Song of Songs: Romance and Religion

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SONG OF SONGS

ROMANCE AND RELIGION[i]

Introduction

Rabbi Yuval Cherlow has composed an extraordinary book on the Song of Songs, *Aharekha Narutzah: Song of Songs: 'Let Us Run After You': A Contemporary Commentary on the Spiritual Significance of King Solomon's Love Poems*. [ii] It not only offers a new interpretation of the text, but also speaks directly to contemporary spiritual challenges. Although the book spans over 500 pages, only sixty are devoted to verse-by-verse commentary. The bulk of the work explores the methodology, interpretive principles, and religious vision that inform Rabbi Cherlow's reading of the Song. Rabbi Cherlow offers a coherent interpretive framework—rooted in both *peshat* and *derash*—that skillfully bridges traditional exegesis with the emotional and religious yearnings of our generation.

Rabbi Cherlow is well positioned to compose such a book. He has written on the thought of Rabbis Avraham Yitzhak Kook and Joseph B. Soloveitchik.[iii] He also answers thousands of halakhic questions on the internet from people from all walks of life in Israel, granting him a unique sensitivity to the religious questions of the broader Israeli public.[iv] At a time when many Jews struggle to relate traditional faith to human emotion and experience, Rabbi Cherlow offers an interpretive bridge between the worlds of Tanakh, Jewish thought, halakhah, Jewish history, and contemporary religious experience. Although the book is lengthy, this chapter highlights some of Rabbi Cherlow's central arguments to encourage further study.

Following in the footsteps of Targum, Rashi, and especially Ibn Ezra,[v] Rabbi Cherlow maintains that there is one coherent story line underlying the Song of Songs (Song of Songs = the best song). Rabbi Cherlow adopts the methodology of Ibn Ezra by employing the literal reading as a springboard to metaphorical readings, but he is not constrained by Ibn Ezra's particular interpretations.

Rabbi Cherlow espouses the traditional interpretation of the Song of Songs as a metaphor for the relationship between God and Israel. In his introduction to the Song of Songs, Ibn Ezra bolsters this view by citing examples where prophets liken the relationship between God and Israel to a marriage. [vi] Gabriel H. Cohn marshals internal textual evidence to support the metaphorical reading as part of the original intent of the Song of Songs. These include: praise of the Land of Israel itself; some of the praises of the woman appear too exaggerated to refer to a person (e.g., 7:5, "Your neck is like a tower

of ivory … your nose like the Lebanon tower that faces toward Damascus"); and the woman appears to be part of a larger group of people who love the man.[vii] It is difficult to pinpoint the boundary between *peshat* and *derash* in the Song of Songs. However, the literal reading lends itself to metaphorical extensions, and both literal and metaphorical readings have played prominent roles in traditional understandings of the Song of Songs.[viii]

Amos Hakham (*Da'at Mikra*) rejects the single-narrative approach, since it depends too heavily on *derash*.[ix] Hakham maintains that the Song of Songs is a collection of different poems purposefully assembled by one author (Song of Songs = a song comprised of several smaller songs). Taking advantage of both perspectives, Rabbi Cherlow uses the coherent narrative approach for the literal reading and for the historical metaphorical reading of Israel's relationship with God. He then adopts the collection of different poems approach for interpreting the Song of Songs as a metaphor for the individual's relationship with God (as per Rambam's interpretation explained below).

To develop a conceptual framework for his ideas, Rabbi Cherlow contrasts Israel's two great sins in the Torah: the Golden Calf and the Spies. Many consider the Calf to be the greater sin, on the assumption that it was outright idolatry. Rabbi Cherlow espouses the approach of the *Kuzari* (I:97) who maintains that the Israelites wrongfully sought God by building a Tabernacle-like resting place for God's Presence without having been commanded to do so. While the Calf was a sin, it still was better than the sin of the Spies who attempted to avoid the challenges of living in the Land altogether. The Calf ultimately led to atonement and a closer relationship with God as the nation built the Tabernacle. In contrast, the sin of the Spies led to aimless wandering and death in the desert. Rabbi Cherlow favors the homiletical interpretations that cast the bad spies as "pietists" who insisted that remaining in the desert was spiritually preferable to entering the Land, where they would have to work for a living and live in the real world. They failed to realize that the Torah requires us to live in this world rather than remaining in isolation. This vision of embodied, this-worldly spirituality becomes a central thread throughout Rabbi Cherlow's reading of the Song.

