



Selected thoughts on

Shir HaShirim

Based on the Talks of

HaRav Shaya Cohen, Shlit”a

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Dedicated

לעלוי נשמת

הרבנית גיטל בת הרב אליעזר מנוח ע"ה



Introduction

There is one relationship that every human being and every Jew even more so, deeply craves and yearns for. The relationship between man and his Creator has been the coveted desire of man from the time of his creation. Since the Jewish nation stood at Mt. Sinai, over 3300 years ago, this craving has only intensified, especially since our exile from our homeland, close to 2000 years ago.

During this long and bitter exile, the Divine presence has often been hidden from us, only to be discovered through the concealed miracles of our history and our daily existence. Throughout the exile, it often appears to us that the special relationship that existed between our people and our Creator has been strained and in the process has waned. We feel distant from Him and perceive Him as distant from us.

Shlomo Hamelech composed a work, of unique importance, describing in detail the depths of the relationship that still exists and flourishes between Klal Yisrael and Hashem, despite the apparent rupture in that relationship since the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash and the exile from our land. The in-depth study of Shir Hashirim, the Song of Songs, has the power to alert us to the fact that that relationship is still alive and well and awaken in us the emotions that may have been dormant, allowing

us to once again feel the depth of love and passion that exists between us and our Creator.

Our sages tell us that the world was never as worthy as the day that Shir HaShirim was given to Klal Yisrael, the day that Shlomo HaMelech's Bais Hamikdash was completed. That day represented the culmination of the goals of creation, teaching of the Torah, and the ultimate connection with the Creator, with the establishment of His permanent residence, so to speak, in our midst.

Despite the fact that at times we feel distanced from Hashem and that He seems, at times, not to be lovingly involved in our personal or communal existence, Shir HaShirim teaches us that the love between us never ceases to remain strong.

The following is a series of insights into that mutual relationship based on Shir HaShirim. They are a collection of weekly emails written and distributed in memory of Mr. Marvin Halpern, Z”L. It is our hope that they will help to inspire a greater realization of the extent of our continued love for Hashem and His endless love for Klal Yisrael.

The Root of Trust

It is well known that Bitachon, trust in Hashem, is the greatest of assets. It brings peace of mind, strength to continue one's efforts and it can even bring out the most desired results.

It seems from the *Seforno* in *Parshas Behaaloscha* (*Bamidbar* 11:12) that if one does not know that an individual's love for him is so strong that the individual will put in full efforts to benefit him, then it can cause his inability to have any trust in that individual.

It would seem therefore that if we don't realize that Hashem's love for us is absolute, we would not be able to find the ability to put any amount of trust in Him.

This can be a most powerful case for the in depth study of *Shir Hashirim*, to enable us to know the extent of Hashem's love for us, despite the lack of our total worthiness.



Embedded Love

The study of *Shir Hashirim*, authored by *Shlomo Hamelech*, is uniquely important in our times. We live in a generation that has trouble imagining the depth of the loving relationship that exists between each of us and our Creator. The Divine presence

seems to be so hidden from us and we tend to doubt that there is truly a passionate love buried in the depths of our hearts for Hashem. The lesson of *Shir Hashirim* is that despite how estranged we may feel from Him and how He seems to be so remote from us, an intense love still exists between us, from both sides.

In his introduction, *Rashi* explains that in the distant exile in which we will find ourselves, we will remind ourselves of the glorious early days of our existence as a people and that memory will reawaken that love of Hashem that lies deeply buried in our hearts and desire to come closer to Him once again. We also realize that despite the hidden nature of His continued involvement in every aspect of our existence, He still loves us and, so to speak, craves for our return to the close and loving relationship of the early days of our existence.



The Process of Return

Rashi, in his introduction to *Shir HaShirim*, says, “*Shlomo HaMelech saw with ruach hakodesh that Klal Yisroel will eventually be exiled time and again, destruction following destruction. They would bemoan, in this exile, their original honor. They will remember the original love of their being the chosen ones from amongst all nations, saying, ‘I will go and return to my first husband for it was better for me*

then than now.' They will remember His kindness, their own treachery, and the good that He said He would bestow upon them at the end of times."

Perhaps we can explain the order of events that *Rashi* describes *Klal Yisroel* going through as they begin their journey back to their Beloved.

They remember their original honor. No process of spiritual awakening can commence before one realizes his inherent self-worth. This is because, as the *Chazon Ish* explains, "Feelings of worthlessness serve as a block, preventing *Mussar* from entering one's soul." Such a person cannot begin to comprehend the great spiritual levels that he was created to enjoy. As *Rabbeinu Yonah* writes (beginning of *Sha'arei Avodah*): The first step towards *Avodas Hashem* is understanding one's great value.

It was better for me then than now. In the depths of spiritual emptiness, the supreme pleasure of eventual happiness, even if eternal and astronomically greater than anything one can imagine, doesn't talk to a person. His present material desires filter out calculations of eventual spiritual pleasures.

They will remember His kindness. Due to its inherent obligations, our mind succeeds in blocking out the memory of Hashem's kindness towards us, until we begin to yearn for Him ourselves.

Only after we come to realize the present benefit of returning to Hashem does our subconscious let us internalize the greatest reason we have to return to Hashem: *The good He said He would bestow upon them at the end of times.*

This teaches us how to reach the soul of one who has distanced himself from Hashem.

No process can begin prior to conveying to him his inestimable self-worth. Any debt of gratitude this person may owe you or Hashem will be subconsciously blocked out of his mind until he is no longer scared of the obligations that kindness may demand of him. Therefore, he first must be shown how returning to Hashem would truly benefit him in the here and now. Only following this will he be able to internalize the ultimate truth of the eternal and infinite benefits of returning to Hashem.



The Sequence of Redemption

In his introduction to *Shir Hashirim*, *Rashi* describes the process and sequence of feelings that progress and eventually awaken *Klal Yisrael* to rejuvenate their relationship with Hashem, which has been so strained through the length and suffering of the exile.

Rashi begins by referring to the seemingly endless sequence of exile after exile, destruction after

destruction, and the lack of any respect for us on the part of the nations of the world. We then begin to remember the glorified status we had many years ago and the love that Hashem expressed for us by choosing us, from among all the nations of the world, to give us His Torah. The memory of this love leads us to want to go back to that relationship, because it was superior to any feeling that we have now. At this point, we begin to allow ourselves to remember all of the kindness that Hashem bestowed upon us and we realize that Hashem is always full of kindness, and the exile in which we find ourselves, is purely a consequence of our rebelliousness. When we understand this, we can begin to appreciate the prophecy that tells us of all of the amazing kindness that Hashem will show us at the end of the exile.

It seems that *Shlomo Hamelech* tells us about how we will act and feel towards the end of days. The rejection that we feel during the long and bitter exile, leads us to forget our glorious history and our unique relationship with the Creator. Yet, the embarrassment that we feel during the exile awakens us to remember that glorious relationship with Hashem, and inspires us to crave that closeness once again.



What is Love?

The *Seforno*, in his introduction to *Shir Hashirim*, explains the nature of the love that *Klal Yisrael* has for Hashem, despite the fact that we are suffering in the Diaspora. The Jewish people have a long and glorious history of experiencing and appreciating Hashem's kindness and goodness to us. Even though we are now in exile and not feeling the kindness directly upon us, we still feel such deep love for Hashem and we desire to fulfill His will.

The *Seforno* explains this phenomenon. He explains the definition of love as being, "The rejoicing of the one who loves in the qualities of the beloved and the fulfilling of the beloved's desires." *Klal Yisrael*, despite its suffering, recognizes Hashem's kindness throughout the ages, and loves Hashem because of His kindness and still wants to satisfy Hashem's desires.

The more that we are able to focus on the qualities of an individual, the more we will come to appreciate and love them and be determined to fulfill their desires. The more that we are able to focus on Hashem's kindness and qualities, the more we will come to love Him and wish to fulfill His Mitzvos.



Worldly Pleasures

Rashi, at the beginning of *Shir Hashirim*, explains why we as Jews have such trouble finding true satisfaction in all of the pleasures and indulgences of the material world. Whether it's more money, exotic foods, or indulgence of drinks, we never feel satiated, always craving more.

He explains that the subconscious memory of the Divine Revelation at *Har Sinai*, over 3,300 years ago, left such an indelible impression of self-worth and fulfillment, that nothing we experience can compare with it. We measure all present pleasures against that subconscious memory, which was a personal expression of the Creator's love for us, therefore they fail to truly satisfy us.

Rashi goes on to say that only when we connect to Hashem through the study of His Torah, do we begin to access and relive that original intimate experience. This is the only pleasure that can truly satisfy us and fulfill our desire for pleasure. We crave spirituality more than anything else and therefore, we must experience it in our lives to find true happiness.



The Holy of Holys

Rashi says, “R’ Akiva said: All scriptural songs are holy, however *Shir HaShirim* is Holy of Holys – for it is solely words regarding the Fear of Heaven and the Acceptance of Hashem’s Yolk.” (*Shir HaShirim* 1:1)

Anyone with even a casual familiarity with *Shir HaShirim* stands perplexed at these words. Of all of the Scriptures, expressions regarding the Fear of Hashem are conspicuously absent from *Shir HaShirim*. To the contrary, from its beginning to end it almost exclusively speaks of the Love of Hashem! To answer this question let us take a deeper look at what Fear of Hashem really means.

Chazal state: All the *Mitzvos* of the Torah put together are not comparable to the study of one word of Torah. (*Yerushalmi, Peah* 1) Now, can we just imagine the merit of a person who studies the Torah in its entirety? However, *Chazal* tell us regarding such a person, “If the fear of G-d was his storehouse – it is good, but if not – it is worthless.” How can this be? Fear of Heaven is but one *Mitzvah* in the Torah, whereas every word of Torah study is equal to the fulfillment of all of the *Mitzvos* combined?

The following paragraph in the *Gemara* provides us with an answer to this question.

“This can be compared to a man who told his messenger, ‘Bring a measure of wheat up to the loft.’

When the messenger brought it up, he asked him, ‘Did you mix in a measure of preservative?’ The messenger said that he didn’t. ‘If so,’ said the man, ‘it would have been better had you not brought the wheat at all.’

We see from here that although “Fear of Heaven” may just be one *Mitzvah*, it is the preservative without which all of one’s Torah and *Mitzvos* will eventually dissipate.

Now that we know all of our Torah and *Mitzvos* depend upon it, it is crucial that we define what exactly this “Fear of Heaven” is. The *Orchos Tzadikim* (*Shar Ha’ahavah*) states: “One should fear Hashem as a husband who loves his wife is fearful to do anything which may compromise her love for him. Similarly is the nature of proper ‘Fear of Heaven’: Fiery flames of love for one’s Creator, combined with the fear of transgressing His words, lest that compromise His love.” The *Orchot Tzadikim* concludes with the following words: “Regarding this Fear it states (in the very same *pasuk* quoted in our *Gemara* above, *Yeshayah* 33:6) ‘the Fear of Heaven is his storehouse.’”

Based on the above it seems clear that the Fear of Hashem in the *Rashi* we opened with above, is in fact the highest level of love for G-d, which is clearly the central theme of *Shir HaShirim*.



The Strongest Bond

The *Medrash* (*Shir Hashirim* 1:2) tells us that the sacrifices of the Avos were greater than those of the leaders of the later generations, because they were made purely out of the love of Hashem. At the time of the Avos, before the Torah was given, they weren't obligated to perform the *Mitzvos*. The later generations, after the giving of the Torah, were obligated and therefore it was less of an expression of pure love of Hashem.

Even though we know that one who is obligated gets more reward because there is more resistance (the *Yetzer Hara* fights obligation), however, in terms of forging a relationship with Hashem in the here and now, the one who acts out of pure love forges a deeper relationship.

This has vast implications for assuring our children follow the proper way in life. We must help them to develop a strong personal and loving bond with their Creator.



Everlasting Memory

“...I’ve been trying to figure out exactly why it is that I’m convinced that I wouldn’t be happy in Vermont, or

anywhere, or any time. And I think I finally figured it out: it's because I'm a Jew. Why do I think this? Simple: Every other Jew I've met is the same. When I was growing up in secular Highland Park, Illinois, that's something like 120% Jewish, no one was happy. I mean, they had happy moments. But they were all trying to achieve something. Or fix something. The high school kids were dying to get into good schools. And I don't mean in the normal way, but in some sort of pathologically insane way, a way that made the entire school's energy be focused on that goal. The adults, they were always trying to reach higher, you could see it. It was one of those upper-middle-class Jewish places. Everyone was trying to reach the "top". I'm sure they all still are; G-d bless 'em.... Perhaps the reason orthodox Jews are less depressed is because they wouldn't touch a psychologist with a ten-foot pole, but perhaps it's also because the structure of religion makes it slightly easier for them to find the meaning that every Jew is dying within to experience and live out..." (Excerpt from an essay by non-religious writer, Elad Nehorai, titled: *I've Never Met A Happy Jew*)

As the Chosen Nation of Hashem, the prizes of Creation, we have already merited to feel the infinite pleasure of the King's closeness when He revealed Himself to us at Har Sinai. This pleasure, seared into the depths of every Jewish heart is so great that no physical pleasure can ever bring us true satisfaction.

This spurs us on to constantly search for something more. And even in the depths of our exile we still cry out:

“Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for your love is better to me more than any wine banquet and more than any pleasure and joy.” *This figure of speech was used because He gave them His Torah and spoke to them face to face, and that love is still more pleasant to them than any pleasure, and they are assured by Him that He will appear to them to explain to them the secret of its reasons and its hidden mysteries, and they entreat Him to fulfill His word, and this is the meaning of “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth.”* (Shir HaShirim 1:2 with Rashi)



The Final Torah Authority

The Pasuk states: *Kiss me from the kisses of your mouth (this refers to Hashem teaching us Torah), for your love is finer than wine.* (1:2) Rav Yossi, the son of Rav Chanina, and the Sages say: *This is comparable to a king who was paying out the salaries of his soldiers through his ministers. When his son came, the king gave him directly from his hand to his son's...* The Sages say: *This is comparable to a king who was eating pieces of food. When his son arrived, he gave him a piece of the food directly from his hand to his son's.* (Medrash Rabah, Shir HaShirim 1:2)

Learning Torah provides us the closest relationship to our Father in Heaven. We are the recipients of the greatest gift in the world, the knowledge of all of its workings, with which all of the Universe was created. True comprehension of Torah, Divine wisdom, is solely possible as a direct gift, constantly flowing from Hashem to our minds, as we are engrossed in its study. Each and every bit of comprehension gifted from Hashem is so fittingly expressed by the above *pasuk* as a kiss from His mouth to ours.

