


Love in the Time of Tyranny
 A New Perspective on the Song of Songs
 Limmud 25 December 2022

2. 'The Song of Songs'



Andrew Levy



1

Love in the Time of Tyranny – Last time

- The importance of Solomon in the Song of Songs – appearing seven times.
- Second born child.
- Dysfunctional childhood.
- Solomon as wise.
- Solomon as wealthy.
- Solomon as tyrannical.
- 'A thousand wives'.



2

Love in the Time of Tyranny – The Song of Songs - שיר השירים

- The title has two possible meanings which are not mutually exclusive.
- First, it could be about quality.
- 'The Song of Songs' could be about how wonderful the poem is.

אמר רבי עקיבא, חס ושלום, לא נחלק אדם מישראל על שיר השירים שלא תטמא את הידים, שאין כל העולם כולו כדאי כיום שנתן בו שיר השירים לישראל, שכל הכתובים קדש, ושיר השירים קדש קדשים



Rabbi Akiba said: Far be it! No human in Israel disputed regarding the Song of Songs [saying] that it does not defile the hands. For the whole world is not as worthy as the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel; for all the writings are holy but the Song of Songs is the holy of holies. (Mishnah Yadayim 3:5).

3

**Love in the Time of Tyranny –
The Song of Songs – שיר השירים**

- Second, it could be about quantity.
- 'Song of the Songs' – i.e. one longer song containing within it, or comprising, shorter songs.
- This reflects the nature of the whole work.
- It contains lovers' dialogues, angst-filled soliloquies, bodily descriptions and coronation/wedding scenes.
- Evidence of similar types of song/poem are known in Egypt and Lebanon, well before when the Song of Songs was written.
- It was all probably brought together by an editor...
- who most likely wove together the older songs to create the work we have today.
- We will look shortly at examples of most of these...
- First a coronation.






4

**Love in the Time of Tyranny –
The Song of Songs – Solomon the hero?**

מי זאת עלה מן המדבר כחמורת עשן מקשרת מור ולבונה מכל אבקת רובל:
הנה משתו ששלמה ששים גברים קיביל לה מנבני ישראל:
כלם אחיזי חרב מלמדי מלחמה איש הרבו עלי ירכו מפרח בלילות: (ס)
אחריו עשה לו המלך שלמה מצעי הלבונו:
עמוליו עשה מקו רזרדוהו רוב מרכבו ארמון רחף אהבה מבנות ירושלים:
צאניה | וראינה בנות ציון בקלור שלמה בעצרה ששורה לו אמו ביום חתונה ובוים שמחת לבו (ק)

- Who is this coming up from the desert like pillars of smoke, rendered more fragrant in myrrh and frankincense than all the powder of the merchant?
- Look: Solomon's bed, sixty heroes surround it from the heroes of Israel. All carrying a sword, trained in warfare, each man has a sword by his thigh, because of fear of night time.
- King Solomon made himself a palanquin from the trees of Lebanon, its pillars he made from silver, its back from gold, its seat was purple, in its midst it was inlaid with love.
- Daughters of Jerusalem, go out, and rejoice, daughters of Zion, about King Solomon, about the crown, with which his mother crowned him, on the day of his wedding, on the day of his heart's joy.
- Song of Songs 3:6-11.



5

**Love in the Time of Tyranny –
The Song of Songs – Solomon the hero?**

מי זאת עלה מן המדבר כחמורת עשן מקשרת מור ולבונה מכל אבקת רובל:
Who is this coming up from the desert like pillars of smoke, rendered more fragrant in myrrh and frankincense than all the powder of the merchant?
Song of Songs 3:6.

Who is this (female) person coming up from the desert?
The female lover?
It reminds one also, though, of the story of the Queen of Sheba.
ותחן למלך משה וישקים | ככר זהב ובקוסים חרבה מזהר ונבן ויחיה לא בא בכעם הוא עוד רוב אשר נתנה מלכת ישבא למלך שלמה:
She presented the king with one hundred and twenty talents of gold, and a very large quantity of spices, and precious stones. Never again did such a vast quantity of spices arrive as that which the Queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon. (I Kings 10:10).

- Could it be both? The female lover being compared to a queen?
- We don't know.