Literal Interpretation

Rabbi Cherlow believes that the literal story describes the love between a king in Jerusalem and a farmer's daughter from En Gedi. Secondary characters then arise who impact on their relationship:

> "We have a little sister, whose breasts are not yet formed. What shall we do for our sister when she is spoken for? If she be a wall, we will build upon it a silver battlement; if she be a door, we will panel it in cedar." I am a wall, my breasts are like towers. So I became in his eyes as one who finds favor (8:8–10).

The woman's siblings do not think she is mature enough for a relationship, but she disagrees. While the woman is fundamentally correct—the king does love her—her brothers are also correct that she is naïve and inexperienced. At the beginning of the story (1:5–6) the daughters of Jerusalem do not think the woman is worthy of the king's love. The king's guards and friends also are impediments (5:7). Part of the story is about the couple's overcoming external impediments to their relationship.

However, these secondary characters comprise only about twenty percent of the Song of Songs; the remainder describes challenges inherent to their relationship. The woman does not understand the language or lifestyle of the palace, and the king needs to learn to appreciate the world of a farmer. For example, she speaks of vineyards, while he refers to king's horses:

> Don't stare at me because I am swarthy, because the sun has gazed upon me. My mother's sons quarreled with me, they made me guard the vineyards (1:6).

> I have likened you, my darling, to a mare in Pharaoh's chariots (1:9).

Additionally, there are other women in the palace, and the royal lifestyle is considerably different from what she was used to on the farm. This reality frightens her back to her mother's house even after their wedding, as we will see below.

Rabbi Cherlow divides the Song of Songs into four major units, primarily based on the adjuration of the woman to the daughters of Jerusalem not to press her relationship further until it is ready (1:1–2:7; 2:8–3:5; 3:6–6:3; 6:4–8:14). In the first song (1:1–2:7) the woman dreams of his kisses but still feels that she must win his heart. She needs to understand the gaps between their lifestyles. The woman describes herself as a lily waiting to be picked. The king agrees that she is a lily but one that is surrounded by thorns and not yet approachable:

> I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys. Like a lily among thorns, so is my darling among the maidens (2:1–2).

In the second song (2:8–3:5) the king approaches the woman at her vineyard during the day but she does not respond. She loves him but wants to wait (2:8–17). She then attempts to pursue him at night (3:1–5). In the first song the king is hesitant, whereas at the beginning of the second song it is the woman who delays.

They get married at the beginning of the third song (3:6–6:3), but the woman is intimidated by the presence of other women and the luxuries of the palace. In chapter 5 she retreats to her mother's home despite the king's passionate expressions of love in chapter 4. It is significant that the challenges of their relationship continue into their marriage. Marriage is not a climactic fairy-tale ending, but rather the next stage in a mature loving relationship that requires constant work and development throughout a lifetime.

The king then pursues her, knocking on her door and begging her to let him in. Her prolonged hesitancy generates the great crisis in the relationship. He eventually despairs and leaves. She now must actively seek him out:

> Hark, my beloved knocks! "Let me in, my own, my darling, my faultless dove! For my head is drenched with dew, my locks with the damp of night." I had taken off my robe—was I to don it again? I had bathed my feet—was I to soil them again? My beloved took his hand off the latch, and my heart was stirred for him…. I opened the door for my beloved, but my beloved had turned and gone. I was faint because of what he said. I sought, but found him not; I called, but he did not answer (5:2–6).

Despite his leaving, the woman remains confident that her beloved has not abandoned her permanently. She again goes out to seek him, enlisting the help of the daughters of Jerusalem (5:8–6:2). These women become convinced that she truly loves the king and therefore cease to be skeptical as they had been at the outset of the story.

Many of the woman's problems stem from her misunderstanding of what she saw in the palace after their wedding. In the fourth song (6:4–8:14) the king explains royal life, hoping to assuage her fears. While there are other women in the palace, she is unique to him:

> There are sixty queens, and eighty concubines, and damsels without number. Only one is my dove, my perfect one, the only one of her mother, the delight of her who bore her. Maidens see and acclaim her; queens and concubines, and praise her (6:8–9).