The *Medrash* concludes, however, with yet another comparison which seems to add an additional insight into the depth of love conveyed by Hashem through giving us His Torah: “*And some say: The king denied the food from his own mouth, giving it to his son.*” What are *Chazal* alluding to by saying: “The King denied the food from his own mouth?” Do kings lack food that they would have to deny it from themselves in order to give it to their children? Does Hashem lack anything by giving us His Torah?

Perhaps *Chazal* are referring to the unbelievable expression of love and trust expressed by Hashem giving over to the sages, decisive authority over the Torah’s interpretation. Even when a voice emerged from Heaven disagreeing with the Sages, it was disregarded as the *Gemara* states: *Rav Yehoshua stood up on his feet and declared, “The Torah is not in*

Heaven!" We do not pay heed to a Heavenly voice [in disagreement with the conclusion of the Sages] (Bava Metziah 59b).

When Moshe Rabbeinu went up to receive the Torah the angles said: The desired possession [that Hashem delights in every day] you have hidden away 974 generations before the world was created and You want to give it to the sons of Man? (Yalkut Shimoni Korach, Chapter 16)

However, in Hashem's great love for us He indeed gave it to us, so much so that our sages, not He, are the final arbiters of its meaning.



Becoming One with Hashem Through Learning

Kiss me, from the kisses of Your mouth for Your love (the words of the Oral Torah) is better than wine (the Written Torah). (Shir HaShirim 1:2, Bavli, Avodah Zara)

The Written Torah is compared to wine, perhaps symbolic of its continued relevance despite its age. However, studying the Oral Torah is compared to receiving a kiss from Hashem for its understanding necessitates Hashem's continued intervention as the One who, "Teaches Torah to His nation Israel".

Why is this intervention called, "Kissing, from the kisses of Your mouth?" The *Zohar* explains further:

“Shlomo HaMelech... began the praise of love between them with, “Kiss me” ... For clinging love, spirit to spirit, is through kissing, and kissing is by way of the mouth for it is the entrance way of the spirit and it’s exit. When they kiss each other the spirits cling to one another becoming one... (Zohar Teruma 371)

The Torah is Hashem's thought, in this way it is a part of Hashem. When we learn the Torah, so to speak, Hashem places the understanding of His thoughts into our minds it is as if he is kissing us on the mouth and becoming one with us in this sense.

This also explains why we find throughout *Chazal*, that the greatest thing that one can do to elevate his spiritual level and to come close to Hashem is the study of Torah. *Chazal* also tell us that this is the way to attain love of Hashem. Based on the above this can be simply understood. When we study Torah, Hashem is kissing us and imparting into us a part of Him, the Torah, whereupon we become one with Hashem. This makes us more G-dly, so to speak.

Is there any greater closeness than this? Is there anyone in the world luckier than such a person?



The Ultimate Inheritance

Shlomo HaMelech describes the essence of the Jew in the long and bitter exile. Deeply buried in the soul of the Jew is that memory of the special loving

relationship that was experienced at *Har Sinai*, when Hashem gave us His Torah and we accepted it with love. However, the Jew in the exile feels unworthy of that relationship, due to his present shortcomings.

In *Shir HaShirim*, *Klal Yisrael* tells the nations of the world that even if I am ugly in my actions, I am beautiful in the actions of my ancestors. It seems from *Rashi*, that not only do I inherit the merit of their great deeds, but I have inherited their innate greatness as well. I have within me the greatness and piety that was passed on to me from my ancestors and therefore far more worthy, in reality, than what appears to be on the surface.

Often, we question the true depth of our relationship with Hashem, due to our own shortcomings. We are in truth far greater and still worthy and capable of having such a close relationship with our Creator.



Divine Supervision

As we remember with profound sadness the destruction of the two Holy Temples and all of the ensuing suffering of *Klal Yisroel* over the nearly 2,000 years of exile from our land, we wonder about whether or not we still have that mutual loving relationship between us and Hashem.

The ongoing suffering that Hashem allows to plague us throughout the millennia, might seem as an indication that His love for us is no longer. However, our miraculous survival against all odds clearly indicates that He is still watching and protecting us. In the words of *Shlomo Hamelech*, "He is supervising through the windows, and peeking through the cracks." Even though we may not see Him, He is still watching and protecting us.

Rashi explains that it was actually Hashem's over-abundant love that caused our rebellion against Him at the time of the first Beis Hamikdash. Yet, we still find that Hashem begs us to return to Him. Klal Yisroel's resistance to Hashem's overtures is only on the surface, but underneath remains a heart full of love for the Creator. This loving relationship continues to withstand all of the interferences it suffers.



Love Takes Effort

It was the first anniversary of their marriage and their happiness knew no bounds. Their love for each other had grown so deep, they lived it and breathed it constantly. Their first year had not come easy. They had struggled together in poverty and angst, slowly growing closer as they drew comfort from each other and learned to appreciate, cherish and fan the flames

of their deep love through their mutual devotion and sacrifice. “The time has come for me to reveal the truth,” said the husband, dramatically as they sat down to celebrate their first year. “We’re really not as poor as you’ve been led to believe, in fact quite the opposite is true. I have many millions in the bank as well as a mansion that we’ll be moving into tomorrow!” “Wow!” said his wife euphorically, “but why didn’t you reveal this to me a year ago, life would have been so much easier?” “That is most definitely true, however, if you would have known before we married that I was a millionaire and your every wish would always be fulfilled, would we have developed such a deep love for each other? The love we have, which is worth more to me than all the money in the world, is a result of our mutual struggles which forced us to look deeper into ourselves and our relationship, slowly but surely fanning the flames of our love to the level we enjoy today.”

Perhaps the above parable can explain the words of a perplexing *Medrash* on the *Pasuk in Shir HaShirim*: “*For this reason, Olamos loved You.*” (1:3) - *Because You hid from them the reward for tzadikim in Olam Haba (olamos) therefore, they loved You.*

This seems hard to understand, why would Hashem’s hiding from *tzadikim* the unfathomable reward He has planned for them in *Olam Haba* lead to their loving Him? To the contrary, revealing what He has

in store for them should provide a much greater impetus to love Him?

Perhaps the answer is that we are all born with an infinite love for our Father-In-Heaven buried deep within our hearts. However, the sparks of this love must be flamed in order for us to truly feel it on a constant basis. If we were all born knowing the infinite reward waiting for us in *Olam Haba*, there would be no struggle to follow Hashem's Torah and we would have nothing in our fleeting lives that would bother us. We would have no need to reach into the depths of our souls and slowly fan the flames of the infinite love for Hashem we all have buried within, through *Tefillah, Emunah and Bitachon*, thereby slowly building up a truly loving relationship with our Father-In-Heaven.

So next time we feel down while we struggle with our lot in life, and therefore our relationship with Hashem, let us remember, such situations are what we were created for. They are the ultimate catalyst for developing an eternal relationship with Hashem!



Lasting Commitment

In *Shema* we say, "You should love Hashem your G-d" and *Rashi* explains that there is a major difference between performing the Mitzvos out of fear of Hashem or out of love of Hashem. When one acts out

of fear, if the burden becomes too heavy, he just leaves it and goes away. This is not so when he acts out of love. Love makes the burden seem light.

In order to fully accept the burden of the Mitzvos and all of our obligations, and to even be afraid to compromise them, we must have a deep feeling of love of Hashem.

If our commitments are not based on love then the burden becomes too much to carry, we stop trying and instead forsake the commitments. Love is truly the only basis of a lasting commitment to do Hashem's Mitzvos, even under trying circumstances.



Equal Footing

Dovid Hamelech, in the 27th *Perek* of *Tehillim*, requests one thing from Hashem, “Let me dwell in the house of Hashem in all of the days of my life, to bask in Hashem’s presence and to take root in His sanctuary.” The *Medrash* tells us that Hashem responds and says to him that he started by saying that he is asking for one thing, but in reality he goes on and asks for multiple requests. Dovid responds and says that he learned this from Hashem Himself and he adds that a servant should be able to be like his master. Hashem said in His Torah that He is only asking one request from Klal Yisrael in their service

of Hashem and yet He continues with so many more. Dovid finishes the discussion by saying, "The servant has the right to be like his master."

Look at the nature of the relationship that a person can have with his Creator. The Creator is our Master and we are His servants, yet this relationship is bonded in so much love that we feel a certain equality in the relationship. As the *Pasuk* says in *Shir HaShirim*, "I am to my beloved and my beloved is to me." Our relationship is so close that we can feel that if Hashem can say He is asking for a little and then asks for more, then we can do the same.



Divine Respect

In the first *Perek* of *Shir Hashirim*, *Shlomo Hamelech* refers to what seems like a complaint that *Klal Yisrael* says to Hashem. They express confusion about the nature of how they are being shepherded amongst the wolves, exiled among the nations who are bent on their destruction. They are always in constant danger and really don't seem to have the appropriate level of leadership. They continue and say that if You ask, "Why does this concern you?" Then the answer is that, "It isn't befitting Your Honor for Your nation to be in such an unfortunate and miserable state."

In these words lies a very special and unique message. Our people are suffering and in a very precarious situation and they bemoan the situation to Hashem, but when they are asked what the reason is for concern, they answer that it is not their personal difficulties that distresses them but rather the disgrace that the situation brings to Hashem.

Imagine such love, that in the midst of deep, personal pain and suffering all they are concerned about is the lack of respect and the insult to the Divine presence that their suffering causes, due to the fact that we are known as the nation of G-d.

Even though the Jew may seem so estranged from his Creator, his love and respect are so deep that his main concern is for Hashem's honor, not for himself.



We Need the Reassurance

The *Pasuk* says, “*Pull me close and after You we will run.*” (1:4) If *Klal Yisroel* is in a state where we are willing to run after Hashem, why must He pull us towards Him? If we are in a state where He must pull us towards Him, then why would we run after Him?

The king, upon having a falling out with his wife, threw her out of his palace for a specific amount of time. When the allotted time passed she returned to him. This occurred once, and then again, however the

third time this occurred, infuriated, the king sent her far away for an extended period of time. Eventually, missing her terribly, the king turned to his advisers saying, "This time, my wife will not return on her own rather I, together with the entire royal court, must go out to search for her and bring her back." When the king finally found his wife she was wallowing in dirt. All were witness to the great honor she received as the mighty king begged her to return to him. Finally, he grabbed her by the hand, lifted her up and led her back to the palace promising her that he will never part with her again. So to with Klal Yisroel. We ourselves returned to Hashem at the culmination of our first and second exiles. However, in our current exile this will not occur rather Hashem himself will take us by the hand and lift us up, pacifying us as he returns us home forever. (Zohar Vayikra 6)

It seems that *Klal Yisroel*'s seeming lack of interest in Hashem is merely a defense mechanism used for fear of being rejected again by her true love. Therefore, once she is promised never to be sent away again, she readily agrees to come.

Pull me close – to assure me that You won't break my heart again, then – after You we will run. For that is the true ultimate desire of every Jew!



Our Natural Love for Hashem

“From ‘Yesharim’ is their love for you.” (1:4) The *Toldos Yitzchak* explains these words to mean: From the *Avos*, the forefathers, who were called “*Yesharim* – Upright Ones” is their love for You bequeathed to them (*Klal Yisrael*).

This explains an anomaly in Jewish History. Throughout the generations, especially in the time of the Spanish Inquisition, there were many Jews who lived their entire lives without any connection to Judaism. However, when they were offered the choice: Deny your belief in Hashem, even if only outwardly, or be killed, they proudly sacrificed their lives in sanctification of Hashem’s Name.

The Jew, even without developing a love for his Creator by learning His Torah and keeping His *Mitzvos*, deep down inside himself has a natural burning love for Him, inherited from his forefathers.

This thought is a great comfort and stimulus on our path to fulfill the purpose of our creation, which is to develop a loving relationship with our Father in Heaven. For it is not a fresh love which we seek, rather it is just a fanning of the great flame of love bequeathed to us from *Avraham*, *Yitzchak* and *Yaakov*.



Evilness and Love of Hashem Can Coincide

The *Mabi”t* states: *Only to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov do we refer to as “Avos” for they are the general fathers of the Jewish nation. However, we do not refer to Adam and Noach as “Avos”, though they are even more general fathers, for since the lineage of righteousness had been severed from their descendants, who were wicked people, they are not referred to as “Avos.” However, from the time of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, [though some of our ancestors descending from them have been very evil and sinful towards Hashem] the knowledge of Hashem and love and awe of Him has never ceased.* (*Beis Elokim, Shar HaTefillah Chap. 8*)

If, according to the *Mabi”t*, our ancestors were, “Very evil and sinful towards Hashem”, how can we say, “The knowledge of Hashem and love and awe of Him never ceased?”

We see from here that, in contrast with others, in the depths of even the most wicked of Jews, true knowledge of Hashem and love and awe of Him never ceases.

It is interesting to note that this same thought is brought out with the very same wording, by the *Seforno* in his commentary on *Shir HaShirim* (1:5) where he states:

Klal Yisroel says to the nations of the world: You cannot claim that it is unfair that Hashem provides me with a more intimate level of Divine assistance, for we are indeed more worthy of His affection than all other nations. For though we are soiled in our deeds as you are, we are comely in our knowledge of Hashem and in awe and love for Him.