6

**Love in the Time of Tyranny –
The Song of Songs – Solomon the hero?**

הנה משתו שלשלמה ששים גברים סביב לה מנבחי ישראל:
כלם אחזי חרב מלמדו מלחמה איש חרבו על ירכו מפתח בלילות: (ס)

- > Look: Solomon's bed, sixty heroes surround it from the heroes of Israel. All carrying a sword, trained in warfare, each man has a sword by his thigh, because of fear at night time.
- > (Song of Songs 3:7-8)
- > Why does a bed need sixty hero warriors?
- > What night time fear is there?
- > Is Solomon a potential target for attack because he is unpopular?
- > We don't know.






7

**Love in the Time of Tyranny –
The Song of Songs – Solomon the hero?**

אפריון עשה לו המלך שלמה מעצי הלבנון:
עמודיו עשה כסף וכידו זהב מרכבו ארגמן טובו רצוף אהבה (מבנות ירושלים):

- > King Solomon made himself a palanquin from the trees of Lebanon. Its pillars he made from silver, its back from gold, its seat was purple, in its midst it was inlaid with love.
- > (Song of Songs 3:9-10)
- > Why does a moving palanquin (a 'litter' or 'rickshaw') have pillars?
- > Implied reference to the temple/palace made out of trees of Lebanon with pillars.
- > Silver and gold indicate wealth. Purple is the colour of royalty.
- > Could Solomon really have loved a thousand wives?
- > Is this about Solomon or the male lover 'as' Solomon?
- > We don't know.






8

**Love in the Time of Tyranny –
The Song of Songs – Solomon the hero?**

[מ]בנות ירושלים: צאינה | וראינה בנות ציון במלך שלמה בעשרה שעורה: לו אמו ביום חתונתו
וביום שמחת לבו: (ס)

- > Daughters of Jerusalem, go out, and rejoice, daughters of Zion, about King Solomon, about the crown, with which his mother crowned him, on the day of his wedding, on the day of his heart's joy.
- > Song of Songs 3:11.
- > Why if this is about Solomon - 'wedding' and not 'weddings'? He married hundreds of times.
- > Is this a clog - the lovers in the Song of Songs only have time for each other and no-one else?
- > 'his mother crowned him'.
- > Reference to Bathsheba presumably – the real power behind the throne.
- > Some commentators even suggest that Solomon is being mocked.





9

Love in the Time of Tyranny – The Song of Songs – Solomon the hero?

מי זאת עליה נזר המדבר כתימרות עשן מקשרת מים ולבונה מל אבקת חזבל:
 הנה מקומו של שלמה ששים בברים חביבי לך מנביר ישראל?
 כלום איזה חרב למלמד מלומה איש הבב עני ירכו הפחד בלילות (ס)
 אמריו עשה לו המלך שלמה מעצ (ללבנון)
 עמדיו עשה כפי רפדתו וזה מרכבו אדמן חזבו רצפו אהבה מבנות ירושלים:
 צאינה | וראינה בנות ציון בקלך שלמה בעשרה שעטרה' לו אמו ביום חתנתו וביום שמחת לבו: (ס)



Who is this coming up from the desert like pillars of smoke, rendered more fragrant in myrrh and frankincense than all the powder of the merchant?
 Look: Solomon's bed, sixty heroes surround it from the heroes of Israel. All carrying a sword, training in warfare, each man has a sword by his thigh, because of fear at night time.
 King Solomon made himself a palanquin from the trees of Lebanon. Its pillars he made from silver, its back from gold, its seat was purple, in its midst it was inlaid with love.
 Daughters of Jerusalem, go out and rejoice, daughters of Zion, about King Solomon, about the crown, with which his mother crowned him, on the day of his wedding, on the day of his heart's joy. (Song of Songs 3:6-11).



10

Love in the Time of Tyranny – The Wasf



The male lover then goes on to describe her body in great detail.
 A familiar type of poem in the Middle East.
 Known in Arabic as وصف Wasf (to 'describe').
 An idealised description of the body.
 There are three full versions in the Song of Songs.
 He describes her twice; she describes him once.
 Shakespeare hated these idealised descriptions...

