

Love in the Time of Tyranny

A New Perspective on the Song of Songs

Limmud 27 December 2022

3. 'The Song of Songs which is about Solomon'

Andrew Levy



1

Love in the Time of Tyranny – Last time

- The meaning of 'the Song of Songs'.
- The coronation/wedding scene.
- The three wasfs – descriptions of the body of the lover (via a Shakespearean test).
- A passage showing how words are used differently in the Song of Songs.




2

Love in the Time of Tyranny – This time

- Simply a secular love song?
- The Song and what it says about the relationship between the city and nature.
- The Song's message about love universally.
- Its radicality.
- Conclusion.




3

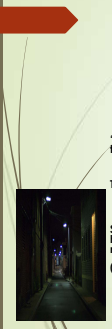


Love in the Time of Tyranny – Simply a secular love song?

- It's not simple.
- It is not 'secular' as it uses religious imagery to describe the lovers.
- זה היום עשה ויהיה נגילה ושמחה בו:
This is the day that the LORD has made. We will be glad and rejoice in Him.
(Psalm 118:24)
- משכני אחריך נרוצה הביאני המלך חדריו נגילה ושמחה בר
Draw me after you, let us run, the king brought me to his rooms. We will be glad and rejoice in you.
(Song of Songs 1:4)



4



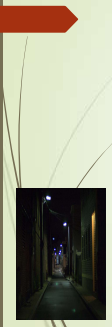
Love in the Time of Tyranny – Danger in City.

על־משכבי בלילות בקשתי את שאהבה נפשי בקשתי ולא מצאתיו:
Upon my couch at night I sought the one I love – I sought him, but found him not.
אקומה נא ואסובבה בעיר בשוקים וברחבות אבקשה את שאהבה נפשי בקשתי ולא מצאתי:
"I must rise and roam the town, through the streets and through the squares; I must seek the one I love." I sought him, but found him not.

מצאני השמרים הסבבים בעיר את שאהבה נפשי ראיתם.
The watchmen who patrol the town found me. "Have you seen the one I love?"
כמעט שעברתי מהם עד שמצאתי את שאהבה נפשי אחוזתי ולא ארפנו עד־שהביאתני אל־בית אמי
ואל־חדר הולדתי:
Scarcely had I passed them when I found the one I love. I held him fast, I would not let him go till I brought him to my mother's house, to the chamber of her who conceived me.
(Song of Songs 3:1-4.)



5



Love in the Time of Tyranny – Danger in City

פתחתי אני לדודי ודודי חמק עבר נפשי יצאה בדברו בקשתיו ולא מצאתיו קראתיו ולא ענני:
I opened the door for my beloved, but my beloved had turned and gone. I was faint because of what he said. I sought him, but found him not; I called him, but he did not answer.

מצאני השמרים הסבבים בעיר הכוני פצעוני נשאו את־רדודי מעלי שמרי החמות:
The watchmen who patrol the town found me; they struck me, they bruised me. The guards of the walls stripped me of my mantle.
(Song of Songs 5:6-7)

The escape is to nature.



6

Love in the Time of Tyranny – Love of nature – with religious imagery

נשכימה לכרמים נראה אם פרחה הגפן פתח הסמדר הנצנו הרמונים שם אתן את ידי לך:
Let us go early to the vineyards; Let us see if the vine has flowered, if its blossoms have opened, if the pomegranates are in bloom. There I will give my love to you.
(Song of Songs 7:13)

ברוך | דודי ודמה לך לצבי או לעפר האילים על הרי בשמים:
"Hurry, my beloved, swift as a gazelle or a young stag, to the hills of spices!"
(Song of Songs 8:14) – final words.

קרות בתינו ארזים רחוטנו [רהיטנו] ברותים:
The beams of our houses are cedars, our rafters are cypresses.
(Song of Songs 1:17)




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Love in the Time of Tyranny – A comparison to Bialik

> Chaim Nachman Bialik (1873-1934)
> Habereichah (The pool) הביחיה

אני יודע יער, וביער
אני יודע ברכה צנועה אחת
בעי החורש, פרושה מן העולם
בצל של אלוון רם, ברור אור ולימוד סער,
לבדה תחלום עולם הפוך
ותדגה לה בחשאי את דג זהבה –
ואין יודע מה בלבבה.

'I know a forest, and in the forest
I know a sheltered pool.
In the thicket of the wood, set apart from the world,
In the shade of a mighty oak, blessed in light and well-versed in storm,
Alone it dreams for itself a dream of an upturned world.
And it will spawn, in secret, its golden fish
But no-one knows what is in its heart.'