At first glance this is hard to understand. If the *pasuk* is referring to *Klal Yisroel* at a time when they were, “Soiled in our deeds as you (the nations of the world) are,” then how can we say, “We are comely in our knowledge of Hashem and in awe and love for Him?”

We see from here as well, that no matter to what level of depravity the Jew may fall, his deeply held awe and love for Hashem still burns in his heart, as difficult as it may be to see.



Sullied & Beautiful

Is it possible to be sullied and to be beautiful? Is it possible for sullenness to be comely? This is comparable to a delinquent princess who was reprimanded and sent from her father's house. As she collected food from the fields, the sun darkened her skin. When her friends began to comment, what does she respond? “Don't see me as someone who's sullied, for I've been merely darkened by the sun. You can't compare one who is innately ugly to one who is really

beautiful and has just been sullied. For the sullied will eventually return to her former beauty.” So too, Klal Yisroel says: “I am sullied due to my bad deeds, but I am beautiful in the deeds of my ancestors.” (Medrash, 1:5)

What seems strange is that the words of the beautiful, though sullied, princess are seemingly incomparable to the words of *Klal Yisroel*. The princess’ message conveys the reality of her own true beauty, as opposed to its absence in one who is born ugly. However, *Klal Yisroel* refers to their own beauty as the beauty of their ancestors deed, not their own.

We see from here that the true beauty of our ancestors is our eternal inheritance, automatically passed down to every Jew. Even a Jew who sins from the moment he enters this world, it is considered as if he has a mere external filth, a passing state of uncleanness hiding his true beauty. The beauty of no less than the beauty of *Avraham, Yitzchak* and *Yaakov!*



Growing From Our Mistakes

The *Pasuk* states (1:12,13 with *Rashi*): While the king was still at his table, my sins gave forth its fragrance. - [The congregation of Israel replies and says:] “All this is true. You bestowed good upon me, but I repaid

You with evil, for while the king was still at the table of his wedding banquet...”; My sins gave forth its fragrance - This is instead of saying, “gave forth its stench.” When the Shechinah was still at Sinai, I sinned with the Calf; Scripture describes it with an expression of love, “gave forth its fragrance,” and did not write, “stank,” or “became putrid,” because Scripture speaks euphemistically; A bundle of myrrh is my Beloved to me - My Beloved has become to me as one who has a bundle of myrrh in his bosom, and he said to him, “Here, take this bundle, which will give a more fragrant scent than the first one that you lost.” So was the Holy One, blessed be He, appeased by Israel for the incident of the Calf and found them an atonement for their iniquity and said: Donate to the Tabernacle, and let the gold of the Tabernacle atone for the gold of the Calf.

Why does Hashem give us more after atoning for the sin of the Golden Calf than He would have given us had we not sinned at all?

Perhaps we can understand this with the following parable: *They were a match made in heaven, and their deep love for each other was incomparable. For this very reason, when they got into a fight, though they made peace quickly, the scars still remained. The husband knew that merely assuring his wife that their relationship is now as strong as ever, would not comfort her from her sorrow over having the stain of*

such a fight upon their perfect marriage. After much thought, the husband found the words that would indeed bring her complete and total comfort: ‘Our relationship won’t be the same as it was before, rather, through our reconciliation and the lessons that we have learned, it will be stronger than had we never got into a fight in the first place!’

So too, Hashem, our Beloved, seeks to comfort *Klal Yisroel* completely and therefore tells us, “Not only has your sin not resulted in a weakening in our relationship, rather, it has led to an even greater level than before.” We find this concept regarding *teshuva* from any sin as well, as *Chazal* state: *One who does teshuva out of love, his sins turn into merits* (*Yoma 86b*).



Constant Desire to Return

Scene 1. It occurs several times each day.

The celestial angles observe in awe! The very heavens tremble in horror! The Creator and Sustainer of the universe shakes His head - so to speak – in mourning. What is happening? Jews, the world over, are reciting the great acclamation found in the Kaddish prayer. “May His great name be blessed for all eternity!” However, as these words reach the heavens, “Hashem shakes His Head in mourning saying, ‘Happy is the

King who is so praised in His palace. However, what does a father who has exiled his children truly have?!"
(Brachos 3a).

Scene 2. It occurs as well several times each day.

Jews lift their eyes towards the heavens and recite the great acclamation found in the Kedusha prayer, "Holy! Holy! Holy! Is G-d the Lord of Hosts, whose presence is felt throughout the entire universe!" As this is happening, in the heavens above, G-d looks back into His children's eyes. He says, "I have no pleasure in My entire universe as I do when My children's eyes are lifted towards mine and my eyes look into theirs." He then grabs hold to His holy throne, to the image of Yaakov engraved therein. He hugs it! He kisses it! Reiterating the promise of our ultimate redemption, and He hastens its fruition. (Tur Orach Chaim 125)

Chazal tell us that Kaddish and Kedusha are the two greatest exclamations of G-d's praise. The first, causes great mourning and pain on High. The second, causes the greatest pleasure above. How can this be understood? The prayer of "May His great name be exalted.." although considered a most beautiful prayer, is a source of great sadness to Hashem. "How beautiful! But what is it worth without my children with me." The second prayer, of the Kedusha, also considered the most beautiful of prayers, should

cause a similar reaction on High, but quite the opposite happens. Upon analyzation of Hashem's words, "*I have no pleasure in the entire universe as I do when My children's eyes are lifted towards mine and my eyes are towards theirs.*"

It is apparent that Hashem's ultimate pleasure, as opposed to great sorrow, is due to the lifting of our eyes towards Him, and His looking into them. What is the secret to the earth-shattering transformational experience of Hashem looking into our eyes? "*Your eyes are like a dove's eyes.*" (*Shir HaShirim*, 1:15) This praise of the eyes is *Klal Yisrael*'s ultimate praise, as mentioned repeatedly in *Shir HaShirim*. Perhaps in understanding the secret of this praise, our question can be answered.

R' Chaim Berlin Zt"l reveals to us this secret. The *Medrash Raba* (*Shir HaShirim* 1:15) explains *Klal Yisroel*'s comparison to a dove based on the later's nature to never abandon its coop entirely. The *Gemara* in *Bava Basra* states that due to this, a dove, even when having to part from its coop, will always remain within eyesight of it. Similarly *Klal Yisrael*, *R' Chaim* explains, although some of them will distance themselves from Hashem greatly, they will not cut themselves off from Him entirely. For in the depths of their hearts, they constantly hope to return.

Based on the above we can now explain the words of *Chazal*. When we proclaim Hashem's greatest praise

He responds, “*How beautiful, but what is this all worth? I cannot enjoy anything if I don't have my children with me.*” However, when we utter the *Kedusha* prayer while lifting our eyes towards His and He sees in their depths the unshakable assurance of our ultimate return, He is comforted and this in turn is His greatest pleasure in the entire universe!



Giving Is the Key to Happiness

“One who loans money to the powerful will be prideful. How much more so if he were to be a lender to a ruler? And how much more so if he were to loan money to a great and mighty king? Were it not to have been written, one who would say the following would be condemned to death. G-d says: Do you desire being a lender and to be happy enjoying the good life? If yes then give to the poor, as the *Pasuk* states (*Mishlei* 19:17) ‘One who gives to the poor is as if he has made a loan to G-d.’ (*Medrash Shir HaShirim Zuta* 1:15)

The *Pasuk* states: “If you will be righteous, how can you benefit him?” It is clear that Hashem doesn't need our help. Everything is under his complete control. Whatever we possess is from Him. Yet, in his great love for us, he considers our good deeds as favors done for Him. Why does Hashem do this?

It seems from the words of the *Medrash*, “Do you desire being a lender and to be happy enjoying the good life?” that Hashem does this in order to make us feel great about ourselves. That we can live our lives in a state of euphoric pride, “To be happy enjoying the good life,” knowing the Creator and Sustainer of the entire Universe considers us His benefactors!



Reciprocating the Love

The *Pasuk* states, (1:15,16 with *Rashi*) "Behold, you are beautiful, my beloved; I was ashamed of my sin, but He encouraged me with appeasing words, saying, "I have forgiven according to your words," Behold, you are beautiful; your eyes are like doves. Behold, you are beautiful, my beloved; the beauty is not mine, but yours; you are the beautiful one.

It is hard to comprehend *Klal Yisroel* arguing with Hashem's statement, “You are beautiful My wife,” by saying, “No, we are not, You are the One who's beautiful.” However, *Rashi* does not explain the words, “We are not beautiful,” literally, rather, “The beauty is not ours, rather, it is Yours.” Perhaps *Rashi* doesn't mean to say that we are denying our beauty, rather, we are merely saying that our beauty, expressed by our eternal fidelity to Hashem's love, does not originate from within ourselves, rather, the

source of the love is Hashem Himself. As the pasuk states (*Mishlei 27:19*): “*As water reflects one’s face, so does one’s heart reflect another’s.*” When we saw how Hashem forgave our sin of the Golden Calf with all its severity, we felt the fidelity of His great love which we reflect back to Him, in the form of a similarly eternal love.



Always Looking Back

Towards the end of the first *Perek* in *Shir HaShirim*, the *Pasuk* says, "Behold you are beautiful, my beloved, behold you are beautiful; your eyes are like doves." Rabbi Aryeh Levin zt"l, the famous *Tzadik* of Jerusalem, related that when he would see the *Gaon*, Rabbi Chaim Berlin zt"l, reciting *Shir Hashirim*, he noticed that he would cry when reciting this *Pasuk*.

When Reb Aryeh asked him to explain why he would cry, he told Reb Aryeh the following story: When Rabbi Berlin was a Rav in Moscow, a Jew came to him in the middle of the night and told him that his wife had given birth to a boy and he requested that the Rav come to circumcise his son. He told him, however, that he would have to come in the middle of the night, otherwise the man's life would be in danger. The Rav asked him why he is willing to put his life in danger to have a *Bris* for his son, considering the fact that he is not even religious. His

answer was that his son will probably also not be religious, but if he would ever want to return to a life of Torah and *Mitzvos*, it should be easier for him if he already had a *Bris* and for that he was willing to put his life in danger.

Rabbi Berlin explained that the text compares the Jewish people to a dove. The Talmud tells us that the dove only goes away from its nest, as far as it can still look back and see it. So too the Jew, he may distance himself from his religion and his Creator, but he does not allow himself to be cut off completely.



Appreciating the Torah

We find a discussion, according to the *Seforno*, between *Klal Yisrael* and Hashem. *Klal Yisrael*, distanced from the Divine presence, during the long exile, craves to return to Hashem and to once again fully follow the ways of the Torah. *Klal Yisrael* asks that Hashem should, once again, show us His miracles, so that we may sense His Divine presence and return to Him and follow in His ways. Hashem responds that we don't need to see and experience Divine miracles to connect with Him and feel His Divine presence. We are the recipients and students of His Torah, and the study and observance of the Torah provides us with "intellectual wonders"

(miracles) and through them we can recognize and connect with the Divine presence. The profound depth and amazing sensitivities that we find in the Torah, above and beyond anything that we find in the outside world, inspire us to realize that they are sublime messages and directives to us from the Creator Himself. The realization that we posses, study and follow the Divine instructions and internalize Divine insights, offers us a connection with Hashem that parallels, if not surpasses, the inspiration that we can receive from witnessing open miracles.

Our long and bitter history in exile from our land and wandering the globe for close to 2,000 years is replete with endless miracles. In fact, our miraculous survival together with our Torah still in tact, may be the greatest of miracles. Yet, if we long to see the Hand of Hashem, even beyond the miracles that we do see, the study of our Torah is where we should begin.

This may be what our sages meant when they said that Hashem says, "If they would forsake Me, but maintain the connection to My Torah, then the spiritual light or enlightenment that emanates from the Torah would bring them back to Me."



Desire What You Feel Is In Your Reach

There is an all-important insight in human nature, the knowledge of which is of utmost importance in many areas of our life. It is found in the commentary of *Rabbeinu Avraham Tamach* on *Shir HaShirim* (2:5):

By nature, when one desires something, but believes it to be far from his reach, he will not turn his heart towards it. Nor will he focus his thoughts towards igniting his yearning for it. However, when one believes that in truth his desire is not far from his reach, there just happens to be some sort of obstacle in the way of its attainment, then he will not let his mind wander towards anything else. And he will sicken himself over its attainment.

From this we learn a lesson of utmost importance. Although every Jew is born with an overwhelming love for Hashem, if he views the actual feeling of this love as a far off dream, he will not stay focused upon it and slowly lose interest in its attainment.

However, when we realize that the attainment of this feeling of love is so close, and a mere fanning of its embers will burst it into a conflagration, then we will focus on nothing else.

In the words of the *Rambam*, “As one whose love for his mate burns within him constantly. All of *Shir HaShirim* is a parable conveying this concept.”

He will then sicken himself in this solitary yearning and stay focused upon it until it is attained.



Hashem's Support of Klal Yisrael

The *Seforno* in *Shir Hashirim* (2:5) offers an interesting insight that is as relevant today as it was throughout our long and difficult history. He explains that all of the decrees of our enemies against us are because of our love of Hashem. Our oppressors seem jealous of our special relationship with the Creator and pursue us relentlessly because of it. He continues and says that therefore, “Hashem supports my head with His left hand, to lift me out of my lowly exile and embraces me with His right hand to save me for eternity.”

Picture the imagery, the enemy is beating a Jew relentlessly, because of the Jew's love of his G-d and at the same time the Jew feels as if he is being held in a loving embrace by his G-d and ready to be saved for eternity. Seeing this further infuriates the enemy anew, however his increased oppression only deepens the Jew's connection to Hashem!



Eternal Embrace

His left hand is under my head: *In the desert*. And his right hand embraces me: *He traveled a three-days' journey; to search out a rest for them (as in Bamidbar 10: 33), and in the place of the rest, He brought down manna and quails for them. All this I remember now in my exile, and I am sick for His love.* (2:6 with Rashi)

If all this we remember now in our exile, why does the *Pasuk* say, “*His right hand embraces...*” – presently, instead of “*His right hand embraced...*” – using the past tense?