They finally come together, and she invites him to the field for a full expression of their love (7:12–14).

However, her call for him to flee like a deer in the final verse (8:14) indicates that their relationship has not reached a final resolution. Yehudah Feliks explains that when deer go into heat, they do not mate immediately. The males and females first seek each other and flee from one another. [x] Thus the final verse demonstrates that their love is an ongoing story that will continue to develop

even after the Song of Songs closes.

Historical Metaphor

Beyond its literal narrative, Rabbi Cherlow, like many traditional commentators, finds a second layer of meaning by interpreting the Song as a parable of national destiny. There are literary advantages of using metaphor, a technique that can express what words cannot. Metaphor can further accommodate multiple meanings, including national history and individual spirituality. It also transforms an incomprehensible subject, that of the mortal relationship with the divine, into terms that everyone can understand—in this case, human love.

The most prevalent metaphorical interpretation in Jewish tradition casts the Song of Songs as symbolizing the historical relationship between God and Israel (e.g., Targum, Rabbi Saadiah Gaon, Rashi, Rashbam,[xi] and Ibn Ezra).[xii] In his historical-*derash* interpretation, Rabbi Cherlow generally follows Targum, the first interpreter to present a coherent historical narrative based on earlier midrashim.[xiii] He deviates from Targum when he believes that alternative approaches create a greater correspondence with the literal reading.

As in his literal reading, Rabbi Cherlow identifies four major narrative units in the Song. Rabbi Cherlow correlates the four songs to four periods (1) from the exodus through the end of the Torah; (2) Joshua through David; (3) the building of the Temple through the Return to Zion; and (4) the final redemption. His overall metaphorical reading agrees with Targum that the first song relates to the exodus, but differs from Targum by interpreting the second song as moving ahead to the period of Joshua through David.

The first song (1:1–2:7) opens with the revelation at Sinai as a kiss. Israel's being black yet beautiful (1:5) refers to the Calf. Though it was a sin, Israel had beautiful intentions by attempting to draw closer to God (*Kuzari*). The sin of the Calf stemmed from Israel's trying to serve God on her terms rather than on God's terms. However, the Calf did not lead to the severing of the relationship; God pardoned Israel and they built the Tabernacle. At the end of the first song (2:5) God makes the daughters of Jerusalem swear not to awaken Israel's love, since she is not yet ready. This lack of readiness refers to the sin of the Spies, which demonstrated that the nation was not yet ready to enter the Land.

In the second song (2:8–3:5) the king seeks the woman, but she does not initially respond. This episode refers primarily to the period of the Judges, when God could not hear Israel's voice since there was a general religious decline. In the beginning of the Book of Samuel, the people's first instinct was to bring the Ark to battle as a magical savior rather than praying to God.

The marriage in the third song (3:6–6:3) refers to the building of the Temple. The story does not end happily ever after because of King Solomon's involvement with foreign wives and their idolatry. One could argue that these marriages—like the Golden Calf—were well intentioned since through them Solomon built alliances and sanctified God's name with the steady flow of foreign visitors to Jerusalem. Ultimately, however, Solomon's disregard of halakhah brought spiritual harm onto himself and his nation. The woman's retreat to her mother's home after the marriage symbolizes the remainder of the history in the Book of Kings, where God and Israel had a more distant relationship.

The great crisis in the historical narrative arises when God knocked at the time of Cyrus and the Jews failed to respond adequately.[xiv] God encouraged Israel to pursue Him, rather than allowing her to take the relationship for granted. Prophecy ceased. When longing for God in His absence, Jews began to translate their religious experience into words. To connect to God, some employed the language of universal philosophy while others turned to kabbalah. These are manifestations of the woman's efforts to enlist the daughters of Jerusalem to help her locate her lover (5:8–6:2).