> Upturned world = עולם הפוך





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Love in the Time of Tyranny – A comparison to Bialik

כי הא דיוסף בריה דר' יתושע חלש איגיד א"ל אבוא מאי חזית אמר ליה עולם הפוך איח
עליונים למטה ותחתונים למעלה אמר ליה עולם ברור ראית

This is like the incident involving Yosef, son of Rabbi Yehoshua, who became ill and fainted. When he returned to good health, his father said to him: What did you see? Yosef said to him: I saw an upturned world. Those above, i.e., those who are considered important in this world, were below, insignificant, while those below, i.e., those who are insignificant in this world, were above. Rabbi Yehoshua said to him: You have seen a clear world.
(Baba Batra 10b)





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Love in the Time of Tyranny – A comparison to Bialik

מבית לפרוכת של העלים, שם יש אי קטון ירוק רפוד דשא

Within a hanging of leaves, there is a small green island carpeted with grass.

ויאמר יהוה אל משה דבר אל אהרן אחיך ואל יבא בכל עת אל הקדש מבית לפרוכת

The LORD said to Moses: Tell your brother Aaron that he is not to come at will into the Shrine behind the curtain (Leviticus 16:2)





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Love in the Time of Tyranny – Love as an absolute

שימני כחולם על לבך כחולם על זרועך כי עזה כמות אהבה קשה כשאל קנאה

רשפיה רשפי אש שלהבתיה:

מים רבים לא יוכלו לכבות את האהבה ונהרות לא ישטפוה אם יתן איש את כל הון ביתו באהבה בוד יבחו לו

Set me as a seal on your head, as a seal on your arm, because strong as death is love, tough as Sheol is jealousy. Its sparks: sparks of fire, an (A)lmighty flame.

Many waters cannot extinguish love and rivers cannot drown it. Were a man to give all the wealth of his house for love, they would surely scorn him.

(Song of Songs 8:6-7).




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Love in the Time of Tyranny – Love as changing other messages.

נצר בני מצות אביר ואל תטש תורת אביר:

קשרם על לבבך תמיד עגדם על גוריתך:

לא יבחו ענב כי יגנוב למלא נפשו כי ירעב:

וגמלא ישלם שבועתם את כל הון ביתו יתן

My son, keep your father's commandment; do not forsake your mother's teaching. Tie them over your heart always; bind them around your throat...

A thief is not scorned for stealing to appease his hunger; yet if caught he must pay sevenfold; he must give up all the wealth of his house.

(Proverbs 6:20-21; 6:30-31.)




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Love in the Time of Tyranny – Scorning wealth – אֶלֶף 'thousand'

כָּרָם הָיָה לְשִׁלְמָה בְּבַעַל הָמוֹן, נָתַן אֶת-הַכָּרֶם לְנֹטְרִים: אִישׁ יִבֶּא בִּפְרִיָּו אֶלֶף כֶּסֶף כְּרָמִי שֵׁלִי, לִפְנֵי (הָאֶלֶף) לֶךְ שִׁלְמָה, וּמֵאֲתָיִים לְנֹטְרִים אֶת-פְּרִיָּו

Solomon had a vineyard in Baal Hamon [the Master of Plenty], he gave the vineyard to the guards. A man earns a thousand pieces of silver for his fruit.
My own vineyard is all mine in front of me; the thousand is yours, O Solomon, and two hundred to those who guard his fruit.
(Song of Songs 8:13-14)




13

Love in the Time of Tyranny – What אֶלֶף 'thousand' is being scorned?

וַיְהִי־לֹו נָשִׁים שְׁבַע מֵאוֹת וּפְלִגְשִׁים שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת וַיִּטּוּ נָשָׁיו אֶת לִבּוֹ:

He had women, seven hundred royal princesses and three hundred concubines; and his women turned his heart away. (I Kings 11:3.)

- Clearly Solomon was (and is) well-known for having a 'thousand' wives.
- But the text does not use the word אֶלֶף 'thousand'
- So what is being scorned as well?




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Love in the Time of Tyranny – What אֶלֶף 'thousand' is being scorned?

וַיֵּלֶךְ הַמֶּלֶךְ שִׁלְמָה מִסִּבְלִי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיְהִי הַמֶּסֶךְ שִׁלְשִׁים אֶלֶף אִישׁ: וַיִּשְׁלָחֵם לְכַנּוּנָה עֶשְׂרֵת אֲלָפִים בְּחֹדֶשׁ חֲלִיפוֹת חֹדֶשׁ יִהְיוּ בִלְבָנּוֹן שָׂצִים חֲדָשִׁים בְּבֵיתוֹ וְאֹדְעֵרֶם עַל הַמֶּסֶךְ: (ס)

וַיְהִי לְשִׁלְמָה שְׁבַע־אֶלֶף אִישׁ סָבִיל וּשְׁמֹנִים אֶלֶף אִישׁ צָבָה בְּהָרִי:

לָבַד מִשְׁרֵי הַנְּצִיבִים לְשִׁלְמָה אִשָּׁר עַל הַמְּלָאכָה שִׁלְשִׁים אֲלָפִים וַיִּשְׁלַח מֵאוֹת הָרָדִים בָּעַם וַיַּעֲשִׂים בְּמִלְאכָה:

King Solomon imposed forced labour on all Israel; the levy came to 30,000 men.
He sent them to the Lebanon in shifts of 10,000 a month; they would spend one month in the Lebanon and two months at home. Adoniram was in charge of the forced labour.
Solomon also had 70,000 porters and 80,000 quarriers in the hills, apart from Solomon's 3,300 officials who were in charge of the work and supervised the gangs doing the work.
I Kings 5:27-30.