Perhaps we can explain this with the following story:

A young man, Zalman, was caught desecrating the Shabbos in his hometown of Radin. In the hopes of inspiring him to return to a Torah-committed life, Zalman was taken into the Chofetz Chaim's room. After just a few minutes, he walked out. He was never mechalel Shabbos again! What did the Chofetz Chaim tell him that had made such a significant impact? For many years, no one knew until Rabbi Berel Wein retold this story to an audience in Florida. After the speech, an old Jew approached him and said to him: I am Zalman! Rabbi Wein immediately asked, “Nu, so what did the Chofetz Chaim say to you?” Zalman, filled with emotion, replied, “He just took my hand in his, stroking it lovingly and as tears streamed down

his eyes he said, ‘Shabbos! Shabbos! Shabbos!’ Since that day so long ago, there were many times when I faced great challenges keeping Shabbos, but I could never violate it for I would immediately feel the warm tears of the Chofetz Chaim on my hands!”

The *Pasuk* above testifies to us that, despite how low we may fall in our *Galus*, the supreme love of our Father in Heaven, displayed to us in the *Midbar*, is still alive in the depths of our hearts. So much so, that we actually feel the warmth of His embrace around our necks, so to speak, as if He is embracing us at this moment!



Individualized Love

When we discuss the unbelievable love that Hashem has for *Klal Yisroel* as revealed in *Shir HaShirim*, some wonder that perhaps this is a description of Hashem's love to the entire nation of *Klal Yisroel* collectively and not necessarily the love Hashem has for each and every individual.

However, this notion dissipates when we look at the words of the *Medrash Rabah* on the *Pasuk*: *The voice of my beloved, behold, it comes (Shir HaShirim 2:8)* This refers to Mashiach, when he says to Yisroel, “*In this month you shall be redeemed!*” They say to him, “*How can we be redeemed, has Hashem not already sworn to subjugate us under the rule of seventy*

nations?" Mashiach answers saying, "When even one of you is exiled to Barbaria, and another to Smatria (gentile nations) it is as if all of you have been exiled."

The supreme love, described all over *Chazal* in such unbelievable terms, that Hashem has for the entirety of His one and only Nation, is in truth descriptive of the love he has for each and every one of His children!



Why Do We Face Challenges?

The *Seforno*, in his commentary on *Shir Hashirim* (2:9), explains the author's comparison of Hashem to a deer running away. He explains that it refers to Hashem's conduct with the Jewish people in exile. He compares Him to a deer running far enough away that we are not even able to perceive his shadow, and bask in His shadow or protection.

In the same sentence, however, *Shlomo Hamelech* tells us that Hashem is looking through the window, peeking through the crevices to continue to supervise us and assure our survival. The *Seforno* explains, that since we were exiled because we took our relationship with Hashem for granted, we need to feel that He is running away from us, in order to be inspired to seek Him out and reconnect with Him. Often times, the difficulties of life, the feeling that Hashem has run away from us, are for the purpose

and maybe the only way, to get us to seek Him out and run after Him. Unfortunately, it seems that sometimes this is the only way that we will really pursue and appreciate our loving Father.



How Appreciated Must We Feel?!

It was on a trip to a distant land where the prince, known far and wide for his deep wisdom and extraordinary heart, saw her among the slaves in the palace. His discerning eye immediately noticed the greatness and beauty hiding behind her disheveled appearance. He saw purity and goodness in her eyes such as he hadn't seen in any of the many princesses that were proposed to him as potential marriage prospects. So great an impression had she made upon him, that he decided then and there not only to redeem her but to then take her hand in marriage as well. He was about to inform her of her great fortune: She would turn overnight from a slave to the princess of a mighty kingdom, from a girl who made due with a morsel of bread and some water each day to one who would have her heart's every desire. However, before he did, his great heart kicked in and he thought: If she were a great and mighty princess it would be expected of me to court her first, expressing to her my admiration and yearning to merit her becoming my princess. True, in this case she is a slave and would gladly give anything for me to merely redeem her from

captivity and that I would actually make her my princess is beyond her wildest dreams, but I still want to give her that feeling of appreciation, as if she were a royal princess that I must cajole and convince to agree to be my bride.

Perhaps with the above parable we can understand the following perplexing *Pesukim* in *Shir HaShirim* (2:10-13 with *Rashi*):

My beloved raised his voice and said to me, through Moses ‘Arise’ - *I will bring you up from the affliction of Egypt; My beloved, my fair one, and come away. For behold, the winter has passed - There is no difficulty in traveling now; The rain is over and gone. The blossoms have appeared in the land - The days of summer are near, when the trees blossom and the travelers enjoy seeing them; The time of singing has arrived - when the birds give forth their song, and the sound is pleasant for travelers; And the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. - It is customary for the birds to sing and chirp in the days of Nissan; The fig tree has put forth its green figs, and the vines with their tiny grapes have given forth their fragrance; arise, my beloved, my fair one, and come away. - This entire episode, according to its simple meaning, is an expression of the affection of enticement, i.e., a young man appealing to his betrothed to follow him. So did my beloved do to me.*

The King of the Universe was about to redeem us from slavery and take our hand in eternal matrimony. However, He still made sure to make us feel how appreciated and great we were in His eyes by acting as if it was He who had to cajole us into following Him under the canopy!



Waiting to Blossom

The *Pasuk* states (2:13), “The fig tree has put forth its unripen figs” - *Rashi* says that these unripen figs are the transgressors of Israel.

Why does the *Pasuk* use unripen fruit to describe the wicked among *Klal Yisroel*?

An unripen fruit contains inside of it all of the wonderful attributes a ripened one has, it just needs a little more sunshine. So too, the wicked in *Klal Yisroel*, deep inside of them are hidden all the great attributes of *tzadikim*, it is their eternal inheritance from their forefathers. We need only give them some time and sunshine and they will blossom.



Our Savior in Times of Need

In *Shir Hashirim* (2:14), we find a comparison of the Jewish people, caught between the Sea and the pursuing Egyptian army, as we exited Egypt, to a

bird caught in the crevice of a rock. The bird was fleeing from a hawk, but then encountered a snake inside. She is now caught between the snake and the hawk, both wanting to devour her.

Hashem asks the Jews to show Him the quality of our deeds; to whom do we turn in a time of distress. *Shlomo Hamelech* refers to this as, “Your voice is sweet and your face beautiful.”

It seems a bit strange that Hashem looks upon our turning to Him in a time of such distress, as a sweetness of voice and a beautiful face. We are turning to Him in despair, without any alternative. Why does He consider it so beautiful?

It seems that the Jew, even when he is so far away from his Creator, that he is being asked about whom he will turn to in a time of real need, is really very close with his Creator. Therefore Hashem looks at his cry and perceives it as sincere and beautiful.



Feeling Confident in Hashem’s Help

The *Medrash* in *Shir HaShirim*, elucidates a sentence that we say in Hallel: "This is the day that Hashem made, we will rejoice and find happiness *Bo*." The *Medrash* states that it is not clear whether the pronoun used, *Bo*, refers to the day or to Hashem. The *Medrash* proves from a sentence in

Shir HaShirim that it refers to Hashem. Thus the sentence is to be read, "This is the day that Hashem made, we will rejoice and find happiness in our relationship with Him (Hashem)."

We recite these words immediately before beseeching Hashem to save us and grant us success. It therefore seems that these words better position us to request Hashem's help and to be confident in His response.

When we rejoice in our relationship with Hashem, we are positioned to ask for His help and to be able to feel confident that He will respond in the affirmative. We clearly see an additional benefit in feeling a joyful and meaningful relationship with our Creator. Not only is it a source of happiness, but it offers us a closer vantage point to request of Hashem His help, ensuring our success.



Overcoming Desires

We live in a world where everyone is overwhelmed by all sorts of desires. Many of these desires tend to lead us astray from the life and the goals that we truly wish to pursue. The *Rambam* teaches us, that inappropriate desire arises only from a heart empty of Torah wisdom. He goes on to explain that it is the passionate love for this wisdom that can fill our

hearts and protect us from all sorts of inappropriate desires.

The *Zohar* teaches us that The Jew, The Torah, and Hashem are One. It seems that when one has a deep love for Jews, for Torah and for Hashem filling his heart, he will be substantially relieved of all sorts of inappropriate desires that might normally have plagued him. This, therefore, is a formula that can enhance the quality of our lives, our marriages and our abilities to keep our lives on track.



Eternal Beauty

“Show me your appearance, let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet and your appearance is beautiful.” (2:14) The *Medrash* tells us that *Klal Yisrael’s*, “Sweet voice and beautiful appearance,” mentioned in this *Pasuk* refers to when *Klal Yisrael* cried out to Hashem before the splitting of the *Yam Suf*.

This is perplexing, for that very same *Medrash* states: *Klal Yisrael* at that time were comparable to a princess whose father, the king, desired for her to speak with him. When he saw that she wouldn’t, he arranged for some of his servants to act as though they were bandits and attack her. When the princess saw she had no choice, she cried out, “Father, Father save me.” So too, Hashem desired to hear *Klal Yisrael*

call out to Him, but they did not want to. Hashem then caused Pharaoh to pursue them. When they saw that they were being pursued, they turned their eyes to Hashem and cried out to Him.

We see from this *Chazal* that *Klal Yisrael*, despite having just been redeemed from slavery through the unprecedented revelation of Hashem's love for them, did not want to call out to Hashem and only did so in fear of death. This itself should be reason for Hashem to be angry with them. If so, why is this used as the classic example to praise the beauty and sweetness of *Klal Yisrael* in the eyes of Hashem?

We see from here that the true inner state of *Klal Yisrael*'s relationship with Hashem is always the epitome of sweetness and beauty. Even at a time when they seem to be spurning Hashem's love immediately following His saving them from eternal slavery, in truth their actions are a mere aberration, a coating of dirt, covering the true beauty and sweetness of their soul.

That being said, when the depth of their soul is awakened, even if only in desperation, what is revealed is the sweet and beautiful soul of a nation who has inherited the pure love for Hashem from their ancestors. Although their crying out to Hashem by the *Yam Suf* was their last resort, with it was awakened their true beauty.



Loving is Giving

The Pasuk states (2:15 with Rashi) “My beloved is mine - He demanded all of His needs from me; He commanded only me: Make a Passover sacrifice, sanctify the firstborn, make a Mikdash, sacrifice burnt offerings, and He did not demand these things of any other nation. And I am His - All my needs I demanded of Him, and not of other deities.”

I never saw a couple as close to each other as my Grandma and Grandpa. Their many years together, through tragedy as well as happy times, had seemingly fused them into one being. They lived for each other. Each knew no greater joy than the other's happiness and felt no greater sorrow than the other's sadness. I had come that day just for a visit and found Grandpa in bed under the weather. We had been talking for some time when he suddenly called out, “Rachel! I could really use a drink of cold water if you don't mind.” Grandma was shortly at his side, breathing heavily from the climb up the stairs, with two cups of cold water and a warm smile on her face. When she left I asked Grandpa, “Why didn't you just ask me to get the water?” Grandpa turned to me with a smile, “How can I do that to Grandma, she lives to take care of me, just as I live for her. I would never take that away from her, ever!”

“I am to my Beloved,” I live to serve him, it is my one and only wish, therefore, *“All His needs He only asks of me and of no other.”* *“And my Beloved is to me,”* I dare not deny Him the pleasure of bestowing His kindness upon me for that is in fact the very reason that He created the entire Universe!

Hashem's greatest desire is to benefit us, however, there are times when for our own good, to His great sorrow, He must withhold His kindness until we sincerely ask for it. We may think that we are the ones who desire His salvation but in truth our salvation is His desire. *Chazal* explain the *Pasuk* in *Tehilim*, “For Your salvation I await, Hashem,” that we wait for Hashem's own salvation, for when we are hurt, so is He. By focusing on this whenever we *daven*, our *tefillos* take on a whole new meaning and bring us that much closer to true *bitachon* in Hashem's salvation.



Mutual Dependency

Rashi explains the *Pasuk* in *Shir HaShirim* (2:15): My Beloved is to me – *All of His needs He requested solely of me to fulfill. He only commanded me,* “Perform the *Pesach* sacrifice,” “Consecrate the first born,” “Construct a Tabernacle,” *He did not request this of any other nation.* And I am to my Beloved – *all of my needs I only asked of Him and not of foreign gods.*

The Creator and Sustainer of the entire Universe, is One whom we cannot provide the slightest benefit to, as the *Pasuk* states: “If you shall be righteous what will you benefit Him.” He created the entire universe and sustains us every second of every day, out of His pure kindness, in order that through the performance of his *Mitzvos* we may merit ultimate and eternal pleasure. However, all of this does not satisfy His great love for us, rather, even the *Mitzvos*, with which He provides us eternal opportunity, He presents to us in such a manner, as if they are needs that He needs us to fulfill.

However, we still must explain how *Rashi’s* explanation: *All His needs He requested solely of me to fulfill*, is learned from the words, My Beloved (*Hashem*) is to me, and *Rashi’s* explanation: *All my needs I only asked of Him and not of foreign gods*, is learned from the words, And I (*Klal Yisroel*) am to my Beloved.

Doesn’t it seem that each explanation of *Rashi* is explanatory of the other section of the *Pasuk*? Additionally, we must understand how the special love Hashem has for us is displayed by His not commanding any other nations to fulfill His needs, so to speak?

It would seem that our relationship to Hashem is comparable to a husband and wife who are extraordinarily in love, with each dependent solely

upon the other for each and every one of their needs. We can understand that were one of them to request of someone other than their spouse for one of their needs, this may create a breach in their supreme relationship with each other.

Such is our relationship with Hashem. We are solely dependent on His love for us and He makes us feel as if He, so to speak, is dependent on our love for Him. Therefore, *Rashi* explains that in truth Hashem's insistence on asking solely of us to fulfill his "needs" truly displays how "My Beloved (*Hashem*) is to me," whereas our asking solely of Him to provide our needs displays how "I (*Klal Yisroel*) am to my Beloved."