11

Love in the Time of Tyranny – The Shakespearean Challenge



My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
 Coral is far more red than her lips' red;
 If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
 If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
 I have seen roses damask'd, red and white,
 But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
 And in some perfumes is there more delight
 Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
 I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
 That music hath a far more pleasing sound;
 I grant I never saw a goddess go;
 My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground:
 And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
 As any she belied with false compare.
 Sonnet 130

12

Love in the Time of Tyranny –
وصف First wasf – Song of Songs 4:1-7


4.1 Look, how beautiful you are my beloved, look how beautiful you are.
 Your eyes are doves through your veil.
 Your hair is like a flock of goats which has cascaded from Mount Gilead.
 4.2 Your teeth are like a flock just shorn, which has come up from being washed.
 All are twinned and none are barren.
 4.3 Like a crimson thread are your lips and your speech is lovely.
 Like a pomegranate slice is your palate through your veil.
 4.4 Like David's tower is your neck, built in turrets,
 A thousand shields hung on it, all the bucklers of the heroes.
 4.5 Your two breasts are like two deer, twin gazelles who are pasturing amongst the lilies.
 4.6 Before the day breathes and the shadows have fled,
 I will get myself to the mountain of myrrh, to the hill of frankincense.
 4.7 You are wholly beautiful, my beloved and you have no blemish.

13

The Song of Solomon Illustrated
 (For our Literalist Friends.)



"How beautiful you are my darling,
 how beautiful you are!
 Your eyes are like doves behind
 your veil.
 Your hair is like a flock of goats
 which has cascaded from Mount Gilead.
 Your teeth are like a flock of
 sheep just shorn,
 which has come up from being washed.
 All are twinned and none
 are barren.
 Like a crimson thread are
 your lips and your speech
 is lovely.
 Like a pomegranate slice
 is your palate through
 your veil.
 Like David's tower is your
 neck, built in turrets,
 a thousand shields hung
 on it,
 all the bucklers of the
 heroes.
 Your two breasts are
 like two deer,
 twin gazelles who are
 pasturing amongst the
 lilies.
 Before the day breathes
 and the shadows have
 fled,
 I will get myself to the
 mountain of myrrh,
 to the hill of frankincense.
 You are wholly beautiful,
 my beloved,
 and you have no blemish."




14

Love in the Time of Tyranny –
وصف First wasf – Song of Songs 4:1-7

4.1 Look, how beautiful you are my beloved, look how beautiful you are.
 Your eyes are doves through your veil.
 Your hair is like a flock of goats which has cascaded from Mount Gilead.
 4.2 Your teeth are like a flock just shorn, which has come up from being washed.
 All are twinned and none are barren.
 4.3 Like a crimson thread are your lips and your speech is lovely.
 Like a pomegranate slice is your palate through your veil.
 4.4 Like David's tower is your neck, built in turrets,
 A thousand shields hung on it, all the bucklers of the heroes.
 4.5 Your two breasts are like two deer, twin gazelles who are pasturing amongst the lilies.
 4.6 Before the day breathes and the shadows have fled,
 I will get myself to the mountain of myrrh, to the hill of ~~frankincense~~ **לבונה 'Levonah'**.
 4.7 You are wholly beautiful, my beloved and you have no blemish.

15



Love in the Time of Tyranny -
وصف First wasf

4.8 With me from Lebanon bride,
 with me from Lebanon come,
 Come down from the peak of Amanah,
 from the peak of Snir and Hermon.
 From lions' lairs
 and leopards' mountains.

4.9 You have stolen my heart my sister bride,
 you have stolen my heart with one of your eyes,
 with one bead in your necklace.

4.10 How beautiful are your caresses, my sister bride,
 how much better are your caresses than wine
 and the fragrance of your oil than all spices.

4.11 Flowing honey drops are your lips, bride,
 honey and milk are under your tongue
 and the fragrance of your dress is like the fragrance of Lebanon.

16

Love in the Time of Tyranny -
وصف First wasf

I will get myself to the mountain of myrrh, to the hill of frankincense.

4.7 You are wholly beautiful, my beloved and you have no blemish.

4.8 With me from Lebanon bride,
 with me from Lebanon come,
 Come down from the peak of Amanah,
 from the peak of Snir and Hermon.
 From lions' lairs
 and leopards' mountains.



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 you have stolen my heart with one of your eyes,
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4.10 How beautiful are your caresses, my sister bride,
 how much better are your caresses than wine
 and the fragrance of your oil than all spices.

