

# The Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash

Themes and Ideas in the Haftara  
Yeshivat Har Etzion

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**This haftara series is dedicated in memory  
of our beloved Chaya Leah bat Efrayim Yitzchak  
(Mrs. Claire Reinitz), zichronah livracha,  
by her family.**

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***SHABBAT CHOL HA-MO'ED PESACH  
SHIR HA-SHIRIM***[\[1\]](#)

**BY RAV MOSHEH LICHTENSTEIN**

Every year, when we read the marvelous love story between the loving *dod* and his beloved *ra'aya*, we are seized by a holy fire that draws us up higher and higher. Who can hear the tremulous voice of the reader, and not become excited at the sound of the lover knocking at the door and by the longings of his beloved for her heart's love? We soar up high with the mighty feelings of love expressed in the verses, when once again the people of Israel captivate their Creator with the renewal of the time of love. However, the stormy emotional experience that sweeps us away as we read the story does not allow us the time or opportunity to reflect, during the course of the reading, upon the details of the verses and the many images in the book.

If indeed we reflect upon the poetic language of the text, and examine the ways in which it operates, we see how literary devices are integrated into the framework of the development of the emotional drama and how they contribute to the advancement and establishment of the plot. Thus, it is fitting to attend to this dimension at this time, before we read the book in the synagogue, so that the poetic devices will contribute to the artistic whole that magnifies and intensifies our participation in the full force of the book. Surely we are dealing with *Shir ha-Shirim*, the Song of Songs, a work that is a poem both with respect to its plot and with respect to its manners of expression. It therefore falls upon us to understand the book using the appropriate tools. Surely, already the Rambam in his introduction to the *Guide of the Perplexed* commented on the relationship between poetry and man's aesthetic sense, on the one hand, and Scripture, on

the other, and supported the use of literary techniques to understand the biblical text. He writes there as follows:

Know that the key to the understanding of all that the prophets, peace be on them, have said, and to the knowledge of its truth, is an understanding of the parables, of their import, and of the meaning of the words occurring in them. You know what God, may He be exalted, has said: "And by the ministry of the prophets have I used similitudes" (*Hoshe'a* 12:11). And you know that He has said: "Put forth a riddle and speak a parable" (*Yechezkel* 17:2). You know too that because of the frequent use prophets make of parables, the prophet has said: "They say of me: Is he not a maker of parables" (*Yechezkel* 21:5). You know how Shelomo began his book: "To understand a proverb, and a figure; the words of the wise and their dark sayings" (*Mishlei* 1:6).

From the moment that the curtain first rises, the *ra'aya* engages in bolder and bolder attempts to reach the long awaited meeting with her heart's desire. She craves for him, she pursues him on the hills and in the valleys. Her sole interest is to find the one whom her soul loves and captivate his heart. The lover, however, does not hasten to answer. He stands behind the wall, looks in at the windows, and peers through the lattice, but he does not reveal himself to her. "Tell me, O you whom my soul loves, where you feed, where you make you flock to rest at noon" (1:7), begs the *ra'aya*, but the only answer that she receives is "Go your way forth by the footsteps of the flock" (1:8). Her call for the immediate clarification of her lover's whereabouts is answered with the advice that she go and search for him, following the tracks that he left behind. She is confused and frustrated; why doesn't he reveal himself to her and immediately take her as his bride?<sup>[2]</sup>

The answer to this question lies in the personality of the *ra'aya*. Her entire being is a bursting emotional storm. She does not think out her steps, but leaps forward in a torrent of stormy love. There is no calculation of gradual and progressive measures, nor is there development and deepening of the relationship over time, but a wild rush forward along a path that ascends to the heights of holy love. These are the distinguishing features of the *ra'aya*; they are what drive her to cling to her beloved *dod* and pursue him at all times, but they also constitute an obstacle and stumbling-block on the road to actualizing her love. Like the unfortunate priest, about whom it is related in the Gemara in *Yoma* that he broke his leg and failed to reach the top of the altar because he had charged up the ramp, rather than walk at a gentle gait, heel touching toe, as instructed by the Sages, so too the *ra'aya*, physically and emotionally drained by her restless running after the *dod* under the burning afternoon sun (1:7) and late at night (3:2) in an intensive search before its time, fails to get up to open the door for the *dod* when the great and long-awaited moment finally arrives. The *ra'aya's* impulsive nature which does not allow her to distinguish between the time for love and the preparations that must precede it, is the main axis around which the *megila* revolves as it describes the *ra'aya's* attempts to find her beloved *dod* and his reactions until he knocks at the door but is not answered.

