the bride recall these words.

**5-10: My beloved is white and ruddy, distinguished among ten thousand.**

Now begins a description of the bridegroom where the bride launches forth apparently heedless of the questioning of her oath to the watchmen or daughters of Jerusalem. Keep in mind the that activity discussed above occurred at night. This obscurity is offset by the bride describing her spouse in bright terms so that the watchmen on the walls could recognize him beyond the city confines.

Note the contrast of colors: white and ruddy. The former, white or *tsach* derives from the verbal root *tsachach*, to be bright. One example is Is 18.4: "I [the Lord] will take my rest and consider from my dwelling like clear heat in sunshine, like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest." This and other references of *tsachach* imply the desert's burning heat which has a certain white hue about it. Here the verb to be at rest or *shaqat* coupled with consider or to look is a regard opposite to the bride's apparent distress at her spouse's absence (that is, outside the city). The watchmen on the walls, allies of the bridegroom, also focus their attention in a manner similar to that of Is 18.4.

The striking image of clear heat in sunshine coupled with a cloud of dew in the heat of the harvest resembles the bride's two-fold white and ruddy, i.e., two opposing colors and

sentiments suggested by their images. His whiteness or *tsach* is like the pillar of fire by night of Ex 13.22 which did not depart from before the people, that is, from before the bride.

The other adjective, ruddy (*'adom*) is closely related to *'adam*, man, that is, referring to the earth's color from which man was formed. This man and his wife were banished from earth...from the city...over which the cherubim or guards on the walls were stationed (cf. Gen 3.24). Note that the previous verse reads, to till the ground from which he was taken. Here is reference to *'adamah* or ground, also related to *'adom*. We may comprehend this verse as a veiled command for man to till or cultivate his own nature or *'adam/'adamah*.

One reference to the adjective *'adom* is found in Is 63.2: “Why is your apparel red and your garments like his who treads in the wine press?” Christian tradition applies this to Jesus Christ in his passion and death, an image we can also read in the bride's words.

Not only is the bridegroom white and ruddy but “distinguished among ten thousand.” Again, keeping in mind the image which we have been dealing (watchmen on the wall, etc), these words are sufficient to cause alarm among those on the wall because they represent an invading army before the city. Certainly David was this distinguished (warrior) when he stepped forward to battle Goliath (cf. 1Sam 17.31+). Later David's victories made Saul jealous as revealed by the women singing “Saul has slain his thousands and David his ten thousands” (1Sam 18.7). This latter reference to ten thousands evokes Sg 5.10 now under consideration, *marvavah*, from the verbal root *ravav*, to be increased, to be many. Note that this word does not specify an exact number, only an indefinitely large one. Similarly, Rebekah received the words from Abraham's servants, “Our sister, be the mother of thousands of ten thousands” (Gen 24.60)!, this praise being found in the bride's mouth of the Song.

#### **5-11: His head is the finest gold; his locks are wavy, black as a raven.**

Note the contrast between bright and dark colors. Finest gold or *paz* derives from the root *pazaz*, to refine with the alternate meaning to leap. In addition to referring to the bridegroom's head, the more refined nature of *paz* can imply a crown of gold to signify royalty. Indeed, the psalmist's concerning David are true: “You set a crown of fine gold upon his head” (Ps 21.3).

Due to the refined nature of *paz*, the bridegroom's dark locks must be imposing indeed. We already encountered the word *qewutsoth* in 5.2 (‘my head is wet with dew and my locks with the drops of the night’) as referring to the bride, so it is not difficult for her to see the same attribute in her beloved. Both locks share different types of darkness, that of the

bridegroom's being black as a raven. Black derives from the verbal root *shachar* which we first saw with regard to the tents of Kedar above. Its association is now with a raven or *horev*, from the root to pledge, to set, and from which comes evening.

Note that in Gen 8.7 Noah in the ark sent forth a raven; and it went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth. This raven indeed became a *horev* or pledge. Its back and forth flight, almost like the drying action of a fan, was responsible for the flood waters to recede. Compare this raven with a dove: "Noah sent forth a dove...but [it] found no place to set her foot, and she returned to him to the ark" (vss 8-9).

**5-12: His eyes are like doves beside springs of water, bathed in milk, fitly set.**

Now we switch to doves or *yonah*, first encountered in Sg 2.14," who dwelt in the clefts of the rock." Several paragraphs above we considered that raven or *horev*...pledge...which, like the Spirit of God in Genesis, was moving over the face of the waters of the second flood. On the other hand, the dove returned to the ark without finding dry land. Note that the Song has the *yonah* beside springs of water, that is, '*aphyq*, a channel, stream. Keeping in mind this noun, its use in Ps 42.1 sums up the bride's feelings: "As a hart longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for you, O God." Thus use of '*aphyq* suggests a narrow, controlled (and hence man made) course of water such as a tube although its expanded meaning applies to a stream. For example, Ps 18.15 suggests that such an '*aphyq* is the source of the ocean's water: "Then the channels of the sea were seen and the foundations of the world were laid bare." It should also be noted that eye or *hyn* can mean a fountain as discussed with regard to Sg 1.14.

'*Aphyq* are associated with the bridegroom's eyes which resemble doves, that is, his eyes which behold all his spouse's actions even when she feels him absent. Keeping in mind this word's fundamental meaning, his eyes are thus channels...hidden sources...which keep a steady, constant gaze on his bride. Furthermore, a dove is symbolic of innocence as well as the Holy Spirit. Such birds are unafraid of roosting by these streams since they can be representative of eternity which constantly bubbles up. "O that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest." (Ps 55.6), that is, I would be at rest by these '*aphyqy*.

"Bathed in milk, fitly set:" Milk is obviously nourishment for infants, another image for innocence. This bathing or *rachats* often applies to ritual purification as can be found in the book of Leviticus and in other places. It is also a sign of courtesy or respect: "Let a little water be brought and wash your feet and rest yourselves under the tree" (Gen 18.4), a gesture made by Abraham to his mysterious guests. But in the Song it is the bridegroom's eyes which are bathed in milk. Compare such bathing with "They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev 7.14). Note the contrast of colors:

garments dipped in red become white. Furthermore, vs 15 continues with they are before the throne of God which bears a certain parallel to those doves beside springs of water. Actually, vs 17 mentions water: “and he will guide them to springs of living water.”

“Fitly set” or as the Septuagint reads, “by the fullness (*pleroma*) of waters:” This is the second image of water (if we include the Septuagint) in the same verse coming after springs of water. The Hebrew literally reads, “sitting on fullness” (*yshkoth hal-mile’th*). This sitting naturally pertains to the well position bridegroom’s eyes, yet in conjunction with what we have just noted regarding this verse, these eyes or fountains (cf. above for the similar verbal root) which reveal the bridegroom’s very being sit or dwell at this selfsame source. He then beholds his bride with them which is why she is so entranced by them.

**5-13: His cheeks are like beds of spices yielding fragrance. His lips are lilies dropping liquid myrrh.**

The bride continues with praise of her beloved and in this verse keeps to a description of his facial area. His cheeks (cf. Sg 1.10 and 4.3) bear a description similar to the eyes’ position of vs 12 (i.e., fitly set). These beds (*harugah*) are also mentioned in Ezk 17.7-8: “But there was another great eagle [reference to Psammetichus II, 594-88 BC] with great wings and much plumage; and behold, this vine bent its roots toward him and shot forth its branches toward him that he might water it. From the bed where it was planted he transplanted it to good soil by abundant waters.” Note the location of this *harugah*, by abundant waters, akin to springs of waters of vs 12.

Bed derives from the verbal root *harag*, to desire as in Ps 42.1-2: “As a hart longs for flowing streams so longs my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.” These verses continue the theme of abundant waters and has a similar reference in Sg 4.15: “a fountain of gardens, a well of living water.” Furthermore, notice that the (unused) verbal root to cheek (*lechy*) is *lachach*, to be moist, which continues the theme of water here in vs 13; cheeks are thus considered to be the seat of beauty. With all this in mind, we get the impression that the beds...cheeks...are sources of irrigation, of desire (cf. Ps 42.1-2).

“Yielding spices:” this is the essence of that irrigation in the gardens of which we just spoke. Spice or *raqach* connotes a type of seasoning where the primary idea consists in making the spices small or grinding them up (cf. *raqaq* and Sg 3.6, with all the powders of the merchant). Note the verb here for yielding, *gadal*, to be great. Thus the bridegroom’s cheeks are magnified by their association with (living) water.

“His lips are lilies:” Observe the contrast of colors (white) with the bridegroom’s praise of his spouse’s lips: “Your lips are like a thread of scarlet” (Sg 4.3). Such lips are located at the center of his cheeks (like pomegranates) and thus stand in contrast to the red cheeks. This appears odd, for we generally associate lips with red. While this remains true, perhaps vs 13 is referring more to the scent of lilies coming from the bridegroom’s lips; such a pure (i.e., white) scent cannot help but impart a color to his lips to which the bride wishes to bring her mouth and thereby acquire his whiteness or inherent purity.

The bridegroom’s lips drop liquid myrrh, that is, *nataph*, a verb encountered in Sg 4.11 where the bridegroom speaks: Your lips drop nectar. In vs 5 we have reference to liquid myrrh; instead of being on his lips, it is on the handles of the bolt. Through these descriptions of her beloved, the bride is employing a number of terms which he applied to her. She is recalling her past encounters with him and assembling them, as it were, in her memory and presents these recollections to the watchmen of 5.7, to whom we may say all these descriptions are addressed.

**5-14: His hands are gold rings set with beryl. His belly is as bright ivory overlaid with sapphires.**

“His hands are gold rings:” Rings or *gelyly* derive from the verbal root *galal*, to go around. We find a reference in 2Kg 6.34 with regard to the entrance of the inner sanctuary as follows: “and two doors of cypress wood; the two leaves of the one door were folding, and the two leaves of the other door were folding.” The Song verse does not specify how many rings are on the bridegroom’s hands, but with 2 Kings in mind, we may surmise that they are two on each hand or door. The notion here is that hands are doors which open a way to the bridegroom’s love: “His left hand is under my head, and his right hand does embrace me” (Sg 2.6). Such an embrace is entry into the inner sanctuary. Now the words of Ps 37.5 make clearer sense: “Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act.” This literally reads, “Roll your way to the Lord,” i.e., *galal* your way.

“Set with beryl” or *tarshyth* from which comes the proper noun Tarshish: “For the king [Solomon] had a fleet of ships of Tarshish at sea with the fleet of Hiram. Once every three years the fleet of ships of Tarshish used to come bringing gold, silver, ivory, apes and baboons” (1Kg 10.22). Note too that Jonah attempted to take a ship to Tarshish (Jon 1.2) which was wrecked, causing him to be swallowed by a large fish and then to be redeemed by God. As 1Kings reveals, Tarshish or southwest Spain is the point of origin for Solomon’s extensive reach which brought precious gifts. Similarly, the bridegroom’s (that is, Solomon) hands are set with *tarshyth*.

