

Assignment 2
Song of Songs Chapter 2 Text Study
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Memo

I have chosen Song of Songs for a few reasons. Normally, this group of congregants studies the Torah portion every week in someone's home. However, it is customary to read this text during Passover, which we are about to begin tomorrow. Second of all, I think it is important to expose these adults to this new genre that is canonized into the Tanakh. From the very small section we look at, they will be able to see the many layers of meaning connected to relationships and discover why such a text may be included in the bible. This session serves as an opportunity for me to teach them a second part of Ketuvim after exposing them to Ecclesiastes in the fall. In the dining room of a congregant's home, we will have a maximum of two hours to complete the session. The age of the learners will range from 18 years of age all the way to 70 years of age. In the group there are a variety of learners. There are received knowers, subjective knowers and procedural knowers.

Big Idea

Relationships can help us blossom and reach our full potential.

Objectives

1. Students will be able to distinguish between the two different types of lenses we will be looking at the text through called peshat and allegorical.
2. Students will be able to have a sense of why we might read Song of Songs on Passover and the reason it is included in the bible.
3. Students will be able to assess the benefits of this relationship for each of the lovers. (peshat)
4. Students will be able to see how the relationship between two lovers could represent the relationship between God and Israel and therefore understand what this text can teach us about said relationship. (allegorical)
5. Students will be able to apply this relationship in Song of Songs to relationships in their own life and see how it could help each party to blossom and reach their full potential.
6. Students will become familiar with the basic info of the genre, setting and possible authorship for the text.

Introduction-15 minutes

- Share with the students the basic information on genre, authorship and setting for Song of Songs.¹
- Share with the students some of the basic features of this text so they can more easily work through the text. This includes terminology, poetic style and the conventions they will encounter.²
- Introduce students to the two major types of interpretation we will be doing, peshat and allegorical.³
- Questions? Break them into chevrotah to begin the study session portion. (45 minutes-1 hour)

¹ Fishbane xix-xxiv

² Fishbane xxiv-xxix

³ Fishbane xxxvi-xxvii

Song of Songs Study Sheet
Chapter 2:8-14
April 9th 2017
by Daniel Freedman

8) Hark! Oh, my lover is coming, bounding over the mountains, leaping over the hills.

קוֹל דּוֹדִי הִנְהִיזָה בָּא מִדִּלְגַּ עַל־הַהַרִּים
מִקַּפֵּץ עַל־הַגְּבָעוֹת:

Discussion Question 2:8

1. So far, we see the use of metaphors. What do you think the lover is being compared to here and what does this language teach us thus far about the lover's character?

9) My lover is like a deer or like a stag. Oh, he stands behind our wall peering through the window, peeping through the crannies.

דוֹמָה דּוֹדִי לְצִבִּי אֹו לְעֵפֶר הָאֵילִים
הִנְהִיזָה עוֹמֵד אַחַר כְּתֻלָּנוּ מִשְׁגָּיְחַ
מִן־הַחֲלֹנוֹת מִצִּיץ מִן־הַחֲרוּכִים:

Commentaries on 2:9 (Peshat)

Robert Alter: This entire line exemplifies the delicate and witty interplay between tenor and vehicle in the use of metaphor in the Song. The scene can be read two ways. As metaphor, it invites us to imagine a deer that has come leaping down the hills and now stands outside the house, peering in through the window (an occurrence quite familiar to many who live in American suburbs near wooded areas). As the referent of the metaphor, it is the vigorous young lover who has come running in his eagerness to be with the beautiful woman he loves, pausing for a moment outside before he crosses the threshold.

Rashi: I had expected to remain detained for many more days, and behold, he informed me he was standing and peering from the windows of heaven at what was being done to me, as it is written in Exodus 3:7, "I have indeed seen the affliction of my people."

Discussion Questions 2:9

1. Robert Alter and Rashi provide two very different peshat interpretations of the significance of כְּתֻלָּנוּ is in the text. According to Brown-Driver Briggs Dictionary, this word literally translates to a wall (in a house). With this in mind, let's think about these very different interpretations of what this wall could mean, which stands between the two lovers. If it is as Alter says, a "threshold" what purpose does the wall serve in our understanding of the text on its simple level? If we follow what Rashi says, it is more of a detaining wall. How does this interpretation change the meaning of the text for you? Finally, which interpretation do you agree with more and why?
2. The word כְּתֻלָּנוּ has a suffixal ending which means "our." Therefore, the word translates to our wall. With this in mind, does this change or augment your answer to question 1 in this section. If so, how?

10) My lover spoke out and said to me:
Arise my friend, my fair one, go forth.

11) For, look, the winter has passed the rain has gone away.

12) Buds can **be seen** in the land, the nightingales's season has come and the turtledove's voice **is heard** in our land.

13) The fig tree has put forth its green fruit and the vines in blossom waft fragrance.
Arise and go, my friend, my fair one, go forth.

14) My dove in the rock's crevices, in the hollow of the cliff, **show me** how you look, **let me hear** your voice, for your voice is sweet and your look desirable.