The fourth song (6:4–8:14) represents the current period. Messianic potential exists, but there is no guarantee of ultimate redemption. To achieve redemption, we need to benefit from the accumulated experience of the earlier stages of our relationship with God and approach it with mature wisdom. Rabbi Cherlow's historical narrative brings us to the open ending of the Song of Songs. It is up to us to

determine whether we are sufficiently mature to engage God as a nation of destiny.[xv]

Metaphor of Personal Religious Quest

While the prevalent historical-metaphorical reading emphasizes Israel's collective journey, the personal metaphor foregrounds the spiritual odyssey of the individual. Rambam interprets the Song of Songs as a symbol of the love between an individual and God.[xvi] Unlike the national historical metaphor, which follows a continuous storyline, the metaphor of personal spirituality reflects the irregular, nonlinear nature of individual religious growth. While Rabbi Cherlow assumes a coherent sequential narrative both for literal and for the historical-metaphorical reading, he shifts for the personal-metaphorical reading and adopts the approach of multiple songs, since not everyone follows the same path in personal religious development.

The common denominator underlying all approaches to God is that an infinite gulf separates God from humanity. There are external impediments to faith, but the internal barriers are far greater. The need for a relationship with God is innate. However, many people misdirect these inclinations and cast God in their own image. Today's spiritual instinct often manifests as unstructured religiosity—seeking God without commitment or covenant. God also is expected to act instantly during crisis. The Calf serves as the paradigm for jumping into a spiritual relationship with God without following halakhah. One must pursue the love of God using God's language and norms. The woman's persistent searching even in divine silence becomes a template for spiritual endurance in the face of doubt.[xvii] People need to build an enduring mature relationship with God.

Marriage is the ideal form of relationship, but it creates a whole new set of challenges than singlehood. It may become stale, and both partners may experience a loss of freedom. Similarly, some have great faith when they are younger but then lose their enthusiasm as they enter adulthood. Song of Songs represents the ongoing process of seeking God that can keep our religious fire burning and increasing throughout our lifetime.

In his book on Rabbi Soloveitchik, Rabbi Cherlow sets out the central thesis of *Aharekha Narutzah* by briefly surveying the history of Jewish thought. Rambam roots faith in the philosophical contemplation of God. Rabbi Yehudah Halevi in his *Kuzari* extrapolates the roots of faith based on an experiential model as is explored in Exodus. Rabbi Soloveitchik, in contrast, sees the roots of faith as stemming from the relationship modeled in the Song of Songs.[xviii] Rabbi Soloveitchik also did not perceive a fundamental difference between the historical-metaphorical and the personal-metaphorical readings of the Song of Songs, since both pertain to the relationship between God and humanity.[xix]

Contemporary Relevance: Jewish Thought and the Song's Relevance Today

Medieval Jewish philosophers from Rabbi Saadiah Gaon through Rabbi Hasdai Crescas attempted to translate faith into the universal language of philosophy. They explained Judaism's paradoxes and systematized its ideas, even though Tanakh and *aggadah* do not speak in those terms.

Rabbi Yehudah Halevi disagreed with most Jewish thinkers of his era. He maintained that philosophy is rooted in unproven assumptions and axioms. Rabbi Yehudah Halevi used philosophy to demonstrate that human reason does not contradict the Torah, a process that is different from assuming that tenets of faith can be demonstrated rationally. Rabbi Yehudah Halevi was proven correct over time. We cannot fathom all of life's contradictions, the nature of God, the reasons behind the mitzvot, and other central issues of faith using only reason.

Medieval Jewish philosophy ultimately declined because it failed to answer the questions it presented and instead generated many more. Entering the early modern period, this decline was accompanied by an inward shift in Jewish thought toward mysticism, messianism, and pietism. There was a parallel growth in Talmudic *pilpul*, which creates an internally coherent system but not one that translates Judaism into a language that outsiders can understand.

Meanwhile, the German philosopher Immanuel Kant demonstrated that philosophy cannot prove the axioms of faith. Many perceived this conclusion as reason to defect from faith altogether.

Rabbi Soloveitchik disagreed, asserting that Kant had liberated religious thinkers from some of the unsolvable questions that had bedeviled medieval philosophers. The pendulum of contemporary faith has swung back to the pre-medieval experiential world of Tanakh-*aggadah*-Jewish thought. We no longer attempt to prove the axioms of religion on rational-philosophical terms but rather generate authentic religious experience. This does not mean that intellectual endeavors are obsolete, only that reason alone cannot serve as the foundation of faith. Contemporary Jewish thinkers need a language that can speak to this new perception.