Infinite Closeness

Rashi explains that the beginning of the 3rd *Perek* of *Shir HaShirim* is referring to the situation of *Klal Yisrael* wandering in the desert for 40 years, before entering the land of Israel. He explains that *Klal Yisrael* is searching for Hashem, but cannot seem to find Him. This seems very strange. That generation saw the most blatant miracles while wandering in the desert. Their daily portion of food came miraculously to their doorsteps every day, with a double portion on Friday. They were miraculously protected by the *Ananei Hakavod* from the heat of the

day and the cold of the desert night by the *Amud Aish*. Their clothing never soiled over the course of the 40 years and there were so many more miracles, clearly indicating that Hashem was with them. Yet, they felt that they couldn't find Him?!

It seems, that we so crave our relationship and closeness to our Creator that no matter how close we get to Him, if we find anything lacking, it seems to us that we can't find Hashem at all. The nature of our desire for a relationship with Hashem is such that the desire is endless and we always crave to become closer and closer. When there are obstacles in that relationship, such as misdeeds, we feel that we have lost the connection completely.



The Importance of Understanding Mitzvos

Rav Eliezer said: Though the Torah was given as a fence for Yisroel at Sinai they weren't punished for its violation until it was repeated over to them in the Ohel Moed (Tabernacle). This is analogous to a decree of the king which is written and signed and enters the state, the subjects of the king are not punished for its violation until it is explained to them at their place of gathering. So too, even though the Torah was given at Sinai they were not punished for its violation until it was repeated to them in the Ohel Moed. This is the meaning of the pasuk (Shir HaShirim 3:4), "Until I

brought him into my mother's house," my mother's house refers to Sinai. "Into the chamber of her who had conceived me," this refers to the Ohel Moed for it is there that they were commanded regarding Hora'ah (teaching). (Vayikra Raba 1:10)

What is the meaning of *Hora'ah*, in whose absence, even though Moshe was told to command *Klal Yisroel* regarding many *Mitzvos*, they would not to be punished for their violation?

Chazal (Michilta Shemos 21:1) comment on the Pasuk, "And these are the laws you shall place before them." Hashem said to Moshe: It should not enter your mind to say, "I will teach them the chapter and the Halacha two or three times until it will be fluent in their mouths, and I will not burden myself to explain to them its reasons and explanations," therefore the Pasuk states: "That you shall place before them," as a set table that is ready for one to eat from."

It seems from this *Medrash* that *Klal Yisroel* could not be liable for violating the Torah before they understood the reasons and explanations behind it! We see from here the overwhelming necessity to explain to our children in detail the reasons behind the *Mitzvos*, for in their absence their fulfillment becomes an unbearable burden, the complete opposite of their true nature, as the *Zohar* describes them: "The six hundred and thirteen *Mitzvos* are in reality six hundred and thirteen methods by which

we can come closer to our Father in Heaven,” which is the very purpose of Creation, procuring for us the greatest pleasures for all eternity!



The War of Torah

The *Pasuk* states (3:7,8 with *Rashi*), Behold the bed of Solomon [Hashem - *the Tent of Meeting and the Ark, which they carried in the desert; sixty mighty men are around it - sixty myriad surround it;* of the mighty men of Israel - *of those who go out to the army, in addition to those under twenty [years of age] and those over sixty.* They all hold the sword - *each one with his sword on his thigh because of fear at night;* skilled in warfare - *the war of Torah...*

Klal Yisroel's relationship to Hashem is compared to that of a *chosson* and *kallah*, and the *mishkan* as the designated dwelling of the Divine presence amongst us. Who are those most close to the “*Chosson*” – the Divine presence? Those who are “*Skilled in warfare, the war of Torah!*” For the closest connection we have with Hashem is through learning His Torah, the act of which is described by Chazal as, “Kisses of the kisses of the mouth,” of Hashem, so to speak! (*Shir Hashirim 1:2*). And what type of Torah? “The war of Torah”! For it is delving into the depths of each word of Hashem and the interactive fighting to understand

it's true meaning, that is what brings out our intimate and eternal bond with Him!



Appreciating Hashem's Glory

King Shlomo [*throughout Shir HaShirim, this is a reference to Hashem*]; made himself a canopy: *This refers to the Tent of Meeting, which was established in the Tabernacle at Shiloh. He made Himself a crowning canopy for glory... (3:9)*

Why did Hashem feel the need to make Himself a crowning canopy for glory? Why is this written in the Song of Songs describing the infinite love between Him and His children?

Similarly, in *Shmoneh Esrei* we say: And He will bring the Redeemer to their children's children for the sake of His name, with love. Can it be that our Father in Heaven Who is constantly overflowing with infinite love for us will finally send *Mashiach*, our redeemer, not for the sake of His two thousand year long suffering children, rather, for the sake of His name?

The answer lies in the end of the above sentence, for the sake of His name, *with love*. Hashem is perfection without the slightest need. However, He worries about His glory and the honor of His name out of love for us, for the surest way to bring us to love Him,

thereby meriting eternal paradise, is through the revelation of His glory.

As the *Rambam* says (*Yesodei HaTorah* Chap. 2): “What is the path [to attain] love and fear of Him? When a person contemplates His wondrous and great deeds and creations and appreciates His infinite wisdom that surpasses all comparison, he will immediately love, praise, and glorify [Him], yearning with tremendous desire to know [G-d's] great name, as David stated: ‘My soul thirsts for the Lord, for the living G-d’ (*Tehillim* 42:3). When he [continues] to reflect on these same matters, he will immediately recoil in awe and fear, appreciating how he is a tiny, lowly and dark creature, standing with his flimsy, limited, wisdom before He Who is of perfect knowledge, as David stated: ‘When I see Your heavens, the work of Your fingers... [I wonder] what is man that You should recall Him’ (*Tehillim* 8:4-5).”



Understanding Ourselves

Confusion mingles with apprehension in back of my mind. It's already two weeks since my blissful spiritual hibernation was shattered with the sound of the shofar on Rosh Chodesh Elul and my thoughts are still unsettled. I know that in the end what I really want is to come closer to Hashem. This desire itself gives me hope; I'm really not too far away from Him.

On the other hand, what are these feelings really worth? Let's be practical and face reality. How far am I from being a true servant of Hashem? From basking in the holy light of His Torah to the extent that I should? From fulfilling His Mitzvos with true enthusiasm? The sad fact is, mundanity encompasses my life from morning until night, and the few short bursts of spirituality that seep through the cracks are quickly pushed away in the grind of life. With this being my sad reality, what is the worth of my meager annual Elul yearnings?

Rabbeinu Elisha Galiko, based on the *Medrash*, explains the *Pasuk*, “With Me from Lebanon My bride, with Me from Lebanon you will come” (*Shir HaShirim* 4:8) as follows: *Hashem says to Klal Yisroel*, “*You went after me from Egypt when you were in the lowest of spiritual states. However, this is also a tremendous praise, the fact that you wanted to come with me, despite your being in such a low spiritual state. Despite having almost no recognition and grasp of the knowledge of My service, you chose to come towards Me and with Me. Certainly I am indebted to you for this. This itself is reason for Me to choose you as my people.*

So there's no reason for confusion. The mundanity of your life is in fact the greatest proof that your current yearning for Hashem is a reflection of your true essence. The significance of those meager

yearnings to return to Hashem are not to be underestimated, in fact the opposite is true. The fact that you still yearn for Hashem, despite your overall spiritual state, is the surest sign of true inherent greatness. It is the very greatness that defines the essence of the Jew. In fact, it was the very catalyst for our being chosen as Hashem's eternal people.

Welcome to the real you!



Unbridled Love

I always knew his wedding would be something else. His special heart truly endeared him to many people and his vast wealth made it possible for him to display his happiness in a fashion that would not be soon forgotten. After years of turning down the finest and wealthiest matches, he had finally found his bride. On a visit to a poor community he had financially supported for years, he noticed the special and pure nature of one of its daughters and a few days later he was engaged. Being his dearest friend, I truly enjoyed the evening reveling in his joy, however, one thing left me bothered. The bride's background was easily noticeable in her humble appearance and simple way she carried herself. She looked like she had come straight from her pauper home to her own extravagant wedding. With money not being an obstacle, why wouldn't my friend, with his heart of

gold, take the time and money to make sure his bride adapted to the ways and regality of the rich, bringing her to the chupah with the appearance of a true queen. A few days later, still bothered by the question, I dared to broach the subject to my dear friend. His response only reinforced his great respect in my eyes. “I did this with specific intent. You’ll see, in a few weeks you’ll think she was a queen from birth. However, I wanted to reinforce to my bride that the stunning beauty of the simple purity of her heart is what endeared her to me over all the other matches I was offered. Her unpreparedness that night beautifully underscored this for all to see.”

Perhaps the above analogy can explain the following *Medrash* on the *Pasuk*, With Me from Lebanon, My bride, with Me from Lebanon shall you come. (4:8) - Rav Levi said: *In the world, it is customary to adorn the bride with jewelry and perfumes and only then she enters her marriage, but Hashem didn’t do so. Rather, He said to Klal Yisroel: “With Me from Lebanon, My bride,” - from mud and bricks I took you and made you a bride.* (*Shemos Rabah* 23)

Why did Hashem not give us some time to acclimate to our new royal status, be it in our outer appearance or spiritually?

Perhaps it was for the very reason of the groom in the above analogy. He wanted to comfort all future generations as He does in the above *Pasuk* in *Shir*

HaShirim. “My love for you isn't based upon your outer appearance or even your lofty spiritual state. Look how you were when I chose you? A nation of slaves who had not long before ignored Moshe's tidings of their imminent redemption, favoring their attachment to *Avodah Zara*. Rather, My love for you is based on the love and loftiness that you inherited from your forefathers which is forever buried deep in your souls regardless of your awareness of it.”

Yes! We, in whatever physical or spiritual state we may presently find ourselves are worthy of the Creator's hand in eternal matrimony. That is why even in our lowly state he will go to the ends of the Earth to bring us back to him, knocking on our door and pleading: *Open for me, My Sister, My Beloved, My Dove, My Perfect One, for My head is full of dew, (I have come despite the elements) My locks with the drops of the night.*”



The Righteousness of Every Jew

The *Pasuk* states (4:9 with *Targum*), You have captivated my heart - *Embedded in my heart is your love; My sister, [My] bride - Klal Yisroel who is compared to a modest bride;* You have captivated my heart with one of your eyes - *Embedded in My heart is the affection for the smallest amongst you, who is as righteous as one of the members of the Sanhedrin;* With one link of your necklaces - *and as one of the*

kings of Klal Yisroel! That the crown of royalty is upon his neck.

Our Father, Creator of Heaven and Earth, testifies: “Embedded in My heart is the affection for the smallest amongst you, *Klal Yisroel*.” Why is this so? Is it merely the irrational, emotional affection of a father to a son irrespective of his worthiness? No! Hashem tells us: “Even the smallest amongst you is righteous as one of the members of the *Sanhedrin*, and as one of the kings of *Klal Yisroel*!”

The regression of each generation is brought out in the words of *Chazal*: If the earlier authorities are as angels, we are like humans; if they are as humans, we are like donkeys... (*Shabbos* 112b) One can only imagine the righteousness of the *Chofetz Chaim*, but the righteousness of a member of the *Sanhedrin* so many generations before we can’t even begin to fathom. So how can Hashem say: Even the smallest amongst you is as righteous as one of the members of the *Sanhedrin*?!

Just as water reflects one’s face, so does one’s heart reflect another’s (*Mishlei* 27:19). Perhaps when Hashem speaks of the love embedded in His heart due to our great righteousness, he is referring to the righteousness embedded in our hearts. What is the righteousness embedded in our hearts?

Rashi describes *Shir HaShirim* as a description of the *love embedded in the heart of every Jew* (*Brachos* 57b). How can the description of the love embedded

in the greatest *tzadikim* who ever lived simultaneously be descriptive of the love embedded in the heart of even the simplest of Jews? Because hidden deep in the heart of even the simplest Jew, buried under all the distractions of this world, is the same infinite love for our Father in Heaven bequeathed to us from our ancestors throughout the generations.

Therefore, at least in reference to the righteousness of their core, the love embedded in their hearts, indeed, the simplest Jew is as righteous as the very greatest, one of the members of the *Sanhedrin*, and one of the kings of *Klal Yisroel*!



A Father's Plea

His son was the light of his life since the day he was born over thirty years ago, and it was really hard that he now lived at the other end of the world. Missing him terribly, he could no longer take it and he decided to make the trip as soon as physically possible. At his age and state of health it would be a great ordeal but what wouldn't he do for his son? His heart fluttered as he watched NYC getting smaller and smaller through the window of the plane and twenty-four hours and two stopovers later he finally landed in Sidney, Australia. At last he would finally see his dear son. He realized it was foolish, but with the clarity of his mind clouded by his love, he strained his eyes

peering through the window of the plane, maybe he would already see his son... When a young fellow offered to help him get his bags he declined saying, “It’s fine he’ll be here any moment,” as if all knew who he was referring to. When the man explained that whoever would be picking him up would not be able to enter the area, he still declined thinking dreamily, “How can I need someone else’s help when I’m so close to my dear son!” After waiting a while and with an excitement he hadn’t felt in years, he made his way to where the crowds awaited their loved ones. However, even there his son was not in sight. After an hour and a half of waiting longingly, with fear in his heart, he took a cab to his son’s house. He ran up to the front door and knocked... No answer. He knocked again, harder... Still no answer. Wild eyed with fright he banged on the door with all his might... “Who’s there?” There was no mistaking his son’s voice. “Are you alright?!” he screamed into the door. “Sure, why I’m just fine. Who’s there?” “What do you mean who’s there? It’s your dear father, I told you I’m coming.” “Oh... now I remember, but, to tell you the truth, it’s really not a good time right now, I just got undressed and lied down for the night...”