As stated above, the *ra'aya* bursts forward with no restraints and the *dod* tries to calm her down and put her to ease in order to allow for their love to deepen in a gradual manner. This finds expression in two ways: First, the *dod* explicitly declares this grand principle: "I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles and by the hinds of the field, that you stir not up,

nor awake my love, till it please" (2:7). In the previous verse the *ra'aya* had stormily proclaimed, "For I am sick with love," and from this she concluded that she was facing a situation of "his left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me." The *dod*, therefore, cries out and clarifies that her longings have outpaced (for the time being) reality, and that love should not be stirred up prematurely. Similar circumstances prevail also the second time that the *dod* charges the daughters of Jerusalem, and immediately afterwards we are informed that sixty men surround Shelomo's litter, i.e., his bed is guarded against the *ra'aya* so that she should not be able to burst in to his room.

In addition to the explicit declaration of the differences between the two heroes in the story, the book of *Shir ha-Shirim* deepens our awareness of the issue by employing literary devices that illustrate and flesh out these characteristics. We shall try here to exemplify this idea as it finds expression in two elements in the book, namely, the role of time and the literary images as they are expressed by the *dod* and the *ra'aya*.

We shall open, in brief, with the issue of time. Already at the beginning of the *ra'aya's* courtings, she directs a question to the *dod*: "Tell me, O you whom my soul loves, where you feed, where you make your flock to rest **at noon**." The simple fact that the *ra'aya* tries to reach the *dod* too soon is reinforced by the emphasis placed on the time. When does she desire to see him – in the middle of the day! Surely that is time for work, and not for pleasure. During the day, we work, and it is at night that we conduct our social and love life. At that early stage of the relationship that is growing between them, she should not abandon everything and chase after him in the middle of the workday. Day is for work, and night for courting. But the *ra'aya* pays no attention; she has an impulsive personality, and she therefore puts everything aside and runs out to find him. The answer does not tarry: "Go your way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed you kids besides the shepherds' tents." Or in other words, calm down and return to your work; the time will yet come when it will be appropriate for the *ra'aya* to be with the *dod* in the middle of the day, but not now. When a relationship is first being created and established, the work of love should be pursued at night, and not during the day. The *dod* will indeed come, but with the dampness of night, and not in the afternoon sun.

Whereas the element of time illustrates this point in a sharp but brief manner, the world of images that the two heroes of the story employ does this in a quiet and constant manner the entire length of the narrative. There is a clear difference between the *ra'aya's* world of images and that of the *dod*. The *ra'aya's* images are all taken from nature, from a world in which animals and plants grow wild and undisturbed, without limits, conventions or restraints. It is the nature of a plant to grow and spread out, and the nature of an animal to do whatever it pleases. The organic world is a world of extension and expansion, and it is in this world that the *ra'aya's* images establish her relationship with the *dod*. Her nature bursts out without limits or restraint, and therefore she identifies herself and her *dod* with this world. We shall offer two examples to illustrate this point: 1) "Like the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons" (2:3); 2) "My beloved is like a gazelle or a young hart" (2:9). In both cases, both the image taken from the plant kingdom and that borrowed from the animal kingdom, the emphasis is on movement and freedom. The inorganic world which lacks movement and growth, the raw material out of which artificial tools are created, the world that is like clay in the hands of the potter to form as he pleases, does not exist in the *ra'aya's* world of images. The entire length of

the narrative, from the beginning of their relationship until the *dod's* knocking in the middle of the night, the *ra'aya* does not employ a single image taken from that which is made by human work.