4.11 Flowing honey drops are your lips, bride,
 honey and milk are under your tongue
 and the fragrance of your dress is like the fragrance of Lebanon.

לבנון
'Levaniah'

לבנון
'Levanon'

17



Love in the Time of Tyranny -
وصف Second wasf

5.10 My lover is dazzling and red, eminent amongst ten thousand.
 5.11 His head is the finest gold, his locks dangle, black as a raven.
 5.12 His eyes are like doves at the shore of water, washed in milk, sitting in a full pool.
 5.13 His cheeks are like a bed of spice, perfume towers.
 His lips are lilies, dripping flowing myrrh.

5.14 His hands are rods of gold studded in emerald
 His stomach is a tablet of ivory adorned with sapphires

עמודי שש
 5.15 His thighs are marble pillars, set on pedestals of fine gold. אדניו
 His appearance is like Lebanon, chosen like cedars.



5.16 His mouth is mellifluous and his all is alluring.
 That is my lover and that is my friend, oh daughters of Jerusalem.

18

Love in the Time of Tyranny – وصف Third Wasf



- 7.1 Again, again, the Shulamite, again, again so that we can see you.
What will we see in the Shulamite, like the dance of the two camps?
- 7.2 How beautiful are your feet in shoes, daughter of a noble.
The curves of your thighs are like jewels, the handiwork of a craftsman.
- 7.3 Your navel is a crescent moon goblet, never lacking mixed wine.
Your stomach is a heap of wheat, surrounded by lilies.
- 7.4 Your two breasts are like two deer, twin gazelles.
- 7.5 Your neck is like a tower of ivory,
your eyes are pools in Heshbon by the gale of Bal Rabbim.
Your nose is like the Lebanon tower overlooking Damascus.
- 7.6 Your head on you is like Carmel
and the locks of your head are like purple,
a king is bound up in the curls.
- 7.7 How beautiful and wondrous you are, love amongst pleasures.

19

Love in the Time of Tyranny – The modification of an idea



- 2.16 My lover is mine and I am his who pastures in the lilies. דודי לי ואני לו הרעה בשושנים:
- 6.3 I am my lover's and my lover is mine, who pastures in the lilies. אני לדודי ודודי לי הרעה בשושנים:
- 7.11 I am my lover's and his desire is for me. אני לדודי ועלי תשוקתו:

20

Love in the Time of Tyranny – The modification of a word

- תשוקתו = 'His desire'.
- Appears three times in the Bible.
- The other two are at the beginning of the book of Genesis.
- אל האשה אמר הרבה ארבה עמנוך והרונך בעצב תלדי בנים ואלי אישך תשוקתך הוא ימשל-בך:
And to the woman He said, "I will make most severe your pangs in childbearing; in pain shall you bear children. Yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." (Genesis 3:16).
- הלא אמי-תיטיב שאת ואם לא תיטיב לפתח תנאט רבץ ואליך תשוקתו ואנה תמשל-בו:
Surely, if you do right, there is uplift. But if you do not do right, sin crouches at the door; its desire is toward you, yet you can be its master." (Genesis 4:7).
- 7.11 I am my lover's and his desire is for me. אני לדודי ועלי תשוקתו:






21

Love in the Time of Tyranny - תשוקתו
A fascinating Rabbinic conundrum

- > תשוקתו 'tshukato' ('his desire') is such a rare word.
- > Where does it derive from?
- > נשיקות 'neshikot' = 'kisses'
- > נשק 'neshek' = 'weapon'
- > In fact it does not derive from either word but see what the Rabbis are saying:
- > 'Desire' in the Song of Songs is a means of mutual respect ('I love him and his desire is for me') like 'kisses'.
- > 'Desire' in Genesis is about control like a 'weapon'.
- > There has been a transformation of language.

7.11 I am my lover's and his desire is for me. אני לדודי ועלי תשוקתו: Andrew Levy

22



Love in the Time of Tyranny –
The Song of Songs as transformative

- > The Song of Songs as transformative.
- > We will consider this further in part 3 (Tuesday 6.20pm)
- > We will look at Solomon and the Song of Songs together and see why it is so radically different to any other book in the Bible.




23

Love in the Time of Tyranny

24