Consider the prophet Daniel's description of God which has a certain parallel to that recounted by the bride: "His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the noise of a multitude" (Dan 10.6). Similarly, Ezekiel describes God's chariot throne: "As for the appearance of the wheels and their construction, their appearance was like the gleaming of beryl, and the four had the same likeness, their construction being as it were a wheel within a wheel" (Ezk 1.16). These wheels or *'ophanym* are from a verbal root different from the rings already described, yet one cannot help but see a certain correspondence in meaning; the latter too were composed of beryl. Observe the cryptic phrase, wheel within a wheel, as if to demonstrate the infinite capacity to turn every which way.

The bride now moves on to describe her spouse's belly or *mehy* which, if we keep in mind the Ezekiel vision just described, is the very center of that wheel within a wheel. Such *mehy* is a figure of one's inmost being; it bears a relationship to the verb *rachaph* as found in Gen 1.2: "and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters," that is, the Spirit expressing what is closest to God when bringing creation from these waters or chaos. Indeed, "the Spirit did not hid your saving help within my heart [*mehy*]; I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation" (Ps 40.10).

This belly is as bright ivory, *hashath* being the verbal root for this adjective which connotes brilliance or something fabricated. Note that the verb *hashath* also means to think as in Jon 1.6: "Perhaps the gods will give a thought to us, that we do not perish." The notion here is that the belly is the seat of thoughts and emotions.

Overlaid with sapphires: that is, covered or *halaph* which also means to faint as in Is 51.20: "Your sons have fainted, they lie at the head of every street like an antelope in a net." The Song's context implies a full concealment, that is, of the bridegroom's belly with sapphires or *sapyrym* which are generally of a bluish hue. We find reference to these stones in Ex 24.9 when Moses and a select group of elders ascended Mount Sinai: "and they saw the God of Israel; and there was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone like the very heaven for clearness." This is an image of heaven, of eternity, which lies under his [God's] feet. Similarly, the heavenly Jerusalem of John's vision had sapphire as the foundation of one of its walls (cf. Rev 21.17).

The image of sapphire pertaining to the bridegroom's belly implies that he embraces all creation as well as transcends it. For a parallel image to the Song's context, refer to Ezk 1.26: "And above the firmament over their heads was the likeness of a throne in appearance like sapphire, and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness as it were of a human form." This likeness of a human form (*kemar'eh 'adam*) is another



picture of God's transcendence yet with a human aspect which we may attribute to Jesus Christ. Verses 27-8 continue with a description of this which we may compare with the bride's description now under consideration in the Song.

**5-15: His legs are pillars of marble set upon bases of gold. His appearance is like Lebanon, excellent as the cedars.**

Notice how the bride switches from a description of her spouse's legs to his appearance, that is, to a perception of his overall bearing. The word for legs here is *shoqy*, from the verbal root *shoqq*, to run. An example of this verb is Ps 107.9 where it implies thirst: "For he satisfies him who is thirsty, and the hungry he fills with good things." Indeed, the bride is such a thirsty person as we can tell from the detailed description of her account of his corporeal nature, a report whose accuracy reflects intimate physical knowledge.

The bridegroom's legs are pillars of marble, *shesh* also meaning fine linen as well as the number six. Moses constructed the tents of the tabernacle from this material, for example, "You shall make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine twined linen and blue and purple and scarlet stuff; with cherubim skillfully worked shall you make them" (Ex 26.1). Such curtains have the appearance of legs standing guard before the entrance to the Holy of Holies. Similarly, God bedecks Israel his bride with such material: "I swathed you in fine linen and covered you with silk" (Ezk 16.11). A New Testament reference pertains to angels: "and out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues robed in pure bright linen, and their breasts girded with golden girdles" (Rev 15.6). Observe the association of angels with the temple, a parallel to that curtain of Ex 26.1. Similarly the bride is clothed in this material: "It was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure, for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints" (Rev 19.8).

Note that such pillars of marble are set upon bases of gold, *'adny*. Again, we find numerous reference to these bases with regard to the temple in Exodus (chapters 26 & 27). *'Adny* bears similarity to *'adony*, lord, a title frequently attributed to God.

"His appearance is like Lebanon:" As noted above, Lebanon is the source of cedar for Solomon's construction of the Jerusalem temple and implies that the bridegroom's general demeanor resembles these cedars." The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. They are planted in the house of the Lord, they flourish in the courts of our God" (Ps 92.12-13). The location of these cedars, not located in Lebanon, but in the house of the Lord suggests their transference to that place. Thus far the Song of Songs has referred to Lebanon several times: 3.9 (palanquin from the wood of Lebanon), 4.8 (Come from Lebanon, my bride), 4.11 (The scent of your garments is like the scent of Lebanon)

and 4.15 (flowing streams from Lebanon). The excellence or *bachar* of the Lebanon cedars intimates more a process of examining in order to attain this state of perfection.

**5-16: His mouth is most sweet, yes, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.**

Here we have the last description of the bridegroom to the city watchmen and keepers of the walls (vs 7), culminating with praise of his mouth. The very beginning of the Song of Songs began with the bride's ardent desire to have him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth. Note the difference in words: 1.2 has *peh* whereas vs 16 has *chek*, the latter referring more to the palate or jaws. Thus *chek* does not appear to be the precise location or source for kisses but implies the mouth area in general, source for speech as well as for eating (NB: Sg 2.3, 'His fruit was sweet to my taste' or palate). Consider Ps 119.103: "How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" with reference to the bride's mouth being most sweet.

Altogether lovely: the verbal root here is *chamad*, to desire, to covet, encountered in Sg 2.3: "I sat down under his shadow with great delight." Perhaps association of the bridegroom's mouth with being altogether lovely or altogether to be coveted intimates that it is his words of love spoken to his bride that captures her attention most, the reason why she concludes chapter five with such a remark. Hence the reason why "from his mouth come knowledge and understanding" (Prov 2.5), gifts which are equivalent to the bridegroom himself. Often we hear the phrase mouth of the Lord as in Is 1.20; this distinction implies that the source of all blessings emanate from God through the medium of speech. And because *chek* in this last verse of chapter five suggests taste, it is a privilege for the bride to taste his voice or word, logos.

In conclusion, the bride boasts to the guards, the daughters of Jerusalem, about her previous descriptions of her spouse by calling him with the now familiar titles, beloved (*dod*) and friend (*rehy*). One gets the impression that she is saying these words as if the bridegroom were present with her, but we should keep in mind that she expresses herself from recollections of past encounters which are so fresh and convincing that they are equivalent to his being present with her.

## Chapter Six

**6-1: Where has your beloved gone, O fairest among women? To where has your beloved turned aside that we may seek him with you?**

We encountered the phrase “fairest among women” in Sg 1.8 and 5.9 uttered by the bridegroom and daughters of Jerusalem respectively; the latter group is asking the question here or those watchmen of 5.7. After a detailed explanation of her spouse’s physical characteristics, the daughters still do not seem to know where he had gone. Their second question, “To where has your beloved turned aside...” is the first of its kind in the Song and implies that he has diverted his original plans. Vs 2 gives the answer, his garden. Nevertheless, we must credit the daughter or vigilant guardians for having noticed this turning (*panah*). One answer to their question is “Turn to me and be gracious to me as is your wont toward those who love your name” (Ps 119.132). In other words, the bridegroom’s *panah* always is directed towards his beloved situated in the garden of the next verse.

The real motive for their questioning of the bride is that “we may seek him with you.” Note the “with you;” i.e., not without her who is essential for a revelation of the bridegroom. Such seeking or *baqash* occurs in Sg 3.1: “By night on my bed I sought him...but I found him not.” This failure to find her beloved sets in motion a quest which results in that now familiar alteration of finding and losing the bridegroom.

The time of night is important and suggested by the role of daughters of Jerusalem, the watchmen of the city who keep their posts by night. Perhaps the archetypal example of this seeking is the Exodus narrative when the people rushed from Egypt without having a clear idea of their destination; all they knew was that they had to leave and that something unusual was going to happen along the way. Another example of setting in motion this seeking is found in Ezk 12.12: “And the prince who is among them shall lift his baggage upon his shoulder in the dark and shall go forth; he shall dig through the wall and go out through it; he shall cover his face that he may not see the land with his eyes.” As for the daughters of Jerusalem, they would be completely lost without the bride’s help. For them she was truly a “pillar of fire to give them light that they might travel by day and by night” (Ex 13.21).

**6-2: My beloved has gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens and to gather lilies.**

With her intimate knowledge of her spouse, the bride realizes that one of his favorite destinations is the garden, *gan*. Note that the bridegroom already had called his bride a garden: “a garden fountain, a well of living water” (Sg 4.15), so from this it is not difficult for her to surmise his destination. A garden symbolizes fertility, a natural symbol for desert peoples; in addition, a garden is cultivated, not wild, as we see from the Genesis account. Observe that the bridegroom has gone down (*yarad*). In virtually all stories describing the divinity, God is situated up in heaven; earth is the domain of down. We may

therefore apply this basic picture to the incarnation of Jesus Christ. In addition, Christ was buried in a garden: “Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden and in the garden a new tomb where no one had ever been laid” (Jn 19.41). Here Christ’s descent from the cross is a going down into this garden from which three days later he will rise.

Besides this garden, the bridegroom goes down to the beds of spices or *harogah*. We encountered this word and its verbal root *harag* in Sg 5.13, “His cheeks are like beds of spices yielding fragrance.” Keeping in mind the association of this verse with the burial of Christ mentioned in the last chapter, it is not difficult to surmise that the spices chiefly consist of myrrh which is used for burial of the dead (cf. Jn 19.39). Note that these spices yield fragrance, certainly the pungent odor of myrrh but implied is cedar taken from Lebanon which is mentioned several times throughout this text.

Once again, the physical portrait of the beloved allows her to obtain a clue as to his whereabouts. Despite his presence there, this chapter of the Song provides no description of her journey to meet him. It is helpful to keep in mind that when she describes the bridegroom as well as his absences and so forth, she has recourse to her recollective faculty. The bride makes him present, as it were, in her self by this descriptive process, thereby precluding any need for place-to-place movement.

The purpose of the bridegroom’s descent is two-fold: to feed in the gardens and to gather lilies. Note the verbal root for to feed (*raha*), discussed numerous times as in Sg 1.7: “Where do you feed?,” from which comes love, a title applied to the bride different occasions. Again, since the bride makes this association, she can determine his activity in the garden which entails feeding and gathering. The second aspect of the bridegroom’s descent is to gather lilies. In Sg 1.16 he pastures his flock among the lilies, another activity with which the bride is intimately familiar. We could say that the bridegroom gathers these flowers for the purpose of feeding his flock, lilies being symbolic of purity and innocence. Note that this verse first has him feeding, that is, he is taking nourishment for himself which we may again assume are such lilies.

**6-3: I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine; he pastures his flock among the lilies.**

This verse functions much as a refrain or a response to those who address the question in Sg 6.1 with regard to the bridegroom’s whereabouts and is similar to Sg 2.16. The bride states these words with a justifiable pride at belonging to someone so dear. Not only does she put herself in his possession but is magnanimous enough to consider her spouse’s flocks who pasture among the lilies. As soon as the bride utters her boast, her husband speaks for the first time in a long time in the next verse. Note the poetic sound of the words

in Hebrew of verse 3: *‘any ledody wdody ly*. We may infer that the city guards and custodians of the wall are not among those whom the bridegroom feeds. Their function is to remain within the city while he goes out into the fields for this purpose. Such guards are intimately connected with the Jerusalem temple, acting as cherubim guarding the entrance to paradise. Thus we may posit the flock as humanity as a whole whom Christ came to redeem or to pasture.