Can we imagine the pain?! As you read these words and commiserate with the father’s unspeakable pain, if you listen closely, you may hear the knocking at your own door! Yes! It’s your dear Father, Who loves beyond all measure, Who, with overflowing love, has

taken care of your every need, since before you were born to this very day, Who has come to plead with you to return to Him so He can provide you with the greatest rewards for all eternity, before it's too late!

“Open for me an entrance the size of a needle head and I will open for you like the size of a chamber!” Many have heard this quote from Chazal encapsulating the meaning of *Elul*. Many, however, do not know the source and background of it and therefore its true meaning.

“My Beloved (Hashem) is knocking” at my door and telling me, “Out of my love for you, I have come to you laden with all that is good, from one end of the world to the other, to benefit you. If only you will ‘open up for me’ an opening of teshuva as small as the tip of a needle, I will open up for you gates through which loaded carriages can pass.” “My sister, my wife, my dove”—*Hashem is comparable to the dove, which upon identifying her mate does not let him consort with any other bird, so too, He will never let me leave Him.* “My perfect and innocent one, my twin”—just as twins feel each other’s pain, so too, *Hashem says, “I am with you in your suffering!”* (Then, we too often respond) *“I have taken off my tunic; how can I put it on? I have bathed my feet; how can I soil them?”* (Shir HaShirim 5:2-3 with Rashi and Medrash)

Our lives and those of our families depend upon it. Will we answer the door...?!



I Am With You In Your Pain

The King was inconsolable. His son was the light of his life, he just could not imagine sending him away, but he was left with no choice. The brazenness his son displayed had been growing day by day and this was the last straw. If open rebellion against the king were to be overlooked, then the entire kingdom would fall apart. In fact, it was for his son's own good that he had reached this dreadful decision to send him into exile for an extended period of time. Feeling like a desperate pauper without any of the comforts of royalty is the only thing that would break his rebellious heart and awaken him to the great harm he was bringing upon the kingdom, and by extension upon himself. With tears flowing from his eyes, he sat down his son and explained to him that he was doing this all for the son's sake. "Don't worry," he finished with a shocking statement, "In a few years, we will return to the royal palace." "Who's we?" asked his son in bewilderment. "What do you mean 'who's we?'" responded the king, "It's true that for your own good I must send you into exile. However, you're my whole life, do you think I'm not coming with you?"

Rashi explains the *Pasuk*, “With Me from Lebanon My bride, with Me from Lebanon you will come” (*Shir HaShirim 4:8*) as follows: “Lebanon” refers to the *Beis Hamikdash*. Hashem says to *Klal Yisroel*

regarding their exiles: “With me you will come back to the *Beis Hamikdash*, for even when I send you in exile I will always remain at your side, from the moment that you leave the *Beis Hamikdash* until your ultimate return,” as the *Pasuk* states, “With him I am in all of his suffering.” (*Tehilim 91:15*)

Hashem may have to send us into bitter exile for our very own sake, but His love for us is too great, so to speak, to bear the separation. Therefore, He goes into exile with us, feeling our every pain along the way, until we allow Him to bring us back, fulfilling the purpose of Creation. “*His palate is sweetness, He is totally pleasing, such is my beloved and so is my friend!*” (*Shir HaShirim 5:16*)



The Dynamic of Our Relationship

The following is a literary exposition of the dynamics of the relationship between an estranged husband and wife. It is expounded upon from the 5th Perek of *Shir Hashirim*, which was written as a parable to describe the dynamic of the true love that still exists between *Klal Yisrael* and Hashem, despite the seemingly strained relationship.

Torrential rains pounded the streets as the hooded figure ran from house to house with determination in his step. Even by the dimness of what little moonlight seeped through the clouds, the striking features of the

tall young man could not be missed, the look of desperation evident in his eyes. After months of non-stop travel through dangerous and unforgiving territory, a rain storm would not stop him. Finally his eyes lit up with recognition. With a last burst of speed he ran up the steps, a triumphant look on his face. Only the thought of this moment had allowed him to get this far. He would finally be reunited with the love of his life.

He pounds on the door. “Open up! Open up, it's me!” he says, with uncontrolled excitement in his voice. With bated breath and his ear to the door, he listens intently, yearning to hear the familiar voice. He hears movement. He again pounds on the door even more vigorously. “Open up! Open up! My wife! My beloved! My soulmate! Oh the obstacles I have overcome to reach you, to reunite with you. I'm freezing and soaking wet. Let me in quick!”

Eyes lighting up, he finally hears the voice of his dreams. However his delight immediately turns to disbelief. His heart shatters into a million pieces. “I have already retired for the night, how can I dress again? I have already washed my feet, I should soil them?” It's her voice overflowing with callousness. He just can't believe his ears. How could this be happening?

On the other side of the door the young lady suppresses the knowledge that deep down she's

waited years for this knock. Since the day he had departed she had never fallen into a complete sleep, deep inside clinging to the hope that this time would come. But with her yearnings suppressed by years of shattered dreams, this was too much for her to admit to herself. Now she just waits, almost hoping, to hear receding footsteps. Suddenly, she sees through the keyhole a hand and her world turns upside down. Memories and shattered yearnings, buried in the deepest recesses of her heart come shooting up like a bursting volcano. Her eyes so worn with years of shedding tears are moist once again. With madness in her eyes she jumps out of bed dashing to the door. But as she throws it open her heart stops. She sinks to the floor in a dead faint. She's too late. He's gone. She can't believe she let him go! She runs out with an energy she did not know she possessed. Desperately hoping that it's not really too late, that she can still catchup to the love of her youth whom she just let slip through her fingers. She notices some local girls standing on a street corner. "Have you seen my beloved," she asks as if her very life depended upon their answer. "No," they say not daring to lift their eyes. "Please, I beg of you," she responds, "if you see him tell him I'm truly sick with love for him."

The above describes the deep complexity of *Klal Yisrael*'s relationship with their Father in Heaven. It is understandable, until we come to the message that the lady asks the girls to pass on if they chance upon

her husband. If the desperate wife has but one message to send him wouldn't an apology be in order, an explanation as to why she did not jump up immediately to let him in?

Perhaps, in truth, this is exactly what her message expressed. Many times when one is consumed by an all-powerful love and desire he is fearful cannot be maintained, as a defense mechanism, he suppresses those feelings deep in the recesses of his subconscious mind. This would explain the wife's original rejection and subsequent pursuit of her husband's love. It was in fact a symptom of her being truly love-sick with him.

This, of course, is analogous of our relationship with Hashem. A Jew may seem so distant, rejecting any sort of relationship with Hashem only to be immediately overcome with love upon being properly exposed to Him. This is because his seeming rejection of Hashem's love was in truth merely a defense mechanism he subconsciously had set up to protect himself from the pain of deep shattered hopes.



The Pain of Love

The pain seared through the very depths of Solomon's heart, he just could not believe that people could stoop so low. Just two years ago, his marriage had been the

envy of the entire town and now everything was lost. A year after his marriage, he had embarked on a lengthy business trip and due to matters beyond his control, he had only been able to return home one week ago. It was then that he discovered their treachery. Relatives of his wife Rachel, who had always been jealous of him, had spread vicious lies about him. They had spent months using all kinds of methods of persuasion until finally succeeding in turning even his wife's heart against him and the love that was once the envy of all had turned to hate. "If I could only speak to her for a few minutes I would explain to her how false the accusations against me are," he thought. "She refuses to see you! She hates you!" her relatives told him with glee, taking great pleasure in their success at turning her against him. "Please, I beg of you, just ask her if she's willing to see me even just for a moment." After speaking to Rachel, the relatives returned to Solomon with a look of satisfaction on their faces. "What can we do? She insists that she doesn't want to see your face for even a second." It was then that he hit upon a plan. Feigning to lose his temper he screamed, "How could she turn against me like that?! I'll get my revenge, I'll get my hands on her and she'll feel what pain is." Upon hearing this, Rachel's relatives thought they finally had their chance to forever solidify the hate they had inspired in her and they said: "You know what, if you swear that all you'll do is give her a slap

and immediately run out of the house we'll let you in." Solomon agreed to swear to this and immediately was let in to Rachel's room, where upon he gave her a hard slap and immediately ran out the door. However, the evil smiles on the faces of Rachel's relatives immediately turned to shock, as they beheld Rachel jump from her chair and run after Solomon with tears in her eyes crying, "Solomon, how did I ever forsake you! How did I fall for all the lies they told me about you! Please don't leave me now, I'm sick with love for you!" "Rachel! Have you lost your mind?!" her relatives said, "Mere seconds ago you were so filled with hate for him that you refused his pleas to even set eyes upon him for a moment. Then you received a ringing slap from him!" "That is true," she sobbed as she ran out into the street, "but I saw that hand, that hand of the man that deep down in my heart, despite all your lies and brainwashing, I knew loved me so much and this reignited that flame that burst through the layers of lies with the depth and clarity of the ultimate truth of my dear husband's eternal love for me. And now nothing will stop me! I'll find no rest until I bring him back home!" With those words she turned around and ran out into the night.

Shir HaShirim describes to us how, even when we have become so distanced from Hashem, that it seems we aren't willing to even open up the door to see him for a moment, when we see Hashem's hand, the eternal and infinite love for Him buried deep

within the heart of even the most distanced Jew is awakened, whereupon we run after Him.

As the *Pesukim* (5:2-6 with *Rashi*) say: I - *Klal Yisroel* - sleep, but my heart is awake. Hark! My beloved—*Hashem*— is knocking: Open for me, my sister, my beloved, my dove, my perfect one, for my head is full of dew — *A term referring to a man who comes at night, knocking on the door of his beloved. He says,* ‘Because of love for you, I have come at night at the time of dew or rain; My locks with the drops of the night. *Klal Yisroel responds:* I have taken off my tunic; how can I put it on? I have bathed my feet; how can I soil them? - *This is the language of an adulterous wife, who does not wish to open the door for her husband;* My beloved stretched forth his hand from the hole — *which is beside the door, and I saw his hand, and the stirring of my insides turned within me to return to his love and to open for him;* I arose to open for my beloved — *wholeheartedly and with a desiring soul;* and my hands dripped with myrrh — *as one who adorns herself to endear herself to her husband with a pleasant scent;* I opened for my beloved, but my beloved had hidden and was gone; my soul went out when he spoke; I sought him...

However, what is even more astounding, is *Rashi's* interpretation that the hand *Klal Yisroel* sees through the hole, that changes her attitude, in fact refers to *Klal Yisroel* getting hit from *Hashem* as he says: My beloved stretched forth his hand from the hole— *and*

demonstrated His vengeance in the days of Ahaz, and He brought upon him the army of the king of Aram (II Chron. 28: 5f): “And they smote him and captured from him a great captivity... And Pekah the son of Remaliah slew in Yehuda one hundred and twenty thousand in one day.”

If you’re wondering how this can be, see our parable above! Deep down the love for Hashem is always burning in the depths of the heart of even the most distanced Jew, even one who is convinced that he hates Hashem, *chas v’shalom!* All he needs is to see the revelation of Hashem’s hand in his life—even if revealed in the form of a punishment—and his true love can be aroused again spurring him on to run after Him! As the *Pasuk* in *Tehillim* states: Hashem is my shepherd I shall not want...Your rod (this refers to *yissurim* that came upon me—Rashi) and your staff, they will comfort me!

Why? Because You’re there! And once You—Almighty G-d, who loves me like an only child and created and sustained the entire Universe all these years with the intent that I may merit the greatest pleasures and happiness forever - are there, can I have a care?!



The Four Faces of Love

"Open up! My Sister! My Wife! My Dove! My Pure One!" (*Shir HaShirim* 5:2) There are three basic categories from which love stems: desirability, goodness and being beneficial. Then there is a fourth category of love, which is purely in reaction to the love felt from another, even though that other is neither desirable, beneficial nor good. As the *Pasuk* states, "As water reflects one's face, so a heart reflects upon another."

Based on this, the *Vilna Gaon* explains the four expressions of Hashem's love for *Klal Yisroel* found in our *Pasuk* as follows:

Achosi - My Sister, is representative of Hashem's love for us in that we "benefit" Him.

Rayosi - My Wife, represents His love stemming from our desirableness to Him.

Yonasi - My Dove, the love stemming from our goodness.

Tamasi - My Pure One, refers to the love He feels for us just from seeing how much we love Him.

We can take away from this *Pasuk* the extent of Hashem's love for us, which is truly astounding. In this section of *Shir HaShirim*, the wife shows such callousness to her husband. He stands in the rain begging to be let inside, while she would rather he

leave altogether than open the door and soil her feet. This represents the Jew at his lowest state, seemingly wanting to have nothing to do with his Creator.

Yet, it is in this very state that Hashem says: Please! Let me in to your life so that I may quench my great love for you! You benefit me (so to speak)! You are desirable to me! You're so good! I - the One who sees to the true depths of every soul - see the great love you feel for Me buried deep inside your heart!



Playing Hard to Get

The overwhelming love for Hashem buried in the recesses of every Jewish heart is apparent throughout *Shir HaShirim*. This begs for an explanation for the baffling phenomenon of Jewish people who seemingly reject all attempts to develop a relationship with Hashem.

Let us take another look at the paragraph in *Shir HaShirim* most descriptive of our paradoxical relationship with Hashem:

After being separated from His wife for so long, the husband (Hashem) returns to her door. “Open up! Open up! My wife! My beloved! My soulmate! Oh, the obstacles I have overcome to reach you, to reunite

with you. I'm freezing and soaking wet. Let Me in, please!" Eyes lighting up, He finally hears the voice of His wife (Klal Yisroel). However, His delight immediately turns to disbelief. His heart shatters into a million pieces. "I have already retired for the night, how can I dress again? I have already washed my feet, how can I soil them?" she says.

Rabbeinu Avraham Tamach explains the wife's disturbing response to her husband's pleas: "The wife rebuffs her husband in an attempt to further ignite his love for her. However, she purposefully uses a lame excuse for denying him entry, worrying that if she used harsher words he may give up on her completely."

