

an excerpt from

The Song of Songs - A Messiah's Confession

by Aryeh Naftaly - all rights reserved © 2013

Chapter 7 – The Dance of the Two Camps

א שׁוֹבֵי שׁוֹבֵי הַשּׁוּלָמִית שׁוֹבֵי וְנִחְזֶה-בָּךְ...
... וְנִחְזֶה-בָּךְ...
... וְנִחְזֶה-בָּךְ...

...מִה-תִּחְזוּ בַשּׁוּלָמִית כְּמַחֲלֵת הַמַּתְנַיִם:

1. Come back, come back, O Shulamít! Come back, and let us watch you!
- What do you mean, "watch the Shulamít"?
Like one who dances The Dance of the Two Camps?

The Shulamít doesn't tarry in the palace; as Malbim said she runs quickly back to her people, to her village. As in Ch. 1 there is plenty of action here – the very first verse is divided into two voices – the first is demanding and presumptuous and the second brazenly answers back to the first. Who is speaking? It isn't hard to say. The first voice, firstly, is an "us" and secondly, likes to look at women. These, of course, are the King's Men. And who responds to them? Naturally, the King's Men's usual adversaries and the Shulamít's advocates – the Daughters of Jerusalem.

So what is going on here? The King's Men want to feast their eyes some more and try to call the Shulamít back, which means she's leaving. Ironically, this is the very verse from which we learn our unnamed heroine's nickname. Without this we would have no name for her at all; she would be as anonymous as the Shepherd. Once again, you don't know what you've got till it's gone. Only now that it's too late is her perfection recognized. But as what? A pretty dancing girl.

The DJs answer for her: "Haven't you realized yet, you boors, that she won't be dancing for you any more, that she's had enough of 'dancing' between two camps?"

Now a single voice comes in, male – and drunk, as we shall soon see. The Shulamít is leaving, and taking with her King Sh'lomó's chance to mend his ways, to appease his mother, and devote himself to one woman – the one woman who can complete him, as her nickname indicates. In a tempestuous outburst he describes her body – this time uncouthly, in front of everyone, from the bottom up, and with obvious sexual innuendos:

ב מה־יָפּוּ פְעָמַיךָ בַּנְּעָלִים בַּת־נָדָב

תְּמוּנָתִי יִרְכָּיךָ כְּמוֹ תְּלָאִים מְעֵשָׂה יְדֵי אָמֵן:

2. How lovely your steps were in your shoes, noble maiden,
the curves of your thighs like jeweled circlets
made by the hands of a craftsman...

How differently we see things when we don't get our way! This is the first in a long series of barbed compliments. "How lovely *were* your steps" – Sh'lomó, who finally realizes he's lost the Shulamít, takes a pot-shot at her. He's basically saying: When you came here you were a barefoot, starry-eyed country girl, happy just to dance for me. Now you act like a "noble maiden"? Literally his words are "daughter of a nobleman" – he reminds her of her missing father. This parallels the Shepherd's sarcastic compliment from Ch. 1: "If you don't know, 'O most beautiful of women!...' from when he was in a similar situation. Embittered, drunk, and disappointed with himself, Sh'lomó goes on to describe her as nothing but a sex object, albeit an exquisite one. He can't take that away from her.

ג שְׂרָרְךָ אֵמֵן הַפֶּתֶר אֶל־יַחְסֵר הַמָּזֶג

בְּטִנְךָ עֵרְמַת חֲטָיִם סוּגָה בְּשׁוֹשַׁנִּים:

3. your navel – a cruse of the crescent moon –
may the blended wine never lack!¹
4. Your belly – a haystack bordered with lilies;

Out of propriety or naiveté the commentators translated the word שְׂרָרְךָ as "navel" (as have I, as long as you don't read the footnote), which is close to the meaning of the word in Ezekiel 16:4: "And those who bore you on your day of birth did not sever your umbilical cord..." but how does that make sense here? The phrase is immediately followed by "Your belly – a haystack..." She is being described from the bottom up, and what is located between the thighs and the belly? We have an allusion to the moon, which rules the menses, as well as "may the (fluid) never lack." In his defense we should mention that Sh'lomó, drunk and unfettered as he may be here, doesn't use foul language, even when he describes the "lilies" (hairs) that border her (plump) belly.