**6-4: You are beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners.**

Once the bride has praised her spouse’s beauty at considerable length, he now speaks after a period of silence. “You are beautiful” or *yaphah*, a word we encountered several times already, but a beauty as Tirzah. This town was the seat of the kingdom of Israel from King Jeroboam to Omri (cf. 1Kg 14.17, 15.21; 2Kg 15.14) and means pleasantness (*tirtsah*) from the verbal root *ratsah*. We may assume that Tirzah was situated in a lovely area, hence the comparison. The bridegroom thus find delight or *ratsah* in his spouse as Ps 147.11 says, “The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him.”

Note that the bridegroom mentions Tirzah first and Jerusalem second. In the verses of chapter five we saw how the bride addressed the city guards with regard to her spouse, that is, his absence from the city which is Jerusalem. Now he identifies her with the holy city which she never departed; such identification is attributing to her own person everything Jerusalem represents. Nevertheless, the bridegroom does specify her beauty, comely (*na’weh*, 1.5: ‘your face is comely’) and “terrible as an army with banners.”

These attributes bring out two different aspects of the bride, first her obvious fairness which, for example, could be seen from the Mount of Olives. Yet at the same time the bride’s comeliness has an awe inspiring, military aspect about her, i.e., terrible (*‘aymeh*). Perhaps the bridegroom had in mind God’s words to Moses when the Israelites were about to enter the Promised Land: “I will send my terror (*‘eymah*) before you and will throw into confusion all the people against whom you shall come, and I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you” (Ex 23.27).

The bride is not simply terrible but terrible as an army with banners. The literal reading lacks army and has just banners, *degaloth*, from the verbal root *dagal*, to cover. This word occurred in Sg 2.4: “And his banner over me was love.” The sign of love which these banners signify are vastly different from a typical military association. We find another reference to *degel* in Ex 17.15: “And Moses built an altar and called the name of it, “The Lord is my banner,”” which he did this after his victory over Amalek. Several verses earlier in this chapter Moses kept his hands outstretched, a sign enabling the Israelites to

prevail over Amalek's forces. When they got tired, Aaron and Hur supported his arms. It is not difficult to see in this image the cross of Christ, that true *degel* or banner of love.

**6-5: Turn away your eyes from me, for they have overcome me. Your hair is like a flock of goats which appears from Gilead.**

Here the bridegroom seems so overwhelmed by his spouse's beauty that he asks her to divert her glance away from him. Her eyes which resemble doves (cf. Sg 1.15, 4.1) are simply too overpowering in their capacity to entrance him. Note that the literal reading is "from before me." In other words, the bridegroom acknowledges that he is aware of her eyes and perhaps wishes her bride to put back her veil (cf. Sg 4.1). Keep in mind that the verbal root for eye and spring come from the same source, *hayn*, a theme discussed earlier. The bride's eyes resembled that captivating sight of a fountain bubbling up, always the same yet always different. Similarly, the sound of such bubbling water is just as captivating as well as a very soothing sound. Indeed, the bridegroom can truthfully say, "All my springs are in you" (Ps 87.7).

"For they have overcome me:" The verbal root *rahav* means to be fierce. That is to say, the bride's eyes look upon her beloved with a certain fierce intensity which overcomes him. Nevertheless, he can say with the psalmist, "Among those who know me I mention Rahab and Babylon; behold, Philistia and Tyre with Ethiopia—"This one was born there," they say" (Ps 87.4). These foreign peoples, often at war with Israel, God can claim as knowing him. Their devotion so overcomes him with delight that he asks them to turn their eyes from him.

The second part of vs 5 is quite different in character from what we just examined; a similar phrase occurs in Sg 4.1, so refer to that section for some comments. Yet keeping in mind the bridegroom who was overcome by his spouse's beauty that he asks her to turn her gaze away from him, it is not surprising that the swiftness with which she turns causes her hair to wave, hence the current expression. In the paragraph above, Rahab and other foreign peoples come to knowledge of the true God. Such outsiders to Israel may be termed goats, often a pejorative term: "As a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats" (Mt 25.32).

"Like a flock of goats moving down [or appearing from] the slopes of Gilead:" here the goats move down the slopes, whereas 6.5 has them appear from Gilead, not necessarily the slopes of that region.

**6-6: Your teeth are like a flock of ewes which go up from the washing, all of them bear twins, not one among them is barren.**

Even though the bridegroom requests her spouse to turn her eyes away, this does not imply that she has physically moved away from him as we can tell from this verse and from those which follow. The word ewes or *rechalym* derives from the verbal root *rachal* from which also comes the proper name Rachel. With this in mind, we may identify the person of Rachel with the Song's bride. She became Jacob's wife after he had worked for her father Laban for seven years (cf. Gen 29.18).

“Which go up from the washing:” A reference to the cleansing of the ewes after having been sheared, most likely in a river as determined by the verb to go up or here as to go up from, *halah min*. Thus these ewes have a special brightness associated with their naked skin (cf. ‘His belly is as bright ivory,’ Sg 5.14). “Jesus went up from the River Jordan after his baptism or after he was thoroughly immersed in its cleansing waters: And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opened and the Spirit descending upon him like a dove” (Mk 1.10). Note the association of Christ's ascent with the Holy Spirit whose traditional image is that of a (white) dove. The ewes' white color has a parallel in 2Kg 5.14: “So he [Naaman] went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.”

“All of them bear twins:” The verbal root here is *ta'am* as in Sg 4.2, “Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes that have come up from the washing, all of which bear twins.”

#### **6-7: As a piece of pomegranate are your cheeks within your locks.**

Compare this verse with the identical words of Sg 4.3, “Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate,” only here vs 7 lacks “behind your veil.” We may gather from this that the bride has unveiled herself which is why her spouse said in vs 5, “Turn away your eyes from me.” Despite her cheeks being partly shrouded by her locks, the bridegroom is able to get a close enough glimpse at her beauty. We may also assume that these locks of hair concealed her eyes, making them even more attractive and mysterious; they thus resemble veils as in Sg 4.3.

Note a reference to veil in 2Cor 3.18: “And we all with unveiled face beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” Indeed, this verse is true with regard to the bridegroom asking his spouse to turn away her eyes in Sg 6.5; the gaze of one so unveiled beholds the bridegroom's glory and sets in motion an infinite series of transformations.

#### **6-8: There are sixty queens and eighty concubines and virgins without number.**



In 1Kg 11.3 we have an account of the actual number of concubines, etc, in King Solomon's court: "He had seven hundred wives, princesses and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart." It is not the intent to attempt a mystical interpretation of these numbers, simply to continue the practice of examining them from the perspective of verbal roots, provided that this procedure yields anything fruitful for the practice of *lectio divina*. Note that there is a lesser number of queens than concubines, though not by terribly much. However, there are virgins without number.

The function of a queen is to share rule with her husband, King Solomon; their large number signifies his extensive reign. The most notable of these (allegorical) queens is the (historical) Queen of Sheba who came to visit Solomon. She brought with her retinue an enormous amount of gifts, whereas "King Solomon gave to the queen of Sheba all that she desired, whatever she asked besides what was given her by the bounty of King Solomon" (1Kg 10.13). Although the queen brought an amazing amount of gifts and Solomon gave her an even greater amount, she got all that she desired, namely, his wisdom (cf. vs 4). "There was no more spirit in her" (vs 5) being an apt description of her breathlessness.

"The queen of the South will arise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here" (Mt 12.42). Such final judgment is also associated with the men of Nineveh (vs 41). Note that these two distant lands play instrumental roles at divine judgment.

"Eighty concubines:" Such women formed part of a harem and were kept for the king's pleasure. Although we associate concubines with times gone by, they enjoyed a privileged status in the ancient world, often enjoying the rank of royal advisers. Observe that when King David abandoned Jerusalem to his son Absalom, he left ten concubines to keep the house (2Sam 15.16), certainly not as much as attributed to his son Solomon here in the Song of Songs.

"Virgins without number:" despite the actual enumeration of queens and concubines, there is no limit to these *halamoth* which are mentioned in Sg 1.3: "Therefore the maidens love you." As noted there, a *halmah* is a girl of marriageable age, not necessarily a virgin. The indefinitely large number of *halamoth* finds a parallel in Ps 68.25: "The singers in front, the minstrels last, between them maidens playing timbrels."

**6-9: My dove, my undefiled is one; she is the [only] one of her mother, she is the choice [one] of her who bore her. The daughters saw her and blessed her; the queens and the concubines praised her.**

Here the dove is both undefiled (*tamamy*, in the sense of being perfect) and “one of her mother.” I.e., the bride as dove is the only child; no mention is made of her father, just the mother, implying that the bridegroom suffices for this paternal role.

Not only are the qualities of *tamamy* and ‘*echad*’ attributed to the bride, she is the “one of her mother,” that is to say, the bridegroom recognizes in her the same qualities of his own mother to whom reference is made in Sg 3.11: “Behold king Solomon with the crown with which his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals.” Indeed, the bride resembles Eve but in a transformed manner due to her relationship with the bridegroom.

In addition to the above mentioned praises of the bride, her spouse adds the “choice [one] of her who bore her.” The word choice comes from the verbal root *barar*, to cut, implying selection as though related to a sacrifice.

Since the bride is set aside...*barar*...for her spouse alone, it causes great joy for her companions, the daughters; note the lack of Jerusalem as in Sg 1.5,7; 3.5, 10; 5.8.

The second sentence of vs 9 reads, “The daughters saw her and blessed her.” Note that seeing precedes blessing, for they must first recognize the bride as wedded to King Solomon, author of the Song of Songs. To bless derives from the verbal root ‘*ashar*’ examined in Sg 1.1 where the transitional nature of this word was noted; i.e., it is intended to lead from one state to another as the relative pronoun derived from the same root implies.

Finally the queens and the concubines praise her, that is, those sixty queens and eighty concubines of the preceding verse. Both groups are united...share in the oneness (‘*echad*’)...of the bride as dove, and such praise now belongs to both spouses.

**6-10: Who is she who looks forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun and terrible as an army with banners?**

The query here is the same as in Sg 3.6 and 8.5: “Who is that coming up from the wilderness?” One gets the impression that the bride is unacquainted with her spouse’s appearance; more specifically, we have another instance of that dialectic between his presence and absence which forms the dynamics of the Song.

“Who looks forth:” the verb here is *shaqaph*, to lay over, to look forth. One example of the latter: “As the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal, the daughter of Saul, looked out of the window and saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord” (2Sam

6.16). David's joy before the ark as it entered Jerusalem provides a hint of that delight the Song's bride feels upon realizing that her beloved is looking at (*shaqaph*) her from his position in Jerusalem. Despite the bitterness Michal felt towards David, the verb *shaqaph* has an amusing quality about it as in the following: "The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men" (Ps 14.2). Although the context here is serious ("to see if there are any that act wisely, that seek after God"), one gets the impression that God is stealthily peeking from a window in heaven. In a way, a sense of the divine presence is obtained by becoming aware of this divine *shaqaph*; it is not simply a gaze from a distant (heavenly) vantage point but one which communicates his loving attention flavored with an element of humor. Another reference demonstrates the active nature of God's *shaqaph*: "And in the morning watch the Lord in the pillar of fire and of cloud looked down upon the host of the Egyptians and discomfited the host of the Egyptians" (Ex 14.24).