Maskilim were dissatisfied with rabbinic responses (or lack thereof) to the new intellectual-spiritual trends that emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Some Jews concluded that religion is a personal choice and people should accept God and Torah on their own terms. In the Song of Songs, the woman made that fundamental mistake at the outset (= the Golden Calf). Others refuse to acknowledge that today's world is any different from previous ages, so they erect barriers to isolate themselves from the world (= the Spies). While this group might survive as an independent religious culture, their philosophy violates the basic principle that the Torah is eternal and relevant to all social realities.

Rabbi Kook called on rabbis to restore *aggadah* to its rightful place joined with halakhah. He believed that this potent combination would provide a language for an intellectually and spiritually compelling approach to Judaism. Rabbi Cherlow is answering Rabbi Kook's call to reconnect halakhah and *aggadah* so that they form an organic unity in our religious experience.[xx]

Once we understand our history as an ongoing love encounter with God, we become part of that experience. If we ignore God's knocks, we will miss a golden historical opportunity. If we assume that today is the beginning of a guaranteed redemption because we now have the Land of Israel, it should be remembered that the struggles of the couple in the Song of Songs continued into their marriage. On both literal and metaphorical planes, love must never be taken for granted.

The Song of Songs teaches that the infinite gulf between God and humanity is deepened—and bridged—through the ongoing struggle of love and relationship. In our world, the tendency for instant gratification prevails. In contrast, true love may be judged by its ability to weather crisis and grow into mature adulthood. In brief, our ability to relate to God is measured by our ability to love as people.

Rabbi Akiva proclaimed that the Song of Songs was *kodesh kodashim*, Holy of Holies (Mishnah Yadayim 3:5). He considered *ve-ahavta le-re'akha kamokha* (love your neighbor as yourself) to be the central axiom of the Torah (*Sifra Kedoshim* 4:12). He also was famous for his exceptional love of his wife. Rabbi Akiva also successfully entered *pardes*:

> ?Hagigah 14b: Four men entered the Garden (*pardes*) namely, Ben Azzai and Ben Zoma, Aher, and Rabbi Akiva…. Ben Azzai cast a look and died…. Ben Zoma looked and became demented…. Aher mutilated the shoots. Rabbi Akiva departed unhurt.
>
> Hagigah 16a: Rabbi Akiva went up unhurt and went down unhurt; and of him Scripture says: Draw me, we will run after you (*aharekha narutzah*) (Song of Songs 1:4).

The very phrase *Aharekha Narutzah*—'Let us run after You'—invokes this model of pursuit. Rabbi Cherlow's title thus captures the dual motion of religious longing: both a personal journey and a national destiny. Rabbi Akiva teaches that the love of God is not what leads to the love of people; rather, the love of people ultimately leads to the love of God. The planes of interpersonal love and love of God fuse into the Holy of Holies. By understanding these connections, Rabbi Akiva was able to enter *pardes* and grow from the experience. Rabbi Akiva models the very fusion of human and divine love that the Song invites. By loving others deeply and navigating spiritual danger with maturity, he became the exemplar of loving God in a world of complexity and imperfection.

Rabbi Cherlow's book is a penetrating analysis and diagnosis of the spiritual needs of our age. Despite its formidable length, it is well worth the effort for rabbis and educators, as well as anyone interested in *peshat-derash* methodology, Jewish thought, and the Song of Songs itself. In this manner,

we can extend our understanding of human love to make the love of God accessible to all Jews. Rabbi Cherlow reclaims the Song of Songs as a sacred text that speaks directly to the modern soul—personal, historical, and eternal.