The world of the *dod*, in contrast, is more complex. He does not aspire to silence his natural urges, but to control them. It is not an artificial world, in which restraint originates in the absence of life and vitality, but a world in which the living and beating heart is found in a reciprocal relationship with calculated reason. Therefore, the *dod*, when he turns to his beloved, makes use of images taken from both realms, and frequently employs metaphors that constitute an intentional mix of nature and human work. Thus, on the one hand, the *dod* turns to the *ra'aya* with the call: "Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, which feed among the lilies" (4:5), while on the other hand, he also asserts that "Your cheeks would be comely with rows of jewels, your neck with strings of beads. We will make you necklets of gold studded with silver" (1:10-11). Another example of the integration of these two elements is found at the very beginning of the *dod's* words: "I compare you, O my love, to a mare of the chariots of Pharaoh" (1:9). While the horse is one of the striking symbols of natural, unrestrained energy [see end of *Iyov*, 39:19-25), and it is not by chance that the literary culture of the Wild West is connected to this noble animal, what we are dealing with here is the horse of a chariot. This is the same horse that is filled with tremendous energy, but that energy is harnessed and channeled for human use. The royal knight who sits erect on his trained horse, whose every muscle is tautly ready for its rider's order, served throughout the generations as the symbol of harnessed and restrained energy. This is the horse that is mentioned by the *dod*, because he is interested in that combination of restrained energy that is ready to burst forward at the appropriate moment when love pleases, and not the wild horse that does whatever it wants. Another expression of this attitude of the *dod* is found in a later verse: "Behold, you are fair, my love, behold, you are fair:: you have doves' eyes behind your veil; your hair is like a flock of goats, that cascade down from Mount Gile'ad"... (4:1). The *ra'aya's* hair is described with a natural image of great intensity, but her eyes are found behind the screen of a veil.<sup>[3]</sup> So too all along the way, the *dod* combines images taken from the two worlds, and interweaves necklets of gold that are studded with silver with the lily that is among thorns, and dove-like eyes with a neck that is strung with beads.

In truth, there is gradation and development in the words of the *dod*. The closer we are to the beginning of the book, when the love is still very unripe, the *dod* makes greater use of inanimate objects, but as the relationship develops and the connection matures, there is a transition to a greater use of natural images to the point that the poem recited immediately prior to his arrival at her house uses not a single inorganic image. The moment that love ripens and the time comes to actualize it, his litter that is guarded by sixty valiant men ceases to be an object that is fashioned out of the timbers of the Lebanon which turn into a palanquin, in which the love from among the daughters of Jerusalem must reside among pillars of silver, its back of gold. Now, even the *dod* proclaims in an excited and tremulous voice: "**A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Levanon**" (4:15), and immediately afterwards: "Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: **for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night**" (5:2).

Owing to her stormy and impulsive nature, however, the *ra'aya* misses the opportunity; that same inability to restrain the love that breaches its bounds at the beginning of the book is what causes trouble now as well. Just as she cannot control her immature passions and she reacts with a burst of emotions that is inappropriate for a budding relationship, so too now fatigue and laziness defeat the deep and enduring connection that exists between them. She has not yet internalized the meaning of the integration of the heart and the head, and just as she cannot control her responses, so too she is unable to channel her feelings into actions at the proper time. However, in the wake of the momentary and impulsive failure that occurs at the time of that fateful knock, she learns her lesson and changes her ways. In a dramatic turnabout from all that transpired previously, the *ra'aya* replaces her world of concepts and adopts for herself tools of expression and thought drawn from the spiritual world of the *dod*. As she pours out her heart following her loss, the *dod* is described in terms that are drastically different from her previous style. No longer an exclusively natural world, but a world that includes a significant artificial component.