In the Song, the verb *shaqaph* is associated with morning, *shachar*, which also means black as in "I am black but comely" (1.5). Such darkness suggests the time prior to daybreak, the period when watchmen are anxious for dawn: "My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning" (Ps 130.6). Here another word is used for morning, *boqer*, from the verbal root *baqar*, to cleave open, as in ploughing a field or the action of a cloven foot animal breaking up the earth.

The second quality of the bride's loveliness is fair (*yaphah*, first encountered in Sg 1.8, 'fairest among women') as the moon. Note the progression here: morning, moon and sun. Often a full moon appears largest and most distinct just before sunrise on the western horizon. Moon (*levanah*) derives from *lavan* (to be white) from which come frankincense and Lebanon, two words encountered earlier in the Song: "Until the day breathes and the shadows flee, I will go to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense" (4.6), and "King Solomon made himself a palanquin from the wood of Lebanon" (3.9). The former (hill of frankincense) implies that the bride, prior to sunrise, goes to this hill which is *levonah* or white. Similarly, Solomon's palanquin which comes up from the wilderness (3.6) is composed of wood from Lebanon or Lebanon; i.e., the palanquin is noted for its bright or whitish color.

The third quality the bridegroom attributes to his spouse is clear as the sun: *bar*, a word encountered in vs 9, "she is the choice [one] of her who bore her." Such clearness implies moral purity as in Ps 73.1: "Truly God is good to the upright, to those who are pure in heart. "This clarity also applies to Christ: "In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth issued a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength" (Rev 1.16). Surely the bridegroom perceives this same full strength in his spouse's face.

The brilliance of Christ's face in the context Revelation finds completion by the Song's words, "terrible as an army with banners," first encountered in Sg 6.4 above. This army may be taken as the angels of Revelation who carry out Christ's commands: "the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven lamp stands are the seven churches (vs 20)." Note the reference to brightness: stars and lamp stands which are associated with the seven churches.

**6-11: I went down to the garden of nuts to see the fruits of the valley and to see whether the vine flourished and the pomegranates budded.**

Now we have the bride describing her descend to the garden, *gan*, as in Sg 4.12 & 16 as well as 5.1. These references are from the bridegroom's mouth; here in Sg 6.11 we have the bride making a statement with regard to the garden. Since she has already been called a garden, her going down may be considered a going inward, that is, an interior gaze to see what kind of fruit is present there. She discovers nuts or 'egoz, the only biblical mention of this word. A nut represents fertility or the potential for future growth in the garden. Although the man and woman were banished from the garden of Eden, they nevertheless carried with them a hope of restoration.

Next the bride wishes to see the fruits of the valley; we may assume that the valley is also located in the garden. The (unused) verbal root for fruits is 'avav, to germinate, to be verdant, and more accurately means greenness. This unripe condition is a step closer to fruition than the nuts associated with the garden; note that it is a garden of nuts. Such 'eby or fruits are located in the valley or *nachal*, from the verbal root meaning to give for a possession, to inherit as well as stream. A valley implies the lowest place in a given region where one would expect to discover flowing water where the bride expects to find her beloved. By so raising his head of finest gold (Sg 5.11), the bride will clearly recognize him. Indeed, here in the lowest and most secret place of the garden the bride finds the fountain of wisdom which is to her a gushing stream (cf. Prov 18.4).

To see whether the vine flourished: We may assume that this vine is located in the valley or *nachal* and is watered there. A vine is symbolic of fertility, the source of wine, and Christ borrows this image as applied to himself: "I am the true vine and my Father is the vine dresser" (Jn 15.1). A few verses later (5) Christ says "neither can you [bear fruit] unless you abide in me," that is, in the Song's context, unless a person goes down with the bride to the garden where this vine and vine dresser are located.

The bride wants to see whether this vine has flourished, *parach*, or as Ps 92.13 says, "They are planted in the house of the Lord, they flourish in the courts of our God." Such courts are the equivalent of the bride's garden.

“Whether...the pomegranates budded:” We encountered this fruit in Sg 4.13: “Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates with all choicest fruits” and in 6.7: “Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate behind your veil.” Certainly the beloved (*dod*) or her spouse calls her a pomegranate due to her ruddy complexion, the same characteristic ascribed to David in 1Sam 16.12. Indeed, when Samuel recognizes David, the Lord said to him “Arise, anoint him; for this is he” (vs 12). That is to say, David budded or came to fruition as king to succeed Saul whom God rejected.

**6-12: Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Ammi-nabib.**

Because the Hebrew text is uncertain, this is generally considered to be the most difficult verse in the Song of Songs. “Or ever I was aware” (*lo yadaty*) reads “I did not know” or a better reading in English, “before I knew.” A clue to its understanding may be found in conjunction with Sg 1.8, “If you do know, fairest among women.” Such knowledge may be applied to realization of oneself, that is, of the bride being espoused to her husband. The dialectic of his presence and absence which form the Song’s essence is the basis of the bride’s discovery not only of him but of her election to be his spouse.

This alteration of presence and absence is so bewildering that the bride could only exclaim my soul made me like the chariots of Ammi-nabib. That is, her soul or *nephesh* as her deepest self and as transcending her normal self awareness is alone able to keep track of the bridegroom’s comings and goings. Perhaps a suitable reference may be found in Elisha’s exclamation when Elijah was taken up into heaven, “‘My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!’ And he saw him no more” (2Kg 2.12). Applied to the Song, these chariots represent her eagerness to ascend and be with her spouse, that is, to ascend from the garden of the previous verse into which she had descended.

The chariots are associated with the non-historical person of Ammi-nabib which translates as prince of my people, that is, the bridegroom as ruler of Israel to which the heavenly chariots of 2Kg 2.12 belong. A prince or ruler usually proceeded his subjects or army in a chariot as Joseph in Egypt: “And he [Pharaoh] made him ride in his second chariot” (Gen 41.43).

## Chapter Seven

**7-1: Return, return, O Shulamite, return, return, that we may look upon you. What will you see in the Shulamite as the dance of armies?**

This is 7.1 in the Hebrew text.

The bridegroom utters these words which begin chapter seven in the Hebrew text, thereby commencing a series of descriptions of his spouse. Note the four occurrences of return which indicate urgency on the bridegroom's part to have her ascend to him like Elijah in the heavenly chariots mentioned at the close of chapter six, the very same chariots which he sends for his bride.

Such a bidding to return or *shuv* implies retracing of the bride's steps to the point from which she had departed. It bears parallel with her self knowledge: "Or if ever I was aware" (6.12) and "If you do not know, fairest among women" (1.8) mentioned above. At this advanced stage in the Song of Songs when the bride has experienced numerous appearances and privations of her beloved, these are welcome words indeed for they indicate that the goal is not far off. She finds consolation in the psalmist's words, "Return (*shuvy*), O my soul, to your rest" (Ps 116.17). Although this *shuv* is comparable to rest (*manuach*), we should keep in mind the fact that this is not common repose in the sense of inactivity. It is rest only insofar as no analogy can be found on the natural plane of place-to-place movement.

The purpose of this four-fold bidding the bride to return is that "we may look upon you." Such a look is not simply a detached gaze but one by which the bridegroom creates his spouse in an ongoing manner, that is, through love.

This is the only instance in the Song of Songs when the bridegroom calls his spouse a Shulamite which may be a female form of the name Solomon, the Song's author. While not accurately based in fact, this interpretation may shed light on why the bridegroom says that "we may look upon you." I.e., the we implies kinship between the two spouses as in "You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride" (4.9) where the bridegroom calls her by two apparently contradictory terms, sister (that is, Shulamite) and bride.

"As the dance of armies:" The word for dance, *mechulah*, derives from *chul* whose basic meaning is to twist, to turn, an action which seems appropriate for a dance as in Ps 149.3: "Let them praise his name with dancing" and "Then Miriam, the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and dancing" (Ex 15.20).

Mention of armies (*machanyim*) gives rise to the image of two maneuvering forces on the battlefield which appear to dance when viewed from a distance. More specifically, *machanah* refers to an encampment whether of soldiers or of tribes. Perhaps it is this latter image the bridegroom has in mind in her progression...her encampments...or ever

growing proximity to him as she “is being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory [i.e., an ‘encampment’] to another “(2Cor 3.18). With this passage in mind, it is not difficult to see it in terms of Israel’s progress in the desert, a classical image of progression in the spiritual life first developed by Origen, second century. However, keep in mind that a camp refers to a nomadic people which has settled down for the night after a day’s traveling; it thus suggests to night, a time of being at rest.

**7-2: How beautiful are your feet with sandals, O prince’s daughter! The joints of your thighs are like jewels, the work of the hands of a craftsman.**

Reference to the bride’s feet (*pehamay*) is a natural consequence to the preceding verse with its four-fold command, “return.” The verbal root is *paham* whose fundamental meaning is to make, to strike, hence, feet strike the ground in their forward motion. This verbal root suggests eagerness in approaching the bridegroom: “Keep my steps according to your promise and let no iniquity get dominion over me” (Ps 119.133). Furthermore, the bridegroom is aware of how clean are her feet: “I have bathed my feet (regel), how could I soil them” (Sg 5.3)?

Note that the verse says “feet with sandals,” that is, they are shod, not bare, which makes for better running towards him. Surely the bride in her zeal disregards God’s command to Moses, “Do not come near; put of your sandals from your feet for the place on which you are standing is holy ground” (Ex 3.5). It should also be observed that the bride is advancing, not stationary, like Moses.

The bridegroom calls his spouse prince’s daughter, *bath-nadyv*, with *nadyv* having the alternate meaning of voluntary. This latter instance seems appropriate for the Song insofar as there is no trace in it as to the bride’s innate nobility; she is admirable by reason of her spouse’s attention and is quite content with an awareness of this fact. Furthermore, the bride is willing (*nadyv*) to acknowledge his dependance upon her beloved.

The second sentence adds further vivid words to describe the bride’s capacity for speedily hastening to her beloved. Joint or *chamuq* derives from *chamaq*, to go around as in Sg 5.6, “I opened to my beloved but my beloved had withdrawn and was gone.” With this in mind, we may say that the bride used these *chamuqy* in pursuit of her spouse as he withdrew from her presence. They are attached to her thighs, *yereky*; this word can also refer to the inmost part of a house as in Ps 128.3: “Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house”. Furthermore, this word is found in Sg 3.8: “All girt with swords and expert in war, each with his sword at his thigh against alarms by night.” Thus she is prepared to run after her spouse like a warrior.



Such joints are like jewels, *chaly*, from the verbal root *chalah* (to be polished, to be pained, as in Sg 2.5), “For I am sick with love.” Again, the bride’s sickness compels her to hasten after the beloved; the loveliness of her knees (for most likely that is what joints refer in conjunction with thighs) flash in the light as she runs towards him.