[i] An earlier version of this essay appeared in Hayyim Angel, *Vision from the Prophet and Counsel from the Elders: A Survey of Nevi'im and Ketuvim* (New York: OU Press, 2013), 258–271.
[ii] Tel Aviv: Miskal-Yediot Aharonot and Hemed Books, 2003.
[iii] *VeErastikh Li LeOlam: Demuto HaDatit shel HaAdam Be'Et Tehiyyah BeMishnato shel HaRav Kook* (Hebrew) (Petah Tikvah: Yeshivat HaHesder Petah Tikvah, 2003); *VeHayu LaAhadim BeYadekha: MeDialektikah LeHarmoniyah BeMishnato shel HaRav Yosef Dov HaLevi Soloveitchik* (Hebrew) (Alon Shevut: Hegyonot, 2000).
[iv] Four collections of his internet responsa have been published by Yeshivat ha-Hesder Petah Tikvah as: *Reshut HaRabbim: Teshuvot Sh-Nitnu BaInternet BeInyanei Emunah, Halakhah VeShe'elot Mithadshot* (2002); *Reshut HaYahid: Teshuvot SheNitnu BaInternet BeInyanei Tseni'ut, Zugiyut U-Mishpahah* (2003); *Reshut HaTzibur: Teshuvot SheNitnu BaInternet BeInyanei Hevrah, Medinah VeGe'ulah* (2005); *Reshut LeHahamir: Teshuvot SheNitnu BaInternet BeInyanei Humrot, Kulot VaAvodat Hashem* (2007).
[v] For a discussion of the differences between the approaches of Rashi and Ibn Ezra, see Eliyahu Assis, "The Differences between the Commentaries of Rashi and Ibn Ezra on the Song of Songs" (Hebrew), in *Teshurah LeAmos: A Collection of Studies in Biblical Interpretation Presented in Honor of Amos Hakham*, ed. Moshe Bar-Asher et al. (Alon Shevut: Tevunot, 2007), 61–69.
[vi] These include: Isaiah 5:1 (this also having a parable to a vineyard, a central element in the Song of Songs); 62:5; Ezekiel 16:7; Hosea 1–3. Gerson Cohen observes further that no other culture likened its relationship with its gods to marriage. Tanakh could do so precisely because it eradicated mythology and cultic prostitution ("The Song of Songs and the Jewish Religious Mentality," in *The Canon and Masorah of the Hebrew Bible: An Introductory Reader*, ed. Sid Z. Leiman [New York: Ktav, 1974], 262–282).
[vii] Gabriel H. Cohn, *Iyyunim BaHamesh HaMegillot* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Eliner Library, 2006), 27–35.
[viii] See discussion of the range of opinions in the previous chapter of this volume.
[ix] Amos Hakham, *Da'at Mikra: Song of Songs*, in *Five Megillot* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1973), introduction, 5. He observes that Rashi must resort to flashbacks on several occasions because of the *peshat* difficulties inherent in his approach. For a survey of traditional and academic approaches regarding the unity and structure of the Song of Songs, see Gavriel H. Cohn, *Iyyunim BaHamesh HaMegillot*, 54–65.

[x] *Da'at Mikra: Song of Songs*, introduction, 16.
[xi] Regarding the attribution of the medieval commentary of "Rabbi Shemuel" on the Song of Songs to Rashbam, see Sara Japhet, "The Commentary of Rabbi Shemuel ben Meir (Rashbam) on the Song of Songs" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 75 (2006), 239–275. For further discussions of Rashi, Rashbam, and other northern French approaches to the Song of Songs, see Japhet, "*Peshat* in the Song of Songs: the Approaches of Rashi and his Followers among the *Peshat* Commentators" (Hebrew), in *Dor VaDor U-Parshanav* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2008), 135–156; "Interpretation and Polemic in Rashbam's Commentary on the Song of Songs" (Hebrew), *Iyyunei Mikra U-Parshanut* vol. 8, ed. Shemuel Vargon et al. (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2008), 481–499; and "'The Lovers' Way': Cultural Symbiosis in a Medieval Commentary on the Song of Songs," in *Birkat Shalom: S. M. Paul Jubilee Volume*, ed. A. Hurvitz et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 863–880.

[xii] This was not the only midrashic understanding, however. In the summary words of David M. Carr (with minor transliteration changes): "While we see the male fairly consistently linked to God, we find the female of the Song of Songs related to the house of study (Eruvin 21b; b. Bava Batra 7b), an individual sage (Tosefta Hagigah 2:3), Moses (*Mekhilta Beshallah Shirah* 9), Joshua the son of Nun (*Sifrei Nitzavim* 305 and parallels), local court (Sanhedrin 36b; Yevamot 101a; Kiddushin 49b and Sanhedrin 24a; cf. Pesahim 87a), or the community of Israel as a whole (Mishnah Ta'anit 4:8; Tosefta Sotah 9:8; Shabbat 88; Yoma 75a; Sukkot 49b; Eruvin 21b; Ta'anit 4a; *Mekhilta Beshallah Shirah* 3)" ("The Song of Songs as a Microcosm of the Canonization and Decanonization Process," in *Canonization and Decanonization*, ed. A. van der Kooij and K. van der Toorn [Leiden: Brill, 1998], 175–176).