ד שְׁנֵי שְׂדֵיךָ כְּשְׁנֵי עֵפְרַיִם תְּאֵמְרֵי צְבִיָּה:

¹ Alternately: "Your vulva – a cruse of the crescent moon – may it never run dry!"

your two breasts like two fawns, twins of a gazelle;

We've heard this before, but now he comes up with a surprise:

ה צִוּאֲרֶךְ כְּמִגְדַּל הַשָּׁן
עֵינָיֶךָ בְּרִכּוֹת בְּחֶשְׁבּוֹן עַל-שַׁעַר בַּת-רַבִּים
אַפְּךָ כְּמִגְדַּל הַלְּבָנוֹן צוֹפֶה פָּנָי דַּמָּשֶׁק:

**5. your neck like the Ivory Tower;
your eyes - pools in Heshbon by the gate of Bat-Rabbím;
your nose like the Tower of Lebanon looking out over Damascus;**

This is more of an insult than a compliment. Whereas in her description of the Shepherd's eyes the Shulamít conjures up a serene but lively image, Sh'lomó chooses pools in Heshbon. What does Heshbon symbolize? First of all, it's in Moab, and by now we know about the Moabites and their girls. This also brings to mind Ruth the Moabite who came to seduce Bóaz. And "the gate of Bat-Rabbím"? There is no such place. Rather, this phrase - literally "daughter of many" - calls to mind the well-known Oriental curse "daughter of thousands," i.e. daughter of a whore. And her nose "like the Tower of Lebanon"?! You may be pretty, but you have a big nose, babe. By the way, this is the first instance I've found anywhere of the well-known phrase "Ivory Tower" (and the only place it appears in the Bible; there is, however, a mention of "ivory palaces" in Psalms 45:9) and I must admit I have no idea to what it refers here besides emphasizing her height along with the Tower of Lebanon and the palm tree that we'll come to in a moment.

ו רֹאשְׁךָ עָלֶיךָ כְּכַרְמֵל וְדָלֶת רֹאשְׁךָ כְּאֶרְנָמָן
מֶלֶךְ אָסוּר בְּרֵהֲטִים:

**6. your head upon you like a heap of barley
and your tresses like purple wool - a king is captive in the rafters.**

Here Sh'lomó ends his verbal tour of the Shulamít's body with another bizarre play on words. Since the previous verse mentioned a variety of places it seems only natural that the word "Carmel" here refers to Mt. Carmel, the mountain range in northwestern Israel (or perhaps - and in fact more likely -

the hill of the same name about 12 miles west of Eïn Gédi²), and this is in fact how it has been understood and translated until now. But what a strange mixed metaphor – "Your head [is] upon you like Mt. Carmel and your tresses [are] like purple [yarn, thread or ribbons]..." However, there is another meaning to the word *carmél* – unripe barley, still on its stalk, which is left in a heap to dry.³ Now we have an image that makes sense: her head looks like a heap of barley, with its pile of hair like purple-dyed yarn, or at least it did when he came to her chamber in Ch. 4. Gone are the neatly combed (or corn-rowed) locks "like the flock of goats that slid down Mt. Gilead"; instead we have a disheveled tumble of hair, or, at best, an afro. He then rounds out the metaphor, admitting that he's captivated by her nonetheless.



ז מַה־יָפִית וּמַה־נְּעִמָּה אֶהְיֶה בְּתַעֲנוּגִים :

7. How much more beautiful and pleasing you were, love, than any other delight.

² Joshua 15:55, Samuel II 23:35 etc.