“The work of the hands of a craftsman:” Obviously the handiwork refers to the bride’s joints (i.e., knees) which grab her spouse’s attention. Craftsman or ‘*aman* derives from the verbal root ‘*aman*, to sustain, to support, from which we get amen. Obviously knees support the thighs and hence the rest of the body so they must be strong yet flexible; their being analogous to work of a craftsman is thus appropriate. Prov 8.30 contains a variation of ‘*aman*: “then I was beside him like a master workman” with the word ‘*amon* which can also mean a little child.

**7-3: Your navel is like a round goblet not lacking liquor; your belly is a heap of wheat set about with lilies.**

Note the progression of the bridegroom’s description starting from the bride’s feet in vs 2 and proceeding upwards to her head and stature, vs 7. *Navel* may be called the center of the belly which was described earlier with regard to the bridegroom in Sg 5.14, “His belly is as bright ivory overlaid with sapphires.”

In Sg 7.3 the bridegroom compares his spouse’s *navel* to a round goblet or ‘*agan* which is found in Ex 24.6 as a container related to sacrifice: “Moses took half the blood and put it in basins and half the blood he threw against the altar.” Note that this act was done early in the morning at the foot of the mountain [Sinai], vs 4. The time of day is significant because often the Bible relates encounters with God either at night, evening or at dawn.

The goblet’s round (*sahar*) lacks no liquor, that is, *chasar*; note the play on words, *chasar* and *sahar*. Liquor or *mezeg* more specifically means mixed wine, i.e., not pure wine but perhaps spiced with various herbs and so forth.

“Your belly is a heap of wheat:” *Beten* also means womb as in Ps 139.13: “For you formed my inward parts, you knitted me together in my mother’s womb.” Thus *beten* implies a kind of hiddenness, of protection whose exterior color resembles that of a heap of wheat, *harimah*, as in Rt 3.7: And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. “Then she [Ruth] came softly and uncovered his feet and lay down.” Perhaps it is this image the bridegroom has in mind when describing his beloved or more specifically, Ruth’s coming softly or *lut* which means to cover over. Wheat or *chitah* suggests grains waving in the fields, perhaps alluding to the moving or heaving of the

bride's belly in desire for her beloved. Use of *chitah* fulfills what the psalmist says, "He fills you the finest of wheat" (Ps 147.14).

The golden nature of wheat in a field is further enhanced by the words, set about with lilies, *sug*, which also means to turn back, usually in a negative sense. Again, we have an image of protection, of keeping the bride's belly for her spouse alone. The walls here are lilies, a word encountered several times thus far in the Song, and act both as decoration and protection. This verse gives fuller meaning to "He pastures his flock among the lilies" (Sg 2.16). Note that the bridegroom uses lilies as food not so much for himself but for his flock which are those faithful to him and who are worthy to pass the barrier, as it were, of lilies on the bride's belly.

**7-4: Your two breasts are like two young roes which are twins.**

This verse duplicates exactly Sg 4.5 with the exception of the last few words: "Your breasts are like two young roes which are twins that feed among the lilies." At this advanced stage of the Song, the bride has no need for her breasts to feed among the lilies, that is, those lilies which vs 3 says surround her spouse's belly. Perhaps omission of these words indicate that her immature breasts (young roes) have developed or matured to such a point that there is no more demand for them to issue milk.

**7-5: Your neck is as a tower of ivory, your eyes like the pools in Heshbon by the gate of Bath-rabbim. Your nose is like a tower of Lebanon overlooking Damascus.**

The opening words of this verse parallel those also uttered by the bridegroom in 4.4: "Your neck is like the tower (*migdal*) of David built for an arsenal." This does not preclude the tower of David being made of ivory which is emphasized here, a fact keeping in line with the general theme of brightness discussed in the past few verses. Such a dazzling landmark can be seen all around. For another example of an ivory structure, see Ps 45.8: "From ivory palaces stringed instruments make you glad." This verse is set within the context of an ode for a royal wedding and bears a close relationship with the Song of Songs.

"Pools in Heshbon:"The word for pool (*berekah*) derives from the verbal root *barak*, to bless from which also comes *berek*, knee. The general idea is that one kneels to take water as well as to receive a blessing. This rather charming image is applied to the bride's eyes, *heyney*, which as noted earlier, connotes fountains, another reference to water. *Berekah* implies a man made supply of water, whereas *heyneyn* can have a similar meaning or refer to a natural source; however, the latter is usually associated with a bubbling source as opposed to the stationary nature of a pool. Note that these pools have a specific location, Heshbon,

an area noted for its fine water and first mentioned in Num 21.26: “For Heshbon was the city of Sihon the king of the Amorites who had fought against the former king of Moab and taken all his land out of his hand as far as the Arnon.”

An even more specific location is given to the pools of Heshbon, “by the gates of Bath-rabbim,” literally, in the gate of the daughter of many, and which lacks a historical location. Anything situated by a gate implies entrance to and from a city where watchmen can keep an eye on people going in and out. At first one would get the impression that a pool by a gate is not the most secure spot in case of an attack or siege, but it makes sense in light of Jn 10.9: “I am the door; if anyone enters by me he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.” We might add, and will find the pools in Heshbon which are located just inside the gate. The bride is indeed an exemplar of those wishing to follow in her footsteps in pursuit of the bridegroom.

Next the bridegroom makes allusion to his spouse’s nose which resembles a tower of Lebanon. This is the first time reference is made to her nose; in 4.4 we have her neck like the tower of David mentioned just above. The connection between nose and Lebanon bring to mind the faculty of smell. We have seen that cedars, presumably from Lebanon, are first mentioned in 1.17: “The beams of our house are cedars.” They yield a distinct odor and signify incorruptibility. Thus the bride’s nose resembles a tower of Lebanon, that is, composed of indestructible cedar wood.

The location of this tower is overlooking Damascus, that is, it is suggestive of Mount Hermon: “It [unity of brothers] is like the dew of Hermon which falls on the mountains of Zion” (Ps 133.3). Damascus is often associated with Israel’s enemies, so the tower is symbolic of keeping watch over this area which poses a threat from the north.

**7-6: The head upon you is like Carmel and the hair of your head is like purple; the king is held in the tresses.**

Carmel is noted for its fertile area and is a promontory which overlooks the sea. It was here that the prophet Elijah had a dramatic confrontation with the Israelites gathered by King Ahab (cf. 1Kg 18.20-40). Although the physical mountain and adjacent area are what the bridegroom has in mind, Carmel’s association with Elijah could not be far from his mind. I.e., the bride has the same spirit as this famous prophet and, her presence cannot but help remind him of this man. The word Carmel itself means a garden as in Is 32.15: and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field. Perhaps it was such fruitfulness that the bridegroom had in mind when beholding his spouse’s hair, possibly from the top of Mount Carmel which gives way to a view of the plain below.

“The hair of your head is like purple:” The verbal root for hair is *dalal*, to hang down, to be weak. Thus the notion implied here is the actual hanging of the bride’s hair. The noun for purple is ‘*argaman*, a dye obtained from a type of shell fish. We encountered this word in Sg 3.10: “The covering of it [chariot] purple.” The color purple represents royalty as we find in Rev 17.4: “The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet and bedecked with gold and jewels and pearls.” Perhaps the bride’s hair flowed down to cover her body like the purple garment of Revelation.

“The king is held in the tresses:” We may assume that the king here is Solomon who is enthralled by his bride, although it is he who is uttering this verse. Sometimes when overcome by great beauty, there is a tendency to speak of oneself in the third person, this being a suggested interpretation. The word for tresses (*rahat*) means to run, to flow, and from it is derived the notion of a carved ceiling as in Sg 1.17: “The beams of our house are cedar and our rafters of fir.” Although it is unclear from the context, such tresses may be taken as the bride’s hair (i.e., it is on her head much like the rafters are on the ceiling).

#### **7-7: How fair and how pleasant are you, O love, for delights!**

Here we find a simple expression of delight where the bridegroom uses three familiar words we have seen on numerous occasions in the Song, fair (*yaphah*), pleasant (*naham*) and love (*ahavah*). Keeping in mind that he was caught in her tresses in verse 6, this implied embrace gives rise to the exclamation of this current verse.

“For delights” (*batahanugym*): the verbal root being *hanag*, to live softly, and is generally considered a derogatory term. For positive use, refer to Ps 37.11, “But the meek shall possess the land and delight themselves in abundant prosperity.” And Is 66.11: “that you may drink deeply with delight from the abundance of her glory.” To date we have seen every type of analogy imaginable the bridegroom uses to describe his bride; it seems as though he is running out of comparisons and utters this brief note of joy partly out of joy and partly out of desperation in that he can find no further words to describe her loveliness.

#### **7-8: I said I will climb the palm tree. I will take hold of its boughs. Now also your breasts shall be as clusters of the vine and the smell of your nose like apples.**

Here we have the bridegroom addressing himself (‘I said’) as if to show determination in what he is about to do. Note that the actions to which he is referring (climb and take hold of) are in the future; i.e., he has not yet accomplished them. This image of ascending a tree appears a thinly veiled reference to sexual intercourse which continues in the next few verses; with reference to the palm tree the text reads “in (ve-) the palm tree.” The word

used here, *tamar*, is from the same verbal root of another word, *tymaroth*, as found in Sg 3.6: “Who is this who comes up from the wilderness like pillars of smoke?” Such trees are generally found in an oasis as in Ex 15.27: “Then they came to Elim where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees.” The proper name Tamar derives from the same verbal root; Tamar was the sister of Absalom, David’s son, whom Amnon raped (cf. 1Sam 13).

The Septuagint for palm tree, *phoenix*, is the same word for the phoenix, the mythical bird which died in the fire only to rise again, and which became a symbol of Christ’s death and resurrection.

Once the bridegroom has ascended (*halah*) the palm tree, he intends to take hold of its boughs. Keeping in mind the Septuagint use of *phoenix*, we may say that the bridegroom is going to grab these branches and strew them at the feet of Jesus upon his entry into Jerusalem: “So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him crying ‘Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel’” (Jn 12.13). Boughs or *sansynim* comes from a closely related verbal root, *salal*, to move to and fro, so the idea of boughs swaying on the top of a palm tree is clear. A use of this verb may be found in Prov 4.8: “Prize her [wisdom] highly and she will exalt you.” That is to say, take hold of her and she will exalt you or enable you to ascend the bride...the palm tree...much like the bridegroom.

The bride’s “breasts shall be as clusters of the vine:” note the future tense; when the bride ascends the palm tree, he does not find his spouse’s breasts putting forth clusters as though she had not yet attained maturity. We saw such clusters (*eshkol*) in Sg 1.14: a cluster of camphire, only then it was the bride describing her spouse. It was these *eshkol* that Moses’ spies brought back to the Israelite camp after having spied the land: “And they came to the Valley of Eshkol and cut down from there a branch with a single cluster of grapes, and they carried it on a pole between two of them” (Num 13.23). Note the proper name Eshkol and cluster being the same word in Hebrew. With this verse in mind, we may say that the bridegroom refers to his bride’s breasts as these two clusters, so big that two men could barely carry them on a pole.