עָנָה דוֹדִי וְאָמַר לִי קוֹמִי לָךְ רַעֲיִתִי
יִפְתֵּי וּלְכִי־לָךְ:

כִּי־הֵנָּה הִסְתּוּ [הַסְתִּיּוֹ] עָבַר הַגֶּשֶׁם
חָלַף הַלֶּךְ לּוֹ:

הַנֶּצְנִים נִרְאוּ בְּאֶרֶץ עֵת הַזְּמִיר הִגִּיעַ
וְקוֹל הַתּוֹר נִשְׁמַע בְּאֶרְצָנוּ:

הַתְּאֵנָה חָנְטָה פְּגִיָּה וְהַגְּפָנִים | סָמְדָר
נִתְּנוּ רֵיחַ קוֹמִי לְכִי [לָךְ] רַעֲיִתִי יִפְתֵּי
וּלְכִי־לָךְ:

יוֹנָתִי בְּחַגְוֵי הַסֶּלַע בְּסִתְרֵי הַמְּדֻרָּה
הִרְאִינִי אֶת־מְרְאִיךָ הַשְּׁמִיעֵנִי

אֶת־קוֹלְךָ כִּי־קוֹלְךָ עָרֵב וּמְרְאִיךָ נְאוּהָ:

Commentaries on 2:10-2:14

Robert Alter:

11) *the winter has passed.* (allegorical) The love poetry of the Song of Songs is preeminently poetry of the verdant world of spring. Jewish tradition fixed it to be read on the Sabbath of springtime Passover because of the allegorical interpretation in which the two lovers are identified with God and Israel celebrating their nuptials after the exodus from Egypt, which occurred in early spring. But the framers of the tradition were also aware of the vernal efflorescence affirmed in the Song, with a good many liturgical poems composed for this Passover Sabbath invoking the flourishing world of spring.

14) *My dove in the rock's crevices.* (peshat) In this particular poem, the young woman appears to be playfully hiding from her lover, an act registered in the image of a dove nesting in the rock's crevices.

Michael Fishbane:

10-13) (peshat) Following the maiden's announcement of her beloved's words (v.10), his speech is framed by the invocation "Arise, my friend, my fair one, go forth. (v.10 and 13). His call contains two imperatives. The immediacy is punctuated by הֵנָּה (now, v.11), followed by a succession of statements indicating the revival of nature in the spring. This unit correlates the ripening of nature with the readiness of love.

14) *My dove in the rock's crevices.* (allegorical) The Beloved continues to address Israel, now called יוֹנָתִי, "My dove." This designation highlights one of Israel's two spiritual traits: tender and faithful like a "simple dove" (Hos.7:11), when it comes to piety and loyalty toward God; she can also be like a lion or wolf, when national try to destroy or inhibit her religious practices. Faith and fortitude enable historical continuity. They are projected here through polar figures: the tender spirit of the dove, and the tough resolve of the lion. Both are Israel. Alternatively, Israel is like the dove, which fled to a crevice before a hunter's arrow, where it flapped its wings to call her owner to the rescue—just as Israel fled before the Egyptians and hid in the crevices of the Sea until she shouted to God, who rescued her.

Discussion Questions 2:10-2:14

1. Based on the commentaries, why do you think we read Song of Songs on Passover?
2. Based on Robert Alter's commentary on v.14, how might this relationship enable the woman to blossom and move in the direction of her full potential?
3. Look at v.10 and 13. Now consult Michael Fishbane's commentary on v.10-13. As we learn from the commentary, the **bolded** English and Hebrew in these two verses is the same imperative which means, Arise my friend, my fair one, go forth! Think about the Hebrew and the English meaning of these two verses. We have actually seen a similar imperative in Genesis Chapter 12:1. Please look at this verse in your Tanakh. What similarities do you see between what God tells Abraham and what the lover says to the woman in our text? How might this command be a way to help the recipient to blossom and reach their full potential?
4. Look at v.12 and 14. I have **bolded** English and Hebrew in these two verses. Do you see a parallel between the English/Hebrew in these two verses? If so, what does the parallel teach us about the nature of the relationship between the lover and the woman? How is the lover trying to help the woman to blossom and reach her full potential?
5. Let's think more about the allegorical interpretation of the text now. Can you see the lover and the woman as metaphors for God and Israel? If so, which one is which? And what can this text teach us about the relationship between God and Israel? Consult the Fishbane commentary for guidance on this question.
6. Can we use what we have learned about the relationship between the lover and the woman to enhance the relationships between us and our loved ones to help each party to blossom and reach their full potential? If so, how? Does the text also shed any light on how we could strengthen our relationship with God? If so, how?
7. Do you agree with the decision for the this text to be included in the Tanakh? Why or why not?

Bibliography

1. Alter, Robert. *Strong As Death Is Love: The Song of Songs, Ruth, Esther, Jonah and Daniel: A Translation With Commentaries*. New York. W.W. Norton and Company, 2015.
2. Fishbane, Michael. *The JPS Bible Commentary: Song of Songs*. Philadelphia. Jewish Publication Society, 2015.