His head is as the finest gold, his locks are wavy, and black as a raven... His lips are like lilies, dropping flowing myrrh. His hands are like rods of gold set with emeralds: his belly is polished ivory overlaid with sapphires. His legs are pillars of marble, set upon sockets of fine gold: his countenance is like the Lebanon, excellent as the cedars. (*Shir ha-Shirim* 5:12-15)

Here, in the combination of flowing myrrh and rods of gold and the balance between the Lebanon forest and the polished ivory and pillars of marble, the *ra'aya* learns the *dod's* secret and internalizes it into her own personality in an attempt to build a new relationship on a stronger foundation.

Following the change that transpires in the *ra'aya* and the emotional turnabout that she undergoes, one important question remains, namely, will the *dod* continue to visit his beloved, restoring their early love to its previous strength, or perhaps, God forbid, she has missed her opportunity, and the *dod* has retraced his steps, fleeing to the mountains of Beter. Is this love no longer capable of being actualized or the longings to be satisfied? Will the *dod* return to his beloved, or will he prefer to hide from her in the mountains and crevices? These questions, which are reinforced by the fact that the *ra'aya* mended her ways in the wake of her failure, stand before us in full force, when we pass from the first half of the book to the second half, to which we shall now direct our attention.

The key to answering the question regarding the nature of the relations between the *dod* and the *ra'aya* in the wake of the nocturnal flight of the *dod* who had knocked on the *ra'aya's* door, but was not answered, lies, it would appear, in a comparison between two sections of the book. The first, before the *ra'aya* missed the *dod*, and the second, afterwards. In the beginning of chapter 4, at the point of transition from a quiet and constrained relationship (which the *dod* conducts in the chapter 3), when the *dod* felt that the time has arrived for his love to find expression, and he no longer felt the need to remain entrenched in his litter surrounded by guards, the *dod* turns to his beloved in a series of poems of praise which in the end will bring him to go to her house and knock on her door. He is fluent and confident in his speech, free of the emotional restraints that were previously his lot before his unripe love had matured.

Behold, you are fair, my love: behold, you are fair; you have doves' eyes behind your veil: your hair is like a flock of goats, that cascade down from Mount Gil'ad. Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes, which came up from the washing; all of which bear twins, and none of them miscarries. Your lips are like a thread of scarlet, and your mouth is comely: your cheek is like a piece of a pomegranate within your locks. Your neck is like the tower of David built with turrets, on which there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men. Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, which feed among the lilies. Before the day cools, and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense. You are all fair, my love; there is no blemish in you. (4:1-7).

The end of this section testifies to the *dod's* closeness at this point, and his standing in wait for the approaching moment of their meeting, which will arrive that night. The flow of the *dod's* songs grows stronger and stronger until at the end he proclaims: "Let my beloved come into his garden and eat its choicest fruits" (4:16). But as we know, the *ra'aya* does not open the door, and the *dod* turns away and is gone, and the *ra'aya* goes out to search for him. However, she finds not him, but only the watchmen, and we are left shrouded in a lack of clarity regarding the continuation of their relationship. Will the *dod* reveal himself again and renew their youthful love, longingly returning to his beloved who has matured and is now better prepared for his love, or will he run off to the mountains and disappear?

The answer does not dawdle; it is found in the crevices of the *dod's* first response after the nocturnal non-encounter. When we say this, we refer not to the important fact that the *dod* answers his beloved, but to the meaning of the allusions concealed in his words. Thus, at the beginning of chapter 6, he turns to the *ra'aya* and says as follows:

Your are beautiful, O my love, as Tirtza, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners. Turn away your eyes from me, for they have overcome me; **your hair is like a flock of goats cascading down the Gil'ad. Your teeth are like a flock of sheep which go up from the washing, of which all bear twins, and not one of them miscarries. As a piece of a pomegranate is your cheek within your veil....** (6:1-7)