“And the smell of your nose like apples:” We encountered the word nose several verses earlier (5) when the groom compared it to a tower of Lebanon overlooking Damascus. Keep in mind the smell (*reyach*) is used in Sg 2.13: and the vines are in blossom, giving forth fragrance. In the verse under consideration, the bride’s nose itself seems to exude an odor; the bridegroom does not seem to be referring to her capacity to smell. Keeping in mind the image of a tower of Lebanon which is a lofty structure and one surely to catch attention by reason of its prominence, the nose draws attention by reason of its smell, that is, the odor it

emits. And the smell which it exudes is like apples (*tepuch*) as in Sg 2.5: “comfort me with apples, for I am sick with love.”

**7-10: And the roof of your mouth is like the best wine for my beloved that goes down sweetly, causing the lips of those who are asleep to speak.**

Implied here is a fulfillment of Sg 1.2, “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth” although reference to actual kissing is absent. The image evoked is the bridegroom inserting his tongue into the bride’s mouth, rather, the roof of her mouth, *chek* more precisely being the internal part of the mouth or palate as in Sg 5.16: “His mouth is most sweet.” This *chek* is compared to best wine, *keyeyn hatov*. Sg 1.2: “For your love is better than wine.” In the former verse the bride speaks of love transcending wine; in the latter her spouse compares her palate to best wine. Note that he adds such wine is for my beloved. Who is the beloved? It seems as though the groom were referring to someone else (NB: *dody* is used of the male spouse in the Song but seems transferred to the bride in this instance). Be this at it may, the roof of the bride’s mouth, like best wine, is intended for her but only realized through her spouse’s words. Perhaps the bridegroom’s kisses simulate her *chek*, thereby causing intoxication which is implied in the words which follow.

“That goes down sweetly” (*lemysharym*): the verbal root here is *yashar*, to be straight, and connotes a sense of justice. In Ps 119.103 (also quoted with reference to palate or *chek* in Sg 5.16) we read, “How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!” As observed with regard to that verse, *chek* connotes the sense of taste, a suitable image with best wine.

The concluding words of vs 10 seem to shift attention away from the two spouses to those who are asleep yet appears to be a general statement concerning the bride’s palate or *chek*. Again, keep in mind that *chek* is closely related to the sense of taste, it or her capacity for tasting has the unique ability to make those asleep or intoxicated by the Holy Spirit to speak. The most obvious reference is Pentecost: “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2.4). For remarks bearing upon this notion of sleep as a type of ecstasy, refer to those remarks with regard to Sg 5.10 (‘How much better is your love than wine’).

**7-11: I am my beloved’s and his desire is toward me.**

“I am my beloved’s” resembles Sg 6.3 only there it adds “and my beloved is mine.” Nevertheless, we have another occurrence of *dod* for beloved, a term generally associated with the bridegroom. Indeed, his love or *dod* is “better than wine” (1.2). Compare the expression of mutual love (his desire is toward me) with Gen 3.16: “yet your desire shall be

for your husband.” Both verses have for desire *teshuqah*, from the verbal root *shoq*, to run, to desire, which was noted with regard to Sg 3.2: “I will rise now and go about the city, in the streets and in the squares” where street comes from this same verbal root. The Genesis reference occurs under a judgment just before Adam and Eve were expelled from Eden. We find the same noun, *teshuqah*, with regard to Cain: “sin is couching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it” (Gen 4.7). The special beauty of the Song of Songs is its ability to take this urge...this *teshuqah*, which may be translated into the Greek *eros* and which permeates its verses...and transform it into that divine love represented by the two spouses.

**7-12: Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field. Let us lodge in the villages.**

In this verse the bride urges her spouse, her *dod*, to go forth into the field. There is no specific reference point where we may locate the two lovers, only if we trace as far back as 6.11 when the bride went down to the nut orchard. However, the Song is a series of love poems which does not follow a logical progression in the modern sense. We would do better to see this exhortation “Come” as an invitation to continue their love affair in a place away from prying eyes. Field or *sadeh* differs from a vineyard or cultivated area and implies a general flat area which may or may not be inhabited, yet in the Song’s context, *sadeh* suggests withdrawal from inhabited areas. There is not specific mention of what the two spouses intend to do in the field, only that the bride exhorts her beloved to accompany her. Immediately there comes to mind something like an elopement or a secret, illicit sexual encounter.

This first sentence brings to mind Christ’s withdrawal into the desert to be tempted by the devil (Mt 4.1), an event which occurred right after his baptism in the Jordan. Keeping in mind this image which has several precedents such as Moses, Elijah and John the Baptist, we may say that the two spouses have left the Jordan River.

“Let us lodge in the villages” appears contradictory to the two spouses going into the field. One way of handling this is that they stay in both places, first the field and then the villages. In her excitement the bride utters what may seem to outside observers conflicting statements, but to anyone in love like this, any contradiction is irrelevant. To lodge or *lun* suggests continued residence as opposed to “Let us go into the field.” One example of this is Ps 25.13: “He himself shall abide in prosperity, and his children shall possess the land.” Thus their time in the field appears limited, not the place where the two spouses wish to deepen their love affair. In brief, the field may be akin to their taking a honeymoon before settling down in the villages.



**7-13: Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine flourishes, whether the tender grape appears and the pomegranates bud forth. There will I give you my loves.**

This verse continues the bride's request to her spouse to move from their current location. It may also be seen as moving first from the field, then to the villages and finally to the vineyards. Certainly by now the reader will have noted the important role a garden plays in the Song of Songs, and this verse is no exception. "Let us get up early," *shekam* meaning also means to do earnestly. One reference with this verb is Ex 24.4: "And And he (Moses) rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel." These pillars form a boundary about the vineyards, marking them off as sacred territory. Note the plural form, "vineyards," symbolizing abundance and variety of fruit as in Sg 1.14: "in the vineyards of En-gedi," so we may assume that the two spouses go there, the fountain of the kid. This time of *shekam*, of early morning, refers to that period just before dawn when darkness still prevails yet the first streaks of light are appearing. Most likely there is still enough light for them to make their way to En-gedi, that fertile place in the Judean desert noted for its palm trees.

Next the bride mentions a group of three fruits: vine, tender grape, pomegranates, all of which are found in En-gedi or in the vineyards. If the vine flourishes or *parach*, as in Sg 6.11 which has the same expression regarding vineyards, the bride can expect the tender grape or *semadar*; cf. Sg 2.13 & 15 for the same word where all three verses have the singular form as opposed to the plural.

"My dove, my undefiled is one" (Sg 6.9). We may compare this oneness (*echad*) to that of *semadar* which highlights its special nature.

Pomegranates were discussed several times as in Sg 6.11, symbolic of the bride's ruddy or healthy complexion. At this point of the bride's request to her spouse, that is, of going to the vineyards, she is not clear whether or not the pomegranates, let alone the vine or tender grape, have come to fruition. It seems that the journey there by the two spouses (early in the morning) is cause enough for their joy; such is the special time of day which takes attention away from any desired results of the journey; to rise at that time is sufficient for them, and by focusing their attention on it they will achieve results exceeding their expectation. This is implied by the words, "There will I give you my love," the real goal of their quest. Note the word for love, *dod*, which the Song generally applies to the bridegroom but is now transferred to the bride.

**7-13: The mandrakes give a smell, and at our gates are all manners of pleasant [fruits], new and old, which I have laid up for you, O my beloved.**

“The mandrakes give a smell:” This plant or *dody* are related to *dod*, love as often pointed out in this document. They are traditionally used as a love potion as recounted in Gen 30.14-16. Such plants yield a smell or *reyach*, a now familiar word related to *ruach*, spirit. Because the mandrakes give this *reyach*, they signify that love...*dod*...is wafted through the air by means of this *reyach* which is sufficient to intoxicate both spouses.

“At our gates are all manners of pleasant [fruits]:” note the location, gates, signifying entrance to the vineyards of the previous verse, the vineyards of En-gedi. Perhaps these *megadym* which mean something very precious or noble are intended as decorations and are found in Sg 4.13: “Your plants are an orchard of pomegranates with pleasant fruits.” They are new and old, that is, they include the full range of fruits. The adjective old derives from the verbal root *yashan* which also means to sleep, perhaps inferring the onset of death. On the other hand, the adjective new derives from the same verbal root as the new moon, *chodesh*.

“Which I have laid up for you, O my beloved:” These various phases of *megadym* the bride offers her spouse; i.e., she has laid them up or *tsaphan*, a word encountered with regard to Sg 4.16, “Awake, O north wind.” The fundamental meaning of this word is to hide, to conceal, so the bride has hidden such choice produce from prying eyes and devotes them strictly for her beloved. Note two uses of the same verbal root in one verse, *dody* for mandrakes and *dod* for love.

## Chapter Eight

**8-1: O that you were as my brother who sucked the breasts of my mother! If I met you outside I would kiss you, yes, I would not be despised.**

The optative “O that” (my) suggests intense longing, of a desire unfulfilled yet with the possibility of being so fulfilled as in Num 11.29: “Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets, that the Lord would put his spirit upon them!” and Lk 12.49: “I came to cast fire upon the earth, and would that it were already kindled!” Here the optative used by the bride towards her spouse is with the intent that he be as “my brother,” that is, having the same mother. Implied is, of course, the same father, yet emphasis is upon the former, implying her nourishing role (sucked the breasts). The bride’s words express a unity, the same type of unity Christ mentions: “For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother” (Mt 12.50).

“Who sucked the breasts of my mother:” These words tie into the concluding observation regarding the Father’s will when Christ said, “Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the

breasts that you sucked!’ But he said, ‘Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it’ (Lk 11.27-8).

“If I met you outside:” In Sg 3.1-4 the bride wanders the city streets in search for her beloved. These words of 8.1 suggest that she is inside, that is, inside her house from which place she expresses an unrealized desire. *Chuts* or outside suggests the streets and avenues of a city. Given the bride’s frequent, intense expressions of desire throughout the Song of Songs, *chuts* suggests an aspiration to exit herself, that is, go into ecstasy, and lose self-awareness in her spouse’s presence. It is akin to Sg 1.2, “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth” which communicates a yearning yet to be consummated. “Like Wisdom she cries aloud in the street (*chuts*, Prov 1.20), I would kiss you.”

“I would not be despised:” The boldness of her words as she cries in the street exceeds any shame or fear of ridicule by others there. Her courage is echoed through the Greek word *parresia*, freedom of speech usually associated with citizens of a city state and which St. Paul applies to the Christian’s relationship with God: “In whom [Christ] we have boldness and confidence of access through our faith in him” (Eph 3.12). Again, keep in mind that the words of Sg 8.1 do not express something that has been realized; in the context of love, they demonstrate the bride’s love for her spouse whether or not he is present.

**8-2: I would lead you and bring you into my mother’s house who would instruct me. I would cause you to drink of spiced wine of the juice of my pomegranate.**

Again, more words in line with the previous verse where the bride addresses her beloved whose presence (or absence) is immaterial; she is giving to what is deep in her heart and utters these passionate words regardless of who may hear them much like Prov 1.20 where “Wisdom cries aloud in the street.”

“I would lead you:” This verb derives from *nahag* whose fundamental meaning is to pant, to sigh, and fits in well here with the bride’s revelation of her desire; such leading is frequently associated with a flock of animals. “My mind still guiding me with wisdom” (Ecl 2.3): an example of this *nahag* by which the Preacher wishes to be counseled which is enhanced by Ps 48.14 which uses the same verbal root: “This is God, our God forever and ever. He will be our guide forever.”