15

Love in the Time of Tyranny – Ending

היושבת בגנים חברים מקשיבים לקולך השמיעני:

O one who dwells in gardens, friends listen to your voice, let me hear it.

ברח | דודי דמה לך לצבי או לעפר האילים על הרי בשמים:

"Get away, my love, and make yourself like a gazelle or a deer of the hinds on the mountains of spices!"

(Song of Songs 8:13-14).

- 'without beginning and without end, the poem like the love it celebrates strives to be everlasting'. (Cheryl Exum Commentary)
- All we are left with is the smell.




16

Love in the Time of Tyranny – Conclusion

- The Song of Songs is a love poem.
- It has always been regarded as mysterious.
- 'Know, my brother, that you will find great diversity of opinions as regards the interpretation of the Song of Songs and it must be confessed that there is a reason for it since the Song is like a lock, the key of which has been lost.' (Attributed to Saadya Gaon 10th century.)
- It remains deeply mysterious.
- But we have a few clues...




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Love in the Time of Tyranny – Conclusion

- Is it a love song?
- Yes.
- Is there more going on?
- Yes – this is not just a 'simple secular love song'.
- We have seen the importance of Solomon.
- But there are other issues as well...




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Love in the Time of Tyranny – Conclusion

- 1. Solomon – Solomon is being mocked and compared unfavourably to the lovers. His love of wealth and multiple women ('thousand').
- 2. Terminology relating to Solomon and his temple is transformed. (Lebanon, cedars, cypresses, frankincense).
- 3. The need to get away from the city and escape to nature.
- 4. Transformative – it uses words we know from other books in the Tanach (Hebrew Bible) and utterly transforms them, or uses them in a completely different situation.
- 5. The female lover is treated as (at least) an equal to her male counterpart.
- ...or as I argue his guide.



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Love in the Time of Tyranny – Conclusion – Authorship

- It is very likely that the work we have is made up of different original fragments.
- Those fragments could have come from as far afield as Egypt and Lebanon.
- They were transformed by the editor to make the flowing work we have today.
- The editing process involved ensuring that the fragments were unified into a whole which became more than the sum of its parts.
- That was the genius of the editor who can really be called the author.
- ...and she was almost certainly a woman.



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Love in the Time of Tyranny – Conclusion – Authorship

- The female lover speaks more than the male lover.
- But those proportions change over the length of the Song of Songs.
- In the first two chapters, she speaks much more than him.
- He says little and she adapts what he says...



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Love in the Time of Tyranny – Conclusion – Authorship

אני חבצלת השרון שושנת העמקים:
(She speaks to him) 2.1 I am a rose of the Sharon, a lily of the valleys
כְּשׁוֹשָׁנָה בֵּין הַחוּחִים כֵּן רַעֲיָתִי בֵּין הַבָּנוֹת:
(He speaks to her) 2.2 Like a lily amongst the thorns, thus is my beloved amongst the daughters.
כַּתְּמוּחַ בְּעֵצֵי הַיָּעַר כֵּן דּוּדִי בֵּין הַבָּנִים בְּצֵלוֹ תַּמְדָּתִי וְיִשְׁבַּתִּי וּפְרִי מִתּוֹק לִחְיִי:
הַבִּיאֵנִי אֶל־בֵּית הַיָּוִן וְדַגְלֹו עָלַי אֶהְבֶּה:
סִמְכוּנִי בְּאִשִּׁשׁוֹת רַעְדוּנִי בַתְּפוּחִים כִּי־חֹלֶת אֶהְבֶּה אֲנִי:
(She speaks to him) 2.3 – 2.5 Like an apple in the trees of the forest, thus is my love amongst the sons. In its shade I have yearned to sit and its fruit is sweet to my palate.
He brought me to the house of wine and his banner over me is love.
Support me with raisin cakes, uphold me with apples because lovesick am I.


22

Love in the Time of Tyranny – Conclusion – Authorship

- After the Solomon passage (chapter 3) however, he finds his voice.
- He then takes up her language and uses it for his own wasfs.
- She is, as it were, his educator.
- No other book in the Bible remotely resembles this way of thinking.
- Very strong evidence therefore of female authorship.



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Love in the Time of Tyranny – Conclusion – Book recommendations

- Want to find out more?
- Love in the Time of Tyranny – Andrew Levy.
- Song of Songs – A Commentary – J. Cheryl Exum (2005).
- The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs – Michael V Fox (1985).
- The Song of Songs – Ariel Bloch and Chana Bloch (1995).
- The Song of Songs – A Biography – Ilana Pardes (2019). (On the reception history).
- The Song of Songs –A Contemplative Guide – Graeme Watson 2014.



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Love in the Time of Tyranny



Love in the
Time of Tyranny
Andrew Lewis