This reveals to us an additional explanation behind a Jew's rejection of the One he so deeply desires. Many times it is not due to his truly wishing to be cut off from Him, for in the depths of his heart there always remains a burning desire to be close with Him. Rather, deep down in his heart he believes that by, "playing hard to get" he will succeed in further stoking the flames of Hashem's love for him, which in truth is his life's desire.



The Source of Hatred

I adjure you O daughters of Jerusalem—[You] heathens, Nebuchadnezzar's men, who saw Chananiah, Mishael and Azariah submitting themselves to the fiery furnace, and Daniel to the lions' den because of prayer, and Mordechai's generation in the days of Haman; if you find my beloved—in the future, on judgment day, for He will request you to testify about me, as it is stated (Yeshaya 43:9): *Let them present their witnesses, that they may be deemed just; what will you tell him—you will testify on my behalf; that I am lovesick—that because of love for Him, I suffered harsh tortures among you. Let Nebuchadnezzar come and testify... let Eliphaz and Zophar and all the prophets of the heathens [come] and testify about me that I fulfilled the Torah.* (Shir HaShirim 5:8)

Why is it fitting for the heathens to testify as to the reason we suffered from them? Additionally, how would they know if the *Mitzvos* we did that led to their persecutions were done out of love for Hashem, perhaps it was out of fear of Him?

Perhaps we can suggest that what we ask the heathens to testify to is not the reason we observed the *Mitzvos* despite their decrees against them which led to our suffering. Rather, it is to testify what they saw in us, which was the real reason behind their persecutions. The *Gemara* says that the reason *Har*

Sinai is called “Sinai” is because it was there that hate descended to the world. Some commentators (*Iyun Yakov*) explain this as referring to the hate the heathens have for the Jews due to their jealousy of us for receiving the Torah. The heathens will testify that what had caused them to persecute us throughout the generations, those generations that fall short in their observance of *Mitzvos*, was their jealousy of the infinite love held between us and our Father in heaven. That love that can never be fully hidden—even when it looks depleted—is so enviable as to cause the greatest hatred known to mankind—the eternal hatred of the Jew.



The Most Beautiful of the Nations

Why is Klal Yisroel called, “The most beautiful amongst women?” (5:9) For she is beautiful in the strengthening of her Torah. When all other nations fall into exile they immediately forget their gods and their religion and their previous good deeds. However, Yisroel, even though they have been exiled they didn't change their good deeds and their Torah, and they didn't forget their G-d. This is the reason Klal Yisroel is called, “The most beautiful amongst women!”

Are we short of reasons why *Klal Yisroel* is more beautiful than the nations of the world? Is the main reason because they don't forget their G-d in exile?

Isn't the very fact that they follow the true G-d a far more elementary reason why they are the most beautiful amongst the nations?

In truth, the true measure of man is not revealed when life is treating him well, rather, it is when he is under duress. When we have been stripped of all the comforts of a successful nation, and to the contrary, we are persecuted until the ends of the earth because of our religion, and we still remain loyal to Hashem, that is the greatest proof that we are indeed "the most beautiful" amongst the nations!

Sometimes we don't appreciate our own spiritual state, comparing it to that of our holy ancestors. However, we must keep in mind that the fact that we still cling to Hashem even in our generation, where we don't have a *Beis Hamikdash*, *Tanaim*, *Amoraim*, *Rishonim* or even a *Chofetz Chaim*, is the greatest proof of our truly being "the most beautiful" amongst the nations!



The Most Painful of All Pains

Let us take a look at the continuation of the paragraph we mentioned previously. "Open up! Open up! I'm freezing and soaking wet. Let me in, please!" Eyes lighting up, he hears the voice of his wife. However, his delight immediately turns to disbelief. "I have already retired for the night, how can I dress

again? I have already washed my feet, how can I soil them?” she says.

The husband proceeds to put his hand through a hole in the door. Seeing her beloved’s hand arouses the wife’s deeply buried love for him. She jumps up to open the door but, alas, she’s too late. He has disappeared. She runs out into the night, searching for him desperately. Though beaten and harassed by the night watchmen, she ignores her wounds and continues on.

She notices some local girls standing on a street corner. “Have you seen my beloved?” she asks, as though her very life depended on their answer. “No,” they say not daring to lift their eyes. “Please, I beg of you,” she responds, “If you see him, tell him that I’m sick with love for him.”

The *Vilna Gaon* explains the above paragraphs as referring to different stages in the history of our people. The “night watchman’s beatings” refer to all of the suffering we have endured by the hand of the nations of the world. The “local street girls” refer to angels whom we request to relay the following message to Hashem: “Just tell Hashem of the great pain we suffer from His absence, due to our lovesickness with Him.” For that, says the *Gaon*, is greater than all of the other pain meted upon us by the nations of the world throughout the generations.

Now let us remember *Rashi*'s description of *Shir HaShirim* as the portrayal of, "The love of Hashem embedded in the heart of all of *Klal Yisroel*." When we add to this the words of the *Vilna Gaon*, this paints an awe inspiring picture of the depth and beauty of the love embedded in the depths of the hearts of each and every Jew, regardless of his current spiritual state. Every Jew, no matter the torturous pain he may have suffered, whether it was the Inquisition, Pogrom or Holocaust, still more painful, although buried deeper in his heart and not always consciously felt, is the pain he truly feels solely from his separation from his Father in Heaven.

That is how love sick we are for Him! That is, *Klal Yisroel* says to Hashem, the greatest tragedy of all our exiles! That is the central theme of our cry to Him: "Bring us back to You! We can bear it no longer!"



Appreciating Tefillah

The *Pasuk* (5:16) says, "His palate is delightful, He is entirely desirable – So is my Beloved, so is my Friend." There is a story regarding a *shadchan* who approached a young man saying: "I have the perfect girl for you. She's unbelievably sweet and kind, with a heart of pure gold. I guarantee you that after a few dates you'll thank me for finding you that one in a

million that you always dreamed of.” After meeting the girl several times, the young man returned to the *shadchan*, upset and saying, “I relied on your information but was terribly disappointed. I did not find any of the many attributes you assured me I would. In fact I don't have any feelings for her.” Shocked, the *shadchan* decided he must find out what had gone wrong. He called the girl and asked her how things had gone. She responded, “I don't know what to tell you. I have never had such an experience dating anyone. The boy arrived late every time, gave the impression that he'd rather be anywhere other than with me and mumbled through our conversations with his mind clearly somewhere else. Moreover, towards the conclusion of each date he seemed in a rush to leave. With this information in hand the *shadchan* returned to the young man and said, “Everything I told you regarding this girl is 100% true, but don't you realize that by your behavior you never gave her the slightest chance?”

The wisest of all men, *Shlomo HaMelech*, assures us that Hashem created the entire universe just so that we can experience the ultimate pleasure of being close to Him. His palate is pure delightfulness - if you get to know Him your soul will be lovesick from Him. However, there are many good Jews who daven three times a day and keep His mitzvos, who are left wondering, “Why don't I feel this great love? What am I missing?”

We must analyze ourselves. Was the relationship ever given a chance if we're consistently late to our appointments with Him and mumble through our conversations with Him without even paying attention to what we're saying? Do we head towards the door before the davening has ended, mumbling the final passages on our way to the car? Have we ever given this relationship - which is the purpose of all Creation - a fighting chance?

Chazal have laid out for us clear relationship building techniques. The davening they wrote is not just empty words said in an attempt to buy one's love, rather it is a long song of love conveying the deepest emotions seared into the flesh of every Jew. "Look down from the heavens and see, we are scorned and the laughingstock of the nations. We are considered no more than sheep to be led to the slaughter, to be murdered, annihilated, beaten and shamed. And through all this we have not forgotten Your name." What an opportunity we have by just paying attention to the words that we say when we daven!



Uninterfered Love

The *Pasuk* states (6:1-3 with *Medrash explanation*) The nations of the world say: *Where did your Beloved – Hashem, go, you most beautiful of women – Klal Yisroel? Where did your Beloved turn to? Let us*

search for Him together. My Beloved, Hashem, [descended to] His garden – this world, to the garden-bed of fragrance – the Jewish people, to graze in the gardens – the shuls and batei medrashim, - and to pluck roses – to remove the righteous ones of Israel.

The following *Pasuk* states: *I am to my Beloved and My Beloved is to me, He who grazes amongst the roses.* This means that at a time when Hashem grazes amongst the roses – to pluck and remove the righteous, which is a time of anger, even then a foreigner will not enter between us and a stranger won't approach us. Rather *I am to my Beloved and my Beloved is to me*, without any intermediary or interferences even at such a time. (*Sar Shalom*)

The nations of the world in the above *Pesukim* seem to be righteous Gentiles who sincerely want to help *Klal Yisroel* figure out the reason behind Hashem's wrath. However, despite their good intentions, at such difficult times, when there seems to be a break in the love between *Klal Yisroel* and Hashem, we loudly proclaim, "*I am to my Beloved and my Beloved is to me.*" We're still in love with each other just as before. We are certain that His actions, as harsh as they may seem, are solely for our good. Therefore, even the slightest help from an outsider would be a breach in the closeness of our bond.



Elul

The letters of the word **אלול** hint at the *Pasuk* in the sixth *Perek* of *Shir Hashirim*, "I am to my beloved and my beloved is to me." *Elul* begins the period leading up to what is referred to as, "The Days of Awe," from *Rosh Hashana* until *Yom Kippur*. The days often evoke feelings of great concern about the fact that during these days the entire world is being judged. Yet, we prepare for this time by focusing on the loving relationship between ourselves and our Creator.

Even at a time of such seriousness, our most basic concern is that we should not do anything that would hurt our relationship with Hashem. It has been suggested that the essence of the fear that we have, at this time of year, is the fear of losing or undermining our relationship with our Maker.

The reciting and study of *Shir Hashirim* helps us to realize the existence of this relationship and to deepen our love for Hashem, even though sometimes we find it difficult to imagine, considering the challenges that we constantly face.



Appreciating Pain

"I am to my beloved and my beloved is to me, the One who grazes His flock in the midst of roses." (6:3)

Rashi explains that the reference to roses refers to Hashem's shepherding His people with a calm and good leadership. *Rashi* also explains that the period in history that it refers to is the Babylonian exile. How can we say and feel that in the suffering of the exile, we appreciate Hashem's leadership as calm and good?

The story is told of Reb Zisha, a man who had experienced terrible tragedies throughout his life. A delegation of Jews came to him to ask him to explain to them the meaning of the concept, "Rejoice in suffering." They found him to be a person of enormous suffering, poverty and illness. When they asked him the question, he stared at them incredulously and said, "I don't understand why you came to ask me this question, I never suffered a day in my whole life."

Dovid HaMelech in the 23rd *Perek* of *Tehillim*, refers to the whip of Hashem, his Shepherd, as a source of comfort to him. This seems a bit difficult to understand as a whip is a source of pain, not comfort. One of the great Torah giants of the previous generation, *Hagaon Harav Eliezer Platchinsky, Zt"l* explained this with the following parable. A shepherd was grazing his flock and as nightfall approached he gathered them in to the safety of the barn. When he counted the sheep, he realized that one was missing. He set out to find her. The animal,

realizing that she is lost and fearful of the dark night, is crying and hoping that the shepherd has not forgotten her. All of the sudden, the shepherd spots the lamb and cracks his whip on her back. Though in pain, she breathes a sigh of relief, as she realizes that the shepherd is still with her and trying to bring her back to safety.

In the context of a real loving relationship, even the whip can be a source of consolation, knowing that the shepherd just wants to bring you back to him in safety.



Hashem's Overwhelming Love

There's an astounding *Chazal* regarding *Moshe Rabbeinu*'s original reluctance to carry out Hashem's request to redeem *Klal Yisrael*: Moshe said, "Master of the Universe, I have calculated Your promise to *Avraham*, 'They (the *Mitzriyim*) will subjugate your children for 400 years' and this has yet to be fulfilled for they have only served 210 years." Hashem responded, "It is not as you have calculated but rather from the day of *Yitzchak*'s birth that I have calculated their exile." The question cries out: How can *Moshe Rabbeinu*, who sacrificed his life time and time again for the sake of *Klal Yisroel*, suggest to Hashem that it is too early to redeem *Klal Yisroel* from their suffering?

Perhaps *Moshe Rabbeinu*'s words can be understood based on the explanation of the *Vilna Gaon* and the *Arizal* on the *Pasuk* in *Shir HaShirim* (6:5). "Turn your eyes away from Me for they have emboldened Me." They explain that Hashem is telling *Klal Yisroel*, "Do not overly cry out over the *Galus*, for then I will be unable to hold myself back from redeeming you before the proper time. And since there is a certain amount of purification that must be wrought through your suffering I will have to bring upon you an overwhelming amount at one time." This explanation is very hard to understand. If it will truly be harder for *Klal Yisroel* if they are to be redeemed at an earlier time then why would Hashem do so?

We must preface that any description of Hashem is beyond our understanding. It is but a way the Torah conveys His conduct toward us in human terms. It seems the above *Pasuk*, and throughout *Shir Hashirim*, is teaching us that Hashem's love is comparable to a human's uncontrollable emotional love that overpowers all other considerations. Therefore, if we would not stop crying out to Him He would, so to speak, be unable to withstand our pleas.

Based on this, we can understand *Moshe Rabbeinu*'s words. He understood that if only 210 of the 400 years of servitude had already passed and Hashem was now planning on redeeming His children, this would only be possible if he would now bring upon

them an unbelievable concentration of suffering in a very short period of time. He worried that *Klal Yisroel* should not have to go through this. Hashem answered him that he need not worry for the full 400 years of the decree had indeed been completed for he had begun the calculation from the birth of *Yitzchak*.

Next time we stand in front of our Father in prayer, let us keep in mind this overpowering love which is overflowing towards us with every word we utter, even if we are not always attuned enough to feel it.



The Queen's Honor

"*Klal Yisroel* has fallen and will never lift herself up again." (*Amos 5:2*) On its surface this *Pasuk* is quite frightening, however the *Zohar's* explanation transforms it into a source of great comfort to us.