Such guiding or *nahag* has a goal, namely, my mother’s house, which may be taken as the Israelite nation of which the bride is an exemplar and which Christian tradition saw exemplified in the Virgin Mary. Even more specifically, this house of which the bride speaks can be the temple at Jerusalem. Compare “mother’s house” with “Father’s house:” “Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house” (Lk 2.49)?

The verbal root *raqach* for spiced wine appears in Sg 5.13, “His cheeks are as a bed of spices yielding fragrance.” Thus *raqach* implies both the sense of smell and taste and in the Song’s context, comes from the juice of my pomegranate. Note the singular form of this fruit which belongs to the bride and anyone else. We encountered pomegranate several times, but here the bride specifies its juice or *hasas* which represents its essence. The prophet Joel speaks of this *hasas* in the context of the day of the Lord: “And in that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk” (3/4.18). Such dripping similarly applies to the bride’s pomegranate, i.e., her cheeks: “Your cheeks are like halves of a [that is, a single] pomegranate” (Sg 4.3). We saw the verb *nataph*, to drip, in Sg 4.11 (drop as the honeycomb) and 5.5 (‘my hands dropped with myrrh’); here as in 8.2 the essence of a thing is implied, that which is most precious.

**8-3: Would that his left hand were under my head, and that his right hand embraced me!**

This is the last verse of the Song which contains the bride’s unfulfilled longing for her lover (would that) and where she yearns for a full and final embrace which she had experienced with various degrees of success thus far. Note that in Sg 2.6 she expresses a similar desire; shortly afterwards she adds, that “you stir not up nor awaken love until he pleases.” Still the bride awaits until he pleases at this stage of the Song, yet another demonstration of the lover’s inclination first to reveal himself and then withdraw, thereby creating in her perplexity followed by a renewed longing to seek him out.

**8-4: I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that you do not stir up nor awake love until he pleases.**

This verse is similar to Sg 2.7 which parallels the sequence of 8.3, only here the gazelles or the hinds of the field are missing. Instead, the bride simply adjures the daughters of Jerusalem. It comes after several instances of would that and expresses a wish for the bridegroom to do what he wants. Thus there are no animals representing swiftness which apply to his propensity to come and go quickly; the bride has had ample experience of this and now has achieved a certain familiarity with his comings and goings, knowing that they are characteristic of “him whom my soul loves” (Sg 3.3).

**8-5: Who is this coming up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved? I raised you up under the apple tree. There your mother brought you forth; there she brought you forth who loves you.**

“Who is this coming up from the wilderness:” the same words as Sg 3.6, only here we have the last ascent of the bridegroom. These verses which resemble earlier ones of the Song

serve to recapitulate its main themes and to remind the bride that her search for the beloved is unending. At first, they indicate that the bride is surprised, even shocked, because someone else is leaning upon her beloved, that is, the bridegroom seems to be carrying on a love affair with someone other than her. Such leaning or *raphaq* is the only use of this verb in the Bible; it suggests John at the Last Supper who was lying close to the breast of Jesus (cf. Jn 13.23), a position which possibly aroused the other Apostles' envy. This incident is recalled in Jn 21.20 ff. when Peter asks Jesus about John: "If it is my will that he remains until I come, what is that to you" (vs 22)? Regardless of who may be leaning upon the Song's beloved, perhaps these words pertaining to John can be taken as a deliberate ploy on the groom's part to test his lover's response. Furthermore, John is the one physically closest to Jesus here, so he is a candidate for the person accompanying the bridegroom coming up from the wilderness.

With the image of Mary and John in mind, we may apply to them the bride's words, "I raised you up under the apple tree" to Christ's intent on the cross prior to his death when he handed over Mary to John's care. Such is the tree of life or in the Song's words, the apple tree. Indeed, "As an apple tree among the trees of the wood [i.e., the cross of Christ], so is my beloved among young men" (Sg 2.3).

The verb for raised up is *hur*, first found in Sg 2.8, "that you stir not up nor awaken love until it pleases" which are repeated in 8.4. It is precisely under this apple tree or the cross that "your mother [i.e., Mary] brought you forth...raised up" ...[i.e., John].

"There your mother brought you forth:" the word for this birth derives from *chaval* whose fundamental meaning is to bind (as a pledge), to spoil. Implied is the twisting and turning of a child exiting the womb. Keeping in mind the two paragraphs above, the newly formed relationship between Mary and John was both a birth and a pledge for the future growth and fulfillment of the Church. Verse 5 concludes with a reiteration of what was just said, "there she brought you forth who loves you," words reminiscent of Elizabeth's words to Mary, "Blessed is the fruit of your womb" (Lk 1.42)!

Note the second time "there" is used as if the bride wished to emphasize the importance of under the apple tree. Indeed, by reason of her position under Christ's cross, Mary is a symbol who corrected Eve's disobedience when she ate from the tree in the midst of the garden (Gen 3.3 & cf. vs 6). Mary's eyes were opened (vs 7) but in a way quite different from our first parents. The words of Christ ('behold your son,' etc) now became clear to her.

**8-6: Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm. For love is strong as death, jealousy is cruel as the grave. Its coals are coals of fire, a most vehement flame.**

Here the bride wishes her spouse to bestow a token of his love, that is, “a seal upon your heart.” A *chotam* or seal was often in the form of a signet ring worn around the neck, thereby hanging on one’s breast which appears the case in this verse (on your heart). This sentence may be read in light of Christ’s tomb where they went and made the sepulcher secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard (Mt 27.66). With this in mind, we may say that “love is strong as death, jealousy is cruel as the grave.” The seal of which the bride speaks is equivalent to having her lover impart an image of himself “to lie between my breasts” (Sg 1.13).

In the book of Revelation, a seal (*sphragis*) plays an important role, for example, 5.1: “And I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back sealed with seven seals.” These scrolls contained various plagues which God’s angels were to inflict on the human race and culminate in the seventh seal.

The second seal which the bride requests is to be located on her lover’s arm, *zeroah*. While the seal upon his heart signifies transmission of love between the two spouses in the form of an image, the one on his arm may signify activity. For example, refer to Ps 98.1: “O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things! His right hand and his holy arm have gotten him victory.” After all, it is the bridegroom’s arms which makes the bride “a garden enclosed, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed” (Sg 5.12), that is, *chatom* as discussed above.

“For love is strong as death:” Not stronger than death but strong as death. I.e., here love (*ahavah*) and death are put on the same level. The bride can boldly say this because of her experience of the groom’s comings and goings which were for her an emotional roller coaster ride. By this time towards the end of the Song, she has gained sufficient experience of these mini deaths and risings and now has authority to speak of them to other persons. They are symbolized by the daughters of Jerusalem whom she bids to tell her spouse that “I am sick with love” (Sg 5.8), that is, the sickness I experience is one leading to death, but a death I welcome.

“Jealousy is cruel as the grave:” A similar comparison to love and death above, only here between jealousy and the grave. The bride is alluding to the inevitability of death regardless of how exalted her experiences of love have been. In this verse the word for grave is *she’ol*, traditional abode of the dead: “For in death there is no remembrance of you; in Sheol who can give you praise” (Ps 6.5)? Despite this unavoidable destiny, the bride can exclaim “If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there” (Ps 139.8). Such is the bride’s jealousy or *qin’ah* which is cruel, *qashah*; note the similar sounding words with regard to the grave, *she’ol*. One cannot but help Christ’s words, “Zeal (*qin’ath*) for your

house will consume me” (Jn 2.17), when he drove out merchants from the temple, a sentence lifted from Ps 69.9.

The love of which the bride speaks in verse 6 is characterized by coals of fire, *resheph*, which also means lightning as Ps 78.48: “He gave over their cattle to the hail and their flocks to thunderbolts.” Another reference is Hab 3.5: “Before him went pestilence and burning coals at his feet.” This verse is situated in the larger context of a revelation to Habakkuk when God comes to judge the earth much as in Revelation. In preparation for proclaiming this revelatory task, “one of the seraphim flew to me [Isaiah], having in his hand a burning coal (*resheph*) which he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said, ‘Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin forgiven’” (Is 6.6-7). Note that the seraph took this *resheph* from the altar, that is, from the place where incense was being offered to God. The coal must have been hot indeed for a seraph to use tongs; the very word seraph means a consuming fire.

Even the seraph had to take it with a tong, not his hands, because of its heat which was a most vehement flame. Such a flame or *lehavah* Isaiah spoke of prior to his purification: “Then the Lord will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory there will be a canopy and a pavilion” (4.5). This *lehavah*, an image of the bride’s love, partakes of this divine flame, otherwise she could not say that it was strong as death.

**8-7: Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it. If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be scorned.**

The previous verse described the bride’s love in terms of fire; verse 7 uses that of water which cannot quench love. The verbal root *kavah*, to quench, connotes the idea of hiding as seen in kindred verbs (for example, *chavah*). We see this verb in Is 42.3: “A bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice.” Christ quotes this verse in reference to his ministry of healing in Mt 12.20. The “many waters” of the Song can refer to the waters of chaos: “The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters” (Gen 1.2). Here the (Holy) Spirit does quench the disorganized face of the deep, an image inverse to that of love. God’s Spirit quenches the many waters by an act of moving or *rachaph* whose fundamental meaning connotes cherishing.

“Neither can the floods drown it:” Such floods or *neharoth* suggest more something like rivers or streams; this noun also means light (*neharah*), so the image of God’s Spirit



moving over the *neharoth*, as it were, suggests God's first words, "Let there be light," 'or (Gen 1.3). I.e., two opposites, floods and light are united in a marvelous act of creation.

In comparison to bringing creation into existence, no gift or offering is comparable which is why the bride then says, "If a man would give all the substance of his house for love." Such substance or *hun* Wisdom mentions as follows: "Honor the Lord with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce" (Prov 1.9). *Hun* suggests more of one's possessions, of goods acquired, as Proverbs reveals and as vs 7 has it, of his house. These material goods are precious, yet the bride despises them when it comes to love (*ahavah*), that is, love for the bridegroom. Christ has similar words of admonition with regard to the kingdom of heaven: "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field which a man found and covered up; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has [i.e., sells his *hun*] and buys that field" (Mt 12.44).

The bride's strong words with regard to relinquishing one's substance, it would utterly be scorned, are strong in Hebrew, *boz yavozu*. It is heightened further by "to him" or *lo* which occurs after this phrase.

**8-8: We have a little sister, and she has no breasts. What shall we do for our sister in the day when she shall be spoken for?**

The first person plural can be taken as words from the two spouses with regard to another person, "little sister," as the bridegroom with his companions or even as the groom alone addressing his beloved. At first glance, this remark sounds disappointing for the bride, implying that after all she had been through, it is an unremarkable statement from whom she received much. However, his words are consistent with the often mentioned theme of alteration between marital presences and absences throughout the Song. Such a thinly veiled disparaging observation is intentional because the bridegroom wishes his beloved to reflect upon her advancements at the close of this love poem and see them as extending eternally into the future.