³ See Rashi on Leviticus 2:14

⁴Map of the Exodus to the Holy Land by Sebastian Munster, 1545 (West is up, North is on the right, etc. – more or less). Right of center is "Engaddi" (Eïn Gédi) and west-southwest of it is "Charmel" (Carmel). The numbers indicate the stops that the Israelites made on the Exodus from Egypt.

Now that he's done describing the Shulamít's body, Sh'lomó starts to describe what he did with it (or tried to). He begins with what appears to be a general comment – there is no greater pleasure than love. But this too is a double-edged sword; he continues to speak in second person but he changes to past tense, i.e. "making love with you was a pleasure."

ח זאת קומתך דמתה לתמר ושריך לאשכולות:

ט אמרתי אעלה בתמר אחזה בסנסניו

ויהיו נא שריך כאשכולות הנפן וריח אפך כתפוחים:

8. Thus you stood tall, like a palm tree, and your breasts like clusters;
9. I said: I'll climb a palm, I'll hold onto its panicles,
and may your breasts be like the bunches on the grapevine
and the smell of your breath like the apples...

Unabashedly Sh'lomó tells everyone present exactly what he did (or planned to do) in private with the Shulamít, once again with mixed metaphors – since when do grape clusters and apples grow on palm trees?

The strange phrasing of V. 8, literally translated: "This (or "She!"), your height, looked like a palm tree," invites a closer look. The image of the palm with its bushy treetop is consistent with our interpretation of V. 6. The palm is also native to Eῤin Gédi, which is also known as *Hatz'tzón Tamár* (חצצון תמר);⁵ *Tamár* means "date" or "date palm" and *Hatz'tzón* apparently comes from the word לחצוץ - to separate, as the village is situated between two creeks. Josephus wrote: "In this village [Eῤin Gédi] grows the most beautiful date palm and the balsam plant."⁶

In these two verses "palm tree" is an indefinite article, and as we learned from 6:11 ("walnut grove") this can also refer to a proper noun. *Tamár*, of course, was the name of Sh'lomó's ancestress who dressed up as a prostitute and slept with her father-in-law. But the Bible tells of another *Tamár* – one far closer to Sh'lomó – his stepsister, in fact. Her story in brief:

"...and Avshalóm son of David had a beautiful sister named *Tamár*, and Amnón son of David loved her. And Amnón was so distressed that he fell sick over *Tamár* his sister because she was a virgin and it was beyond Amnón to do anything to her... And

⁵ Chronicles II 20:2

⁶ Antiquities 9:7

Amnón lay down and made himself [or "pretended to be"] sick, and the King came to see him, and Amnón said: 'Please have Tamár my sister come and make me two cakes, so that I may eat from her hands.' And Davíd sent for Tamár at home, saying: 'Please go to the house of Amnón your brother and bake for him.' And Tamár went to the house of Amnón her brother and he was lying down, and she took the dough and kneaded it and made it into cakes before his eyes, and she cooked the cakes. And she took the pan and poured them out for him but he refused to eat, and Amnón said: 'Take every man away from me,' and every man went away. And Amnón said to Tamár: 'Bring the food to my room and I will eat from your hand,' and Tamár took the cakes that she made and brought them to Amnón her brother in his room. And she served them to him to eat and he grabbed her and said to her: 'Come lie with me, my sister.' And she said: 'Don't, my brother, don't abuse me, for this is not done in Israel, do not do this despicable deed. And I, where will I hide my shame? and you will be despised in Israel; now please, speak to the King, for he will not withhold me from you.' But he didn't heed her, and he overpowered her and abused her and lay with her. And Amnón felt a great hatred for her, for the hate he felt for her was greater than the love he felt for her, and Amnón said to her: 'Get up and leave'.⁷

Avshalóm eventually avenges his sister by having Amnón killed, but that's beside our point. Our point is three-fold: one, this is the only other mention of lovesickness in the Bible; two, like his half-brother Amnón, Sh'lomó humiliates the woman he loves but cannot have, because, three, like Tamár the Shulamít is unattainable - or simply playing hard-to-get. Here Sh'lomó looks at the Shulamít from below, as if he's sitting or lying down and she's standing before him - in an inferior position, in contrast with his description of her body in Ch. 4 where he stood over her. He seems to be insinuating, almost accusing her, that she made herself irresistible, with her breasts hanging like ripe clusters, and like Amnón he simply couldn't resist the temptation.