It should be noted that all the verses in bold are a literal repetition of the very same verses found in the beginning of chapter 4. In fact, the *dod* does not provide a new and different answer, directed towards the *ra'aya* in the wake of what had passed between them and the new situation that was created. But rather he intentionally and emphatically repeats what he had said earlier, and thus returns them to the precise point where they had stood previously, when their love had blossomed before the crisis. All through the book, there is constant variety and novelty in the images and in the words of love, but precisely here – following the great crisis – the *dod* with full intention repeats what he had said earlier. In this manner, he tells his beloved that the mistakes of the past are as naught and that he still delights in her as at first. In this way he restores them to the last point that they had shared and from which he wishes to continue. Concealed within these verses of innocent love, that describe his beloved's teeth, hair and cheeks, is the grand and mighty message that God accepts us in renewed love, totally unprejudiced by the past that had been sullied by indifference and sin.[\[4\]](#)

Indeed, from this point on the relationship between the *dod* and the *ra'aya* flows with speed and innocence until it finds full expression in their union. From the moment that the *dod* restores the previous situation, ignoring his beloved's failure, the story continues from the very point where it had left off and develops as before. Many elements of chapter 4 are, therefore, found again in chapter 7, for chapter 7 is but a second and improved version of the events of chapter 4.

We can see this technique of intentional repetition if we follow one particular element that is central to both chapters, namely the gradual development in the *dod's* attitude and the attention that he pays to the *ra'aya's* body. As we tried to demonstrate above, the *dod*, in contrast to the *ra'aya*, tries to build the relationship between him and his beloved in a gradual manner, and he does not leap forward in a rush of emotions without advance preparations. This finds striking expression in his attitude toward the *ra'aya's* body. Until the beginning of chapter 4, the *dod* directs his attention to the entirety of his beloved's person without relating to the physical element, or when he does refer to her body, it is to the exposed portions – "you have doves' eyes" (1:15), "your cheeks would be comely with rows of jewels, your neck with strings of beads" (1:10) – and not to her unexposed areas, mention of which would be inappropriate at this point in their budding relationship. All this fits in with his approach, which was described at length above, that love should not be stirred up till it pleases. However, in the poems of chapter 4, which appear after his love has developed, and are meant to bring him directly to their nocturnal meeting, there is a significant change in this regard. Now that his love has ripened, it is appropriate for the *dod* to mention those parts of the body that are ordinarily concealed from the eyes of strangers, but are exposed to one's lover and emotional partner. Therefore, the opening poem of chapter 4 does not end with "you have doves' eyes" (4:1) or "your hair is a flock of goats" (*ibid.*). But rather it advances to the declaration that "Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle" (4:5), and in the next poem, the second in the chapter, the *dod* says to his beloved, "How fair is your love, my sister, my bride!" (4:10).

The climax of this process is in the last poem, which is stated immediately prior to the *dod's* nighttime visit to his beloved's house: "A garden enclosed is my sister, my bride; a spring shut up... A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon... Blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden and eat its choicest fruit" (4:12-15). The image of the garden with the flowing spring is a clear sexual image, which is occasionally used by *Chazal* for this purpose as well. The description of the garden and the spring as closed and sealed until the time arrives when it is possible and necessary to say, "Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat its choicest fruit" corresponds to the development that accompanies their relationship from the beginning of the book until this point.

As we know, the *dod* does not merit at this time to enter his garden and enjoy its choicest fruit, and his desperate knocking remains unanswered and unrealized owing to the crazed indifference of his impulsive *ra'aya*. However, if we trace this standard of exposure and cover-up, concealment and revelation, we will see that here too the *dod* returns to the love of his youth and the full actualization of his union with his beloved. Just as we saw the repetition of the earlier images as an indication of the full and absolute renewal of the *dod's* connection to his

beloved, so too we can discern the same approach in his renewed attention to her and her body. He does not go back to the beginning of the book but to the situation that had been reached in chapter 4. His first and immediate response repeats the images found at the beginning of chapter 4. But immediately afterwards there is a quick transition to the deeper level of what is covered, in a song of praise of all the parts of her body:

Your rounded thighs are like jewels, the work of the hands of an artist. Your navel is like a round goblet that never lacks blended wine; your belly is like a heap of wheat set about with lilies. **Your two breasts are like two fawns, the twins of a gazelle.** (7:3-5)

Here too there is a word-for-word repetition of the verse that originated in earlier circumstances, in order to emphasize the continuity and succession.