"We have a little sister:" Two instances as in Sg 5.1 & 2, my sister, my bride and my sister, my love, where the close relationship has already been established. Her littleness is also a term of endearment followed by the bridegroom's further remarks, she has no breasts, that is, she is young and not ready for marriage: "And you grew up and became tall and arrived at full maidenhood; your breasts were formed, and your hair had grown, yet you were naked and bare. When I passed by you again and looked upon you, behold, you were at the age for love" (Ezk 16.7-8). The image of a young girl for the people of Israel is marked by her breasts, that is, her capacity for giving nourishment which similarly implied that she was mature enough to bear children. Note too this absence of breasts, that is, an indication

that the bride is but at the beginning of her advancement in love, with Sg 4.5 where her breasts are like “two fawns, twins of a gazelle,” a vivid image of her full vigor.

“In the day when she shall be spoken of:” This statement resembles 1Sam 25.39: “Then David sent and wooed Abigail to make her his wife.” Both this verse and the Song’s use the verb *davar*, to speak, which in these instances means a giving witness or statement with regard to the person in question. In response to the question posed in this verse of the Song, the bridegroom gives his answer in the next verse.

**8-9: If she is a wall, we will build upon her a palace of silver; and if she is a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar.**

Here the bridegroom is uncertain about his beloved, that is, whether she is a wall or a door. The first term, wall or *chumah*, represents protection from outside influences; because the bride is a little sister, she has need for defense against those who would besiege her. This is fine and well, but her lover wishes to build upon her, that is, make a palace of silver which would be visible not only within the walls but from without. Observe that he intends to construct this building upon her, that is, use her walls as a foundation, an image which brings to mind the heavenly Jerusalem of John’s vision. In chapter 21 of Revelation, that is, towards the close of this book, he speaks of its walls six times. The city’s walls are associated with the number twelve, symbolic of the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve Apostles. Vs 19 mentions its foundation which parallels the upon her of the Song: The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every jewel. John proceeds to enumerate twelve precious stones related to this foundation which is reminiscent of the place of silver. Indeed, the words of Ps 122.7 apply to the bride: “Peace be within your walls and security within your towers!”

The word for palace or *tyrah* basically means a wall, fence or more specifically, a fortified encampment (cf. Gen 25.16, Num 31.10, Ps 69.25) with reference to the encampment of nomadic tribes. Similarly, this brings to mind temporary walls Roman armies were accustomed to build when on campaign; despite their impermanence, much effort went into their construction. In the context of the Song, though, the *tyrah* as a temporary fortification suggests that the bride is continuously on the move in the sense of constantly advancing towards greater love of her spouse. Note that her beloved makes this palace of silver, that is, he lavishes much work on her temporary or transitional stages as she proceeds “from glory to glory” (2Cor 3.18).

“If she is a door:” We encountered this word, *deleth*, in the context of Sg 7.6; refer to it for details, etc. Naturally, a door provides entrance and can be welcoming or forbidding. Here the bridegroom ponders making his spouse or *deleth* with boards of cedar, that is, wood

not subject to corrosion, an image of incorruptibility. Possibly he had in mind Sg 1.17, “The beams of our house are cedar.” Note that the groom mentions boards or *luach* which also means a tablet as for writing and derives from a verbal root meaning to shine, to be polished.

*Luach* brings to mind an association with the Ten Commandments; similarly, they can be associated with one’s heart: “Let not loyalty and faithfulness forsake you; bind them about your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart” (Prov 3.3). With this image in mind—for *luach* is used most often as tablet—we may infer that the bridegroom intends to make his spouse as a door with such boards of cedar, they would have the capacity to receive any type of writing or inscription. Such writing would have the word love or ‘*ahavah* much like “He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love” (Sg 2.4). Thus banner and boards are comparable.

Note that the bridegroom intends to enclose her where the verb used is *tsur*, to press upon; the word stone derives from this root. Although cedar and stone are two different building materials, they both share a common attribute, durability.

**8-10: I am a wall and my breasts like towers; then I was in his eyes as one who find favor.**

In response to the bridegroom’s deliberations whether to make his spouse a palace of silver or a door, she now responds that she is indeed a wall, *chumah*. Furthermore, the bride’s breasts [are] like towers, that is, she has in mind the palaces of silver of vs 9. In Sg 4.4 the bridegroom says that her neck is like the tower of David, and in 7.4 her nose is like a tower of Lebanon where *migdal* is used in all three instances. Perhaps the bride is thinking of Ps 48.12: “Walk about Zion, go round about her, number her towers.” Certainly her beloved has been engaged in this walking about his spouse, admiring her beauty. To appreciate her loveliness, he must alternate between coming close and then stand at a distance; in this way he can get a better perspective on her which accounts for the Song’s numerous comings and goings on the bridegroom’s part.

Note that Ps 48.12-13 contains a total of four commands: walk about Zion, number her towers, consider well her ramparts and go through her citadels. Such is a description of the bridegroom as noted in the last paragraph. These commands are given for one intention, “that you may tell the next generation that this is God” (vs 14); i.e., that you may recount the bridegroom’s magnificence.

“As one who found favor:” The word used for favor is *shalom*, peace. Since vss 9 & 10 of the Song present an image of buildings, etc, we may find an articulation of *shalom* in a similar context, namely, “Peace be within your walls [i.e., Jerusalem] and security within

your towers” (Ps 122.7)! Just as in the Song, we have mention of walls and towers; however, the words used are, *chyl* (in the sense of a defense) and ‘*armon* (in the sense of a fortified tower).

Note that the bride says in the context of this *shalom*, “then I was in his eyes.” Emphasis upon the word “then” (‘*az*) suggests that as a result of her assertion of being a wall and having breasts like towers, this enabled her to find such *shalom* in his eyes. As noted elsewhere, eye and fountain drive from the same verbal root. This association may be understood as the bride becoming a spring of water welling up to eternal life (Jn 4.14) for her spouse.

**8-11: Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon. He let out the vineyard to keepers; each one was to bring for its fruit a thousand pieces of silver.**

Most likely it is the bride who utters this verse concerning King Solomon, author of the Song of Songs, although she speaks as though he were a person different from the one in love with her. Anyway, it is a prelude to her boast in the next verse, “My vineyard which is mine,” i.e., not Solomon’s. The location is at Baal-hamon, lord of the people, lacks a historical reference point except possibly Balamon where Judith’s husband, Manasseh, was buried (cf. Juth 8.3). We could take this locale in the sense of Solomon being king, that is, as ruler, but the Song of Songs does not accentuate this aspect; instead it focuses upon Solomon as lover. Yet Solomon is lord or *baal* of all those who read the Song and follow in the bride’s footsteps. As for *baal* it’s also used for the word husband: “A good wife is the crown of her husband” (Prov 12.8). The location of his vineyard there suggests “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine dresser” (Jn 15.1); the Father as the Baal-hamon works in this vineyard upon the true vine, Jesus Christ.

“He let out the vineyard to keepers:” With the image of God the Father as vine dresser in mind, this letting out may be understood in terms of Christ commissioning his disciples “to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28.19). Thus his disciples are keepers, *noterym*. The image here brings to mind Mt 20.1-16 where Christ describes the kingdom of heaven in terms of a vineyard being let out to laborers. As this parable recounts, the workers hired at the eleventh hour received the same pay as those hired early in the morning.

Solomon requested a huge sum of money for its fruit, a thousand pieces of silver. Such is the value of this vineyard’s produce; it brings to mind vs 9, “we will build upon her a palace of silver.”

**8-12: My vineyard which is mine is before me. You, O Solomon, may have the thousand and the keepers of the fruit two hundred.**

This is the very last time when the bride speaks, so it is important to pay attention to her words. She has a newly found confidence obtained through her experience of the bridegroom's various presences and absences and has achieved a certain autonomy. "My vineyard which is mine is before me:" that is, my vineyard, literally, my vineyard to me as if to drive home her confidence. Similarly, no more do we see her entreating the bridegroom for his love; she has come a long way from Sg 1.6, "but my own vineyard I have not kept." Note that this vineyard is before me, *lephany*, or in my presence, suggesting that she is outside it looking in on her own keepers (cf. vs 11), not Solomon's.

The bride's confidence is further manifested by directly addressing Solomon to more or less to go about his own business. He can keep the thousand, that is, the thousand or great multitude of vineyards: "I built houses and planted vineyards for myself" (Eccl 2.4). The bride has attained detachment from any inordinate needs to acquire things and has realized that such pursuits are "vanity of vanities" (Eccl. 1.2). Similarly Solomon's keepers can have their portion, two hundred; that is to say, the bride has transcended any need to measure love in terms of profit as we saw with the laborers of Mt 20. In their place she has assumed the same attitude as the householder, "Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?...So the last will be first and the first last" (vss 15-16). Indeed the bride, the last, has become first in her own sight.

**8-13: You who dwell in the gardens, the companions hearken to your voice; let me hear it.**

Here the bridegroom speaks as well as in the next (and last) verse. He addresses his beloved as dwelling in the gardens, not vineyards, of which she proudly boasted in vs 12. Note the plural form here; an indefinite number of gardens is attributed to the bride's possession, and she apparently dwells in them all. These gardens may be taken as representing all the various stages of her advancements. Apparently the bridegroom does not know in which garden she is dwelling, so makes the request, "let me hear it" [your voice]. However, prior to this he cunningly says, the companions [i.e., the 'daughters of Jerusalem'] "hearken to your voice," that is, they seem to know in which garden their mistress is hiding. Such uncertainty on the groom's part is interesting because the bride, having learned about all those presences and absences...sources of pain and joy..., is now in a position to turn the tables on him. She is like Moses in a cleft of a rock (cf. Ex 33.21) over which the bridegroom passes, only here she has no need to exit the cleft/gardens.

**8-14: Make haste, my beloved, and be like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of spices.**

Because the bridegroom gets no response yet cannot help but marvel at her (to paraphrase the words of Christ at the centurion's faith in reference to Lk 7.9), he attempts to allure her by saying, "make haste" or *barach* which implies taking flight as if fleeing from danger. Another enticement is to address her as "my beloved," that is, *dod*, the term she had used so often throughout the Song with regard to him.

With a slight hint of desperation the bridegroom tries another ploy: "be like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of spices," words which closely resemble Sg 2.17: "Until the day breaks and the shadows flee, turn, my beloved, be like a roe or a young hart upon rugged mountains." Note the difference: 8.14 has mountains of spices whereas 2.17 has rugged mountains. First, the bridegroom appeals to his spouse's memory when she was identified with such swift and graceful animals who could easily surmount craggy peaks. Now at a last attempt to get her attention he mollifies these rugged mountains by transforming them into ones of spice (*vesamym*), the same spices as in Sg 4.16, "let its [garden] fragrance be wafted abroad." The bridegroom hopes that the tantalizing spices or better, fragrances, will allure her from the gardens of vs 13 and compel her to follow him.

The Song of Songs concludes on this unresolved urgent request on part of the bridegroom, thereby keeping with all those meetings and departures between him and his beloved. Such is the case with the conclusion of Revelation, "Surely I am coming soon. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (22.20)! As readers of the Song we adopt the same role as the bride with these words: the divine bridegroom, Jesus Christ, has come yet is still coming.

+ The End +