⁷ Samuel II 13:1-15



Referring back to Ch. 4 V. 9, this story reveals the significance of the phrase: "You made my heart pound, my sister-bride..." The meaning of "sister-bride," which first appeared there, is now obvious. Less obvious is the verbal invention which I translate as "you made my heart pound." The root of this word, לִבְתָּנִי, is לֵב or לִב, meaning "heart." But in this story Amnón uses the same root for "knead" (וַתִּלְבֵּב) and "cakes" (לֶבְבוֹת). Sh'lomó is using this play on words to say: "You held my heart in the palm of your hand."

Getting back to our story, V. 9 illustrates another aspect of the palm; with its many needle-sharp spines and jagged fronds it's a very dangerous tree to climb. But Sh'lomó takes up the challenge: "I said: I'll climb a palm..." He then (verbally) climbs up her body, takes her breasts in his hands...

יִחְכְּךָ כִּיִּין הַטּוֹב...

...הוֹלֵךְ לְדוֹדִי לְמִישְׁרִים דּוֹבֵב שְׁפִתַי יְשָׁנִים:

10. ...and your mouth like the wine of goodness...
 ...Which goes straight to my lover's head,
 making him speak like a sleep-talker.

Launching in with the emphatic trope **Zaqéf Gadól**, Sh'lomó begins to describe her kisses: "and your mouth like the wine of goodness..." and the Shulamít can't take it any more. Not only is he about to describe their intimacies, once again he's reminding her how naively thrilled she was when she first came to the palace; her first words to him were: "For better is your

⁸ "Amnon and Tamar" - Jan Steen c. 1661

loving than wine." She interrupts him – both verbally and musically⁹ – and and politely yet decisively, as if in apology to the present company (he *is* the King, after all) she explains that the "wine of goodness" – a bizarre turn of phrase that only serves to emphasize his drunkenness – has gone to his head, making him speak nonsense. With the same decisiveness she adds:

יָא אֲנִי לְדוֹדֵי וְעָלַי תְּשׁוּקָתוֹ: {ס}

11. I am my lover's and his passion is upon me.

Act 7, Scene 1 ends with a declaration that brings the story to closure, to completion, to perfection, to peace. If in 2:16 the Shulamit asserted her superiority over her lover by saying "My lover is mine and I am his" and in 6:3 she reversed the order in submission by saying "I am my lover's and my lover is mine," here, finally, she has struck the essential balance: she belongs only to him and he only has eyes for her.

What makes this statement even more remarkable and powerful is that in this story rife with passion this is the only time the word תְּשׁוּקָה – passion or desire – appears (here the male third-person possessive suffix is attached to it: "his passion" – תְּשׁוּקָתוֹ). In fact it is only the third and last place it appears in the entire Bible, a fact which invites a closer look.

As we mentioned earlier, the two-letter root of the word for desire or passion – קֶשׁ – is the same as that of "kiss," as in "he will kiss me" – יִשָּׁקֵנִי – the first word of the Song proper, which makes perfect sense. And it's also the root of the Hebrew word for pouring or watering, as Sh'lomó cleverly puns in Ch. 8 (אֶשְׁקֶךָ). Yet the reference goes even deeper.