The *Zohar* (*Vayikra*) states: This *Pasuk* does not say, "*Klal Yisrael* will never again be uplifted," rather it says, "*Klal Yisrael* will never again uplift herself." Indeed our previous exiles had a known time limit, whereupon we ourselves returned home. In contrast, our current exile's end is unknown and *Klal Yisrael* as a whole will not return on their own, rather Hashem Himself will return us.

This is analogous to a king who had a falling out with his wife, whereupon he threw her out of his palace

for a specific amount of time. When the allotted time passed she returned to him. This occurred once, and then again, however the third time this occurred, infuriated, the king sent her far away for an extended period of time. Eventually, missing her terribly, the king turned to his advisers saying, "This time my wife will not return on her own, rather I together with the entire royal court must go out to search for her and bring her back."

When the king finally found his wife she was wallowing in dirt. All were witness to the great honor she received as the mighty king begged her to return to him. Finally he grabbed her by the hand, lifted her up and led her back to the palace, promising her that he will never part with her again.

So to with *Klal Yisrael*. We ourselves returned to Hashem at the culmination of our first and second exiles. However in our current exile this will not occur, rather Hashem himself will take us by the hand and lift us up, pacifying us as he returns us home forever.

In the depths of our present exile these words are a source of great comfort. However, the words of the *Zohar*, "All were witness to the great honor she received as the mighty king begged her to return to him," are perplexing. In general, we understand the infinite love that Hashem has for us as a product of a father's eternal love for his child despite how low

he may have fallen. Therefore, rather than her being honored we would say in truth she should be ashamed, and only the husband's great love is what is to be admired.

Perhaps the *Zohar*'s words provide us with a deeper understanding of the entire *Shir HaShirim*. Hashem is in no way illogical. Therefore His astounding expressions of love for us are in fact a true reflection of the inherent greatness of every Jew regardless of the depth of depravity he may have fallen to. Therefore, His entreaties towards us to return to Him is indeed a great honor, in as much as it reveals the Jew's unfathomable greatness, however hidden it may be.



Overcoming Challenges Results in True Love

Since the day the world was created there was no more joyful time before Hashem than when the *Beis Hamikdash* was completed. At that time, a heavenly *Beis Hamikdash* was created as well and was established in all of the worlds, enlightening and filling them with sweet fragrance. All heavenly enclosures opened, casting their light. There was no greater joy in the entire universe than the joy of that day. At that time all of the creations above and below arose in song, the song of *Shir Hashirim*. (*Zohar, Teruma 143*)

The reason that all of Creation would sing of the love between *Klal Yisrael* and their Creator is clear, since the very reason for Creation was the love between Hashem and His children. However, the context of the song is perplexing. As *Rashi* states, *Shir Hashirim* describes the love still present between an estranged couple, the exact opposite of the state of *Klal Yisrael* at the time, when we were a bride together with her groom, upon completion of our House of Hashem. Would it not be more appropriate to sing of the love between a bride and groom, to describe the service of the *Beis Hamikdash* and being in the presence of the *Shechinah*?

In truth, we see, that the depth of true love is not revealed as a bride and groom begin their journey together. Rather, it is when this love has been tested, when under brutal circumstances the couple has been estranged, yet from the depths of their hearts rises an overpowering dormant love. These times are when true love is revealed.

For this reason, at the time when *Klal Yisrael* was basking in the love of Hashem, such as a bride with her groom, when all of Creation wished to express in song the true depth of that love, they did not sing of the present state that they were witnessing. Rather they sang of a time still far in the future, when the bride would be disloyal and sent far away. The couple's house would be destroyed leaving the bride

to the mercy of enemies, to suffer scorn and torture, time after time wherever she went. Yet, despite it all, an eternal overpowering love would remain ever present in her heart.

The bride would be sought after by many rich and powerful men. “Just come with me and all your suffering will end,” they would tell her. “No! I’d rather die,” she’d respond again and again in every generation, “I’d rather be beaten and tortured than give up my husband’s love.” “What love?” they’d respond, “Have you lost your mind? He abandoned you completely thousands of years ago, letting you suffer like no other nation in the history of the world.” She responds, “No, No, you’ll never understand. I know He really loves me, and one day, you too will all see.”

Such expressions of love by someone living in the time of the *Beis Hamikdash*, still basking in Hashem’s presence, are beautiful. However, can they be compared to the time when they are said by a Marrano Jew who, despite never having felt the beauty of Torah and *Mitzvos*, when presented with the choice: Forsake Hashem and live a good life or hold on to Him and be burned at the stake, chooses death?

We see, that the love between *Klal Yisrael* and Hashem during the years of our bitter exile, when we are far from Hashem and His presence is felt on a

significantly smaller scale, is the period most revealing of the true depth of love between us and Hashem.

May that great day, when we will all feel this love in its entirety, come speedily.



The Roar of a Lion

“Woe to the sons because of whose sins I destroyed My house, burned My temple and exiled them among the nations of the world.” Three times each night, the *Gemara* (*Brachos* 3a) states, the above words are expressed by our Father in Heaven, with the description as, “Hashem roaring like a lion,” as He says them. In contrast, later on in this very same *Gemara*, *Chazal* relate that R’ Yossi recounted hearing a “*Bas Kol*” – a heavenly voice – crying like a dove and saying the very same statement, “Woe to the sons...”

How can we understand these seemingly diametrically opposed expressions of Hashem's statement? Does Hashem “roar like a lion” or does He in fact “cry like a dove” as He says these words?

Perhaps we can understand this based on a *Rashi*. *Rashi* in *Meseches Sota* (33a) describes a “*Bas Kol*” as not the actual voice of Hashem, but rather as an angel who is sent to convey His words to others.

Hashem, so to speak, in fact “roars like a lion” in His great pain over the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash*. This however, can be understood in two ways. Either He “roars like a lion” in His great anger towards us, “because of whose sins I destroyed My house etc.” Or He “roars like a lion” in great pain for His children, “Due to whose sins I (was forced) to destroy My house and exile them among the nations.”

Therefore, the *Bas Kol*, which is sent to convey the true meaning of Hashem’s roar, describes it as the “crying of a dove,” conveying the message to *Klal Yisroel* that rather than Hashem “roaring” in an ultimate expression of anger at us, He is “roaring” in an ultimate expression of commiseration with our pain.

Perhaps we can additionally explain why Hashem's “roar” is described as a dove crying. Our eternal bond with our Father in Heaven is described in *Shir HaShirim* (*Rashi*, 1:15), “As a dove, who upon recognizing his mate will never part from her to allow her to mate with another.”

Therefore, as Hashem expresses His ultimate pain over having been forced to temporarily send us away from Him, so to speak, He simultaneously conveys the eternal bond that we hold with Him.



Divine Revelation Through Torah Study

The *Seforno* explains that Hashem says the words, "*You are beautiful, my wife. You are beautiful, your eyes are dovelike,*" to *Klal Yisroel* in response to our request of Him: "Please reveal Your Divine Presence to us as in days of yore, then we will return to You as in days of yore." To which Hashem responds: "'*You are beautiful, my wife,'* - Now you do not need that form of miraculous Divine revelation as in days of yore, for I have already made you beautiful through the giving of the Torah, which I have written to guide you with miraculous logic."

We see from this *Seforno* that when one truly toils in Torah and delves to its depths, he beholds wisdom so miraculous, and a connection to Hashem so great, that he negates the need to witness with his own eyes Divine revelations of the caliber of *Yitzias Mitzrayim* and *Maamad Har Sinai*.

Perhaps with this understanding we can further appreciate an explanation of the *Seforno* later on in *Shir HaShirim* (7:8). There, he explains that upon the cessation of Divine Prophecy, the prophets begged *Klal Yisroel*, "Return, Return, Oh Israel in order that we will again merit Divine Revelation." To which *Klal Yisroel* responded, "'What will you be able to see already? Can Hashem give you a new Torah?"

It seems *Klal Yisroel* is responding to their prophets with the assertion that their appreciation of the Torah is so great that the necessity for miraculous Divine Revelation was negated.

Such is the greatness that Hashem has implanted in our midst, waiting for us to take advantage of. A direct line of communication from our Father in Heaven, through which He reveals Himself with a clarity as miraculous as the Revelation at *Har Sinai*.

Perhaps this is also the meaning of the words of the *Zohar* (brought in *Nefesh HaChaim*) "One who toils in Torah, is as if He stands by *Har Sinai*."



Perseverence of Love

Why is it that towards the beginning of *Shir HaShirim* (2:8), *Klal Yisroel* adjures the nations of the world, "That you not spoil the love." While towards the end of *Shir HaShirim* (8:4), *Klal Yisroel* adjures them: "Why would you even try to spoil the love?"

Perhaps the answer lies in *Rashi*'s explanation of the latter *Pasuk*: Now *Klal Yisroel* turns towards the nations: "Though I complain and remonstrate, my Beloved holds my hand and is my support in my exile. Therefore, I adjure you: Why would you try to spoil this love, for it won't work."

It seems that towards the beginning of *Shir HaShirim*, *Klal Yisroel* just adjures the nations not to try to spoil their love. However, after all of the chapters of her complaints and remonstrations she can turn to the nations and say: “Despite all of my complaints, G-d still holds my hand, and He indeed is my entire support in my exile. This being the case, you can be sure that you’ll never be able to separate me from Him.”

It seems that the strongest and fail-safe way to assure that the Jew won’t forsake Hashem, is his understanding that despite his complaining and estrangement from Hashem He still holds his hand in support.

Let us strengthen this knowledge within us at every trying opportunity we face, for in truth we have no greater assurance of our fidelity towards Him than this. “*For I am Hashem your G-D who holds your right hand, who says to you: Do not fear for I will help you!*” (*Yeshayah 41:13*)



Focusing on Love

Rav Chaninah and Rav Oshiyah said: What nation is like this nation that knows the nature of their G-d. The custom of the world is that one who faces judgment dons black clothing, grows his beard and does not cut his finger-nails for he does not know what will be the

outcome of his judgment. However, this is not so regarding Klal Yisroel who don white clothing, cut their hair and finger nails, eat, drink and make merry on Rosh Hashanah for they know that Hashem will perform miracles on their behalf, judge them favorably and shred their harsh judgments. (Yalkut Shemoni, Tehilim 148:14)

It seems that the fact that Hashem actually performs miracles and shreds our evil judgments is not sufficient to explain how *Klav Yisroel* are so close to Hashem. *Rav Oshiyah* and *Rav Chaninah* take pains to underline the fact that we are aware that this is the nature of Hashem and we place our trust in Him, in order to explain why we are considered so close to Him. True closeness is only felt when one is aware and focused on another's love. The fact, as attested to throughout *Shir HaShirim*, is that Hashem is overflowing with infinite love towards us. All we need is to focus upon this and we will truly feel close to Him.



Crying During the Ultimate Redemption

When Yosef saw that they were extremely embarrassed, he said to them: Come near to me (Bereshis 45:4). As each one of them approached, he kissed him and wept upon him, as it says: And he kissed all his brethren, and wept upon them (Ibid, 15). Just as Joseph comforted his brothers through

weeping, so the Holy One, Blessed Be He, will redeem Israel through weeping, as it is said: They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them... (Medrash Tanchuma Vayigash 5)

It seems from the *Medrash* that Hashem will weep during the *geula* as a way of comforting us. What is the need for Hashem to comfort *Klal Yisroel* through crying during their redemption? The very act of *geula* would seem to provide the greatest comfort?

Perhaps the connection between Hashem's comforting and Yosef's runs much deeper. We are comforted from the pains of our exile through redemption itself, however, as by Yosef's brothers, we may still worry upon seeing Hashem's great love that perhaps the great pain we caused Him by forcing Him, so to speak, to part from us for all those years, will affect our supreme closeness to Him even after our redemption. As Yosef cried upon revealing his identity to his brothers who sold him, comforting them through this supreme show of love, so too Hashem will cry as a supreme show of love when He will reveal Himself to us, His dear children, who caused Him so much pain of separation, comforting us that He doesn't hold it against us.



Hashem Is With Us In Our Suffering

The great and powerful king was obsessed with an overwhelming love for his wife. Perhaps for this very reason when she displayed disloyalty towards him, he was so angered that he threw her out of his house and sent her off to a faraway land. From being queen of the entire kingdom, in an instant she had been turned into a pauper begging from door to door for her basic needs, and suffering at the whim of whomever wished to harm her. She suffered unimaginably, however, she was well aware of how much she was truly loved by the king. She knew that however much she suffered on the street, the king suffered so much more just from her absence. Such was his infinite love towards her. She was so sure of this that when the king finally sent her the message: All of your suffering is over! You can return to the paradise of the royal palace to rule the kingdom once again by my side, despite her unbearable suffering she responded: Let him first double my kesuba! Only then will I return to him!

The Medrash on the Pasuk, “*I, I am He Who consoles you...*” (Yeshayah 51:12) states: “Rav Aba said in the name of Rav Shimon Ben Levi that this is analogous to a king who was angered by his wife and threw her out of his palace. After some time, he sought to return her to him, whereupon she said: Let him double my kesuba then I will return to him! Similarly, Hashem said to Yisroel: My son, at Sinai I

said one time “*Anochi* – I am Hashem your G-d”, and regarding *Yerushalayim* when the time comes I will say twice, “*Anochi Anochi – I, I am He Who consoles you...!*”

Imagine the picture! After two thousand years of suffering! Burned at the stake, pogroms, and holocaust such as no other nation in the history of the world has seen! When finally, Hashem reveals Himself to return us to His side, we are compared to the wife in our story, who’s so sure that her husband’s pain in her absence is greater than hers, despite all her suffering, that she has the audacity to say: *Let him double my kesuba then I will return to him!* For however desperate we are to reclaim our status as the princes of the world, we know deep down that He, so to speak, is even more desperate! As He says: *With them I am in their suffering!* (*Tehilim 91:15*)





שיר השירים