We see then that the *dod* did not cut off his relations with his beloved in the wake of her failure, nor did he even change or adapt it, but rather he accepted his beloved (who had indeed matured and whose love had deepened) in absolute love as at first, and now they both merit to realize the love that had been missed on the earlier occasion. "How fair and how pleasant are you, O love, for delights!" (7:8) – this cry, which marks the conclusion of the renewed courtship following the failure, is the great call of *Shir ha-Shirim*, which testifies to the deep connection and love of the *dod* for his beloved, and it is the climactic moment which the *ra'aya* had awaited from the time that her love had advised her "go your way forth by the footsteps of the flock" and wait for love till it please.

[If we veer for a short moment from our focus on the allegory in the book and shift to the moral, this is the same great and dreadful mystery – forged also in God's great love for His creations – that was revealed to Moshe in the cleft of the rock: "Lord, Lord' – it is I before man sins and it is I after man sins and repents" (*Rosh ha-Shana* 17b). Here too there is no change, but rather a return after the sin to the very same point as before, while preserving the personal encounter and connection that come to expression in God's revelation to us through the Tetragrammaton.[\[5\]](#)]

Having reached this point and having brought the reader to the moment of the meeting between the *dod* and the *ra'aya*, it seems that our work has been completed. As opposed to what we might have expected, however, the book does not end here but rather it continues with another chapter. Moreover, as opposed to the previous chapters in which the developing narrative line is clear, the concluding chapter appears on the surface as if it were unconnected to what came before it, and even as if it were presenting a relationship different from that which we saw develop before our eyes earlier in the book. If we wish to fit the end of the book into the work as a whole, we must then continue.

The main feature of the end of *Shir ha-Shirim* is the calm between the *dod* and the *ra'aya*, the absence of tension between them and the self-confidence of the *ra'aya* that accompanies these two changes.

Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field; let us lodge in the villages. Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine has flowered, if the grape blossoms have

opened, if the pomegranates are in flower: there will I give you my loves. The mandrakes give a fragrance and at our gate are all manner of choice fruits, new and old, which I have laid up for you, O my beloved. (7:13-14)

The contrast between these verses, where harmony between the couple and a pastoral atmosphere rule, and the previous sections where the struggle and the tension to establish a relationship was the primary component, is very striking. It is no longer a story of two people standing opposite one another, but rather one of two people standing side by side as a single unit going out to spend the night together. It is not by chance that the transition from tension and seduction to peace and partnership is accompanied by a shift from the noisy and suspicious city with all its alienation – and it suffices to remember Shelomo's litter that was surrounded by sixty valiant men and the city watchmen that constitute a fixed and striking presence in the urban landscape – to the village and the vineyard, where it is possible to spend the night undisturbed and to listen in the gardens to the voice of companions, where the watchmen stand guard not against people, but against foxes, and it is possible to rely on their integrity and work. The root of the matter is that up until this point the *dod* and the *ra'aya* were in a period of mutual courtship. Now, after they have been united the tension has subsided and gone. We are no longer standing before a couple at the time of their betrothal and the preceding period, but rather we encounter a married couple that magnifies and deepens its love in a natural and healthy manner without fear or tension. In effect, we can say that the personal situation described in the aforementioned verses, in which the *ra'aya* plans their stay in the villages and the vineyards in order to actualize the unity that was created in the wake of the decision, is a honeymoon. Her great hope is to advance past the initial period of marriage to a situation absolutely void of tension, and to natural inborn unity between her and her lover.