To get to the heart of the matter we must look at the first place where "passion" appears in the Bible, and very telling it is. It appears when God banishes Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden after they eat from the Tree of Knowledge:

"To the woman He [God] said: I will greatly increase your pain and pregnancy; in pain will you bear children. And toward your man will be your desire (תְּשׁוּקָתְךָ) and he will rule over you."¹⁰

Here the woman is the passionate one, the one who desires. And therefore, the Torah implies, her man rules over her. Passion and desire put one at a disadvantage. The Shepherd has proven his desire for the Shulamit. But she

⁹ Between Princess Tip'há and her escort Count T'vir

¹⁰ Genesis 3:16

will not take advantage of her advantage. Instead she redresses the balance. In this verse she is basically announcing for the King, his entourage, and the whole world to hear: "We have found that which King Sh'lomó sought but could not attain. We have found equilibrium." And unlike Adam and Eve, this chapter ends with them going to the garden, not leaving it.



In this scene the Shulamít is reunited with her lover the Shepherd. She's had enough of Sh'lomó, of his cronies and of palace life - all she wants is to get out of the city and back to her village. We can easily picture her packing her few things, ready to hit the road, and saying to the Shepherd:

יב לָכֶּה דֹדִי נִצָּא הַשָּׂדֶה נָלִינָה בַּכְּפָרִים:

יג נִשְׁכִּימָה לַכְּרָמִים נִרְאֶה אִם-פָּרְחָה הַנֶּפֶן פִּתְּחַת הַסְּמֹדָר

הַנֶּצְנִי הַרְמוֹנִים שָׁם אֶתֵּן אֶת-דְּרִי לָךְ:

12. Come, my lover, let's go out to the field,
we'll sleep among the henna blossoms.¹¹

13. We'll wake up to the plantations, we'll see whether
the vine has blossomed, releasing its sweet fragrance,
whether the pomegranates have budded - there I will give you my loving.

Actually, the Shulamít already saw in Ch. 6 that the vine has blossomed and the pomegranates budded - signs that the time for loving has arrived and now they can "awaken and arouse love" - but then she was alone. Now she states categorically: there I will give you my loving. She continues emphatically:

יד הַדֹּדָאִים נָתַנּוּ-יְרִיחַ וְעַל-פֶּתַחַיִנּוּ כָּל-מִנְדָּיִם

חֲדָשִׁים גַּם-יִשָּׁנִים דֹּדִי צִפְנֹתִי לָךְ:

14. The mandrakes have given forth their fragrance
and every delicacy assails our senses, new and old alike -
my lover, I hid them away for you.

Here the veiled allusion to sex becomes explicit. Mandrakes, as their Hebrew name implies, (דֹּדָאִים, like דֹּדִים - loving) are aphrodisiac plants, as we find in

¹¹ Alternately: "we'll sleep in the villages"; the same word, כְּפָרִים, can mean either "henna blossoms" or "villages"

the story of Reuven, Leah and Rachel,¹² which takes place during the wheat harvest, indicating the lapse of time in the Song from early Spring after the rains have passed to the warm late Spring. "Our senses" - literally "our openings" or "our portals" - the orifices through which we experience and enjoy "delicacies." "New and old alike" - both pleasures we've already experienced and those we have yet to enjoy. And most importantly: "My lover, I hid them away for you." - regardless of what the King may claim I've saved the best for you. Sex can be taken but love must be given.



13

Synopsis of Chapter 7

Scene 1 - A main hall in the palace - Day: The Shulamít prepares to leave the palace; the King's Men protest, the Daughters of Jerusalem are supportive, and the desperate, drunken King describes what he did (or tried to do) with the Shulamít. Before he gets to the intimate details the Shulamít cuts him off, says he's drunk, and declares once and for all that she belongs to the Shepherd, not to him.

¹² Genesis 30:13-16

¹³ "Mandragora faemina" from *Florilegium Renovatum et Auctum* by Johannes Theodorus de Bry, Frankfurt am Mein, 1641

Scene 2 - In the Shulamít's chamber in the palace - Day: The Shulamít says to the Shepherd "let's get out of here," affirms that the time for love is finally ripe, and that she saved the essence of her love for him.