[xiii] See Philip S. Alexander, "Tradition and Originality in the Targum of the Song of Songs," in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in Their Historical Context*, ed. D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 318–339; Isaac B. Gottlieb, "The Jewish Allegory of Love: Change and Constancy," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 2 (1992), 1–17. For a more detailed analysis of Targum's reading, see Esther M. Menn, "*Targum of the Song of Songs* and the Dynamics of Historical Allegory," in *The Interpretation of Scripture in Early Judaism and Christianity: Studies in Language and Tradition*, ed. Craig A. Evans (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 423–445.

[xiv] See, e.g., Berakhot 4a; Yoma 9b; *Kuzari* II:24; Malbim on Haggai 1:1. For further discussion, see Hayyim Angel, "Prophecy as Potential: The Consolations of Isaiah 1–12 in Context," in Angel, *Revealed Texts, Hidden Meanings: Finding the Religious Significance in Tanakh* (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav-Sephardic Publication Foundation, 2009), 117–126.

[xv] Rabbi Cherlow cites the parallel to the thought of Rabbi Soloveitchik in *Kol Dodi Dofek*. Rabbi Soloveitchik also turned to the Song of Songs as the call of destiny to our generation.

[xvi] See *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 10:3; *Guide for the Perplexed* 3:51. See Yosef Murciano, "Rambam and the Interpretation of the Song of Songs" (Hebrew), in *Teshurah LeAmos: A Collection of Studies in Biblical Interpretation Presented in Honor of Amos Hakham*, ed. Moshe Bar-Asher et al. (Alon Shevut: Tevunot, 2007), 85–108. For an analysis of medieval philosophical readings of the Song of Songs, and how Malbim and Rabbi Soloveitchik (in *U-Vikkashtem mi-Sham*) adopted variations of that approach, see Shalom Rosenberg, "Philosophical Interpretations of the Song of Songs: Preliminary Observations" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 59 (1990), 133–151.

[xvii] It is striking that of the 117 verses in the Song of Songs, some 61 are spoken by the woman, with only 33 in the man's mouth. She initiates their encounters more frequently than he, and she gets the last word except for two dialogues. The woman takes to the streets alone at night to search for her beloved (3:1–4; 5:6–7), and even the secondary characters marvel at her unusual behavior (Yair Zakovitch, *Mikra LeYisrael: Song of Songs* [Hebrew] [Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1992], 11–14).

[xviii] See Rabbi Yuval Cherlow, *VeHayu LaAhadim BeYadekha: MeDialektikah LeHarmoniyah BeMishnato shel HaRav Yosef Dov HaLevi Soloveitchik*, 33–41. See also Rabbi Shalom Carmy, "On Cleaving and Identification: Rabbi Soloveitchik's Account of *Devekut* in *U-Vikkashtem Mi-Sham*," *Tradition* 41:2 (Summer 2008), 100–112.

[xix] See Rabbi Soloveitchik, *U-Vikkashtem mi-Sham*, in *Ish ha-Halakhah: Galui VeNistar* (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1992), 119–120, n. 1. Rabbi Shalom Carmy adds nuance to the idea of both historical and philosophical metaphorical readings. Allegory brings the human perspective to the fore in the Song of Songs since the woman (who represents Israel in the historical reading; and the religious individual in the philosophical reading) is the predominant speaker. The prophets, in contrast, told the love story between God and Israel primarily from God's perspective. Rabbi Carmy suggests that the Sabbath eve reading transcends the division between historical and philosophical approaches because it belongs to the liturgical and implicitly communal setting, rather than as a lonely philosopher ("Perfect Harmony: Examining the Theories that Explain the Hebrew Bible's Holiest of Holies: Song of Songs," *First Things* 208 [December 2010], 33-37).

[xx] Rabbi Haim David Halevi (1924–1998, the late Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv-Jaffa) similarly composed his five-volume halakhic work *Mekor Hayyim HaShalem*—a comprehensive guide to halakhah that meshes with *aggadah*—in response to Rabbi Kook's call (see his introduction in vol. 1, 9–20).

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