O that you were as my brother, that sucked the breasts of my mother! When I should find you outside, I would kiss you; and none would scorn me. I would lead you, and bring you into the house of my mother who brought me up. (8:1-2)

In this context it is fitting to cite the Gemara in *Yoma* that notes this very point:

Rav Katina said: Whenever Israel came up to the festival, the curtain would be removed for them and the *keruvim* were shown to them, whose bodies were intertwined with one another, and they would be thus addressed: You are beloved before God as the love between man and woman. – Rav Chisda raised an objection: "But they shall not go in to see when the holy things are covered" (*Bamidbar* 4:20). And Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav: When they put the vessels into their cases. – Rav Nachman said: This may be likened to a bride, who as long as she is in her father's house is modest with her husband (Rashi: during the period of her betrothal, so too Israel in the wilderness were not yet familiar with the *Shekhina*). Once she comes to her father-in-law's house, she is not modest with her husband.

The modesty and the tension that accompanies the covering and exposure relate to the period of the betrothal while the bride is still in her father's house. This picture, which serves as a metaphor for Israel in the wilderness, accompanies us throughout the book of *Shir ha-*

*Shirim* until we draw near to the end. There we find a transition to joint life, when covering and concealment disappear and the accompanying tension fades away.

In short, if we opened with the question what is the relationship between the *dod* and the *ra'aya* after the initial failure, the book answers that the *dod* did not forget his beloved, nor did he abandon her forever, nor did he even change her status in the wake of what had happened. Great is repentance out of love which draws man near to the *Shekhina*, and great is God's love and compassion for Israel that bears them for all time.

(Translated by David Strauss)

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[1] It is customary to read *Shir ha-Shirim* on *Shabbat Chol ha-Mo'ed Pesach*. The reading of the various *megilot* on their appointed times is already documented in tractate *Soferim*, and from the end of the period of the *Rishonim*, it appears as a routine custom. The halakhic status of this reading is, however, problematic, for we do not find an enactment to read any of the *megilot* other than the book of *Esther*, and there is no mention of such a reading in the Gemara. The *Posekim* discuss the issue, focusing on the question whether or not a blessing should be recited, for in and of itself the reading of the *megila* presents no problem.

In light of what we have already said in the framework of this series of *shiurim*, that the *haftara* was instituted in order to relate to man's spiritual situation and to provide him with weekly guidance and direction, it seems that the reading of the *megilot* should be viewed in a similar manner. Whether we read the *megilot* because of a formal enactment, or by custom from the days of *Chazal*, or because of a later custom, the purpose of the *haftara* from an existential perspective is to relate to man's situation vis-a-vis God, history, and nature, and the reading of the *megilot* has a similar objective. In this context, we should mention the view of Rabbenu Tam (*Shabbat* 24a, *Tosafot*, s.v. *she-ilmale*) that in the time of *Chazal*, they would routinely read a *haftara* from the Hagiographa at the *Michna* service on *Shabbat*, parallel to the reading of a *haftara* from the Prophets on *Shabbat* morning.

We have, therefore, chosen to focus in the framework of these *shiurim* on *Shir ha-Shirim*, based on the assumption that its function and objective, if not its concerns and contents, are similar to those of the *haftara*.

[2] See Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *U-bikashtem Mi-sham*, p. 119, where similar questions are raised. Our presentation, however, follows a course that is different from that which is developed there.

[3] Whatever the precise meaning of the term, we are clearly dealing with some kind of covering, and it might even mean that the naturally falling hair is gathered together in a braid, and therefore does not cascade. See the various commentaries.

[4] We find the same structure and the same message in the Torah in the *parashiyot* dealing with the *Mishkan* and the intentional repetition in *Vayakhel* and *Pekudei* which comes to inform us of the restoration of God's love for Israel to its previous state prior to the sin of the golden calf. This point is emphasized by the Ramban. Mention should also be made in this context of the parallel drawn by *Chazal* between the resting of the *Shekhina* at Sinai and in the *Mikdash* and *Shir ha-Shirim*.

[5] Rabbi Yehuda Halevi expanded on the direct personal expression contained in this name. See *Kuzari*, IV, especially sections 3, 15-17.