

## **The Steinsaltz Megillot**

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*Megillot Translation and Commentary*

Commentary by

**Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz**



**Steinsaltz Center**



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The Steinsaltz Megillot

Commentary by  
Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz  
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# Introduction to The Steinsaltz Megillot

Scholars and lay readers alike are aware that writing a new commentary on the Bible requires assistance and blessings from Above, as well as substantial effort from below. Two fundamental challenges stand before one who seeks to write a commentary on the Bible: First, the aspiration to relate to the loftiest and holiest text and to explain it faithfully risks hubris. Second, a huge number of commentaries on the Bible have been composed over the course of the past three thousand years by the greatest people in our history. Who has the audacity to attempt to join this holy assembly or even grasp its coattails?

Sanction for undertaking this daunting task can be found in Rashi's statement to his grandson Rashbam, himself the author of an important commentary on the Torah. Rashbam reports Rashi to have said that if he had had the strength, he would have written another commentary in accordance with the "plain meanings that are renewed every day" (Rashbam, Genesis 37:2).

In every generation and on each passing day, fresh light can be shed on the verses of the Bible and new perspectives can be found. Not only are new answers offered to old questions, but in every era additional questions are raised by students of the Bible, due to both the diversity of the personalities, and the differing interests and perspectives, of each era. Throughout the ages, the great commentaries have discussed a wide range of different issues. To this day, thank God, there are many scholars and students of the Bible raising unique questions and challenges that require attention, analysis, and investigation. All these illuminate the eternal words of the Torah through a range of viewpoints and give rise to "plain meanings that are renewed every day."

This commentary seeks to offer the reader the plain meaning of the text, the *peshat*. Ostensibly, this is the simplest level of interpretation, but the elucidation of the plain meaning is actually the most difficult type of interpretation. Other kinds of interpretation, based on allusion [*remez*], midrashic hermeneutics [*derash*], or esoteric, mystical traditions [*sod*], are free to forge links between the text and the sources from which they draw and are not constrained by the language and concepts of the Bible. In contrast, discovering the plain meaning of the text requires the interpreter to adhere closely to the literal meaning of the words while paying attention to syntax and context.

Although this commentary includes references to many other commentaries, it is not an anthology. It was not intended to provide a comprehensive array of interpretations from across the generations. The aim of the references is to show that a suggested interpretation is based on earlier sources or discusses a similar question. Moreover, this work does not aspire to be revolutionary or novel. Rather, it aims to present what might be called a "transparent" commentary, one whose explanations should go almost unnoticed and serve only to give the reader and student the sense that there is no barrier between him or her and the text. The aim is to let the Torah speak for itself, to allow the prophets to prophesy and the wise men to impart their wisdom. In order to enable the "voice" of the verses to be heard, the annotations are brief, serving as a thin, barely perceptible screen rather than a heavy, concealing coat of armor.

At Mount Sinai, the entire Jewish people heard "a great voice" (Deuteronomy 5:18), which the Sages interpret to mean a voice that has never ceased (*Targum Onkelos; Sanhedrin 17a*). It is my hope that this project will help people hear the voice of the Torah even in our busy, noisy world.

Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz

# Introduction by the Hebrew Editors

The purpose of this commentary is to assist the contemporary reader by bridging the gaps in language, outlook, and culture between us and the world of the Bible. As far as possible, it seeks to clarify ambiguities, elucidate problematic passages, and remove obstacles to understanding while dealing with both explicit and implicit difficulties.

The commentary consists of several parts, which complement but are independent of one another. The literal translation of the verses appears in boldface. Woven into the biblical text in non-bold typeface are brief explanatory comments and elaborations. Below the text are notes that offer more elaborate discussion of topics that appear in the verses as well as insights into the general context and scientific and historical realia that surround the biblical text.

The biblical text is divided into units based on subject matter, which do not always accord with the standard division into chapters. Each unit is prefaced by a heading and a short introduction. This structure should not be viewed as a definitive partition of the biblical text but as a suggestion, part of the commentary, for the reader's convenience and orientation.

The commentary seeks to concisely clarify the language and context at the most basic level so as not to encumber the reader. Consequently, it is not committed to a particular exegetical method and does not systematically defer to any particular commentator. In cases where there are differing explanations of a passage, alternative explanations may be cited. In cases where the halakhic tradition expounds a verse in a manner not consistent with the plain meaning, this will be noted and explained briefly in the annotations themselves or by means of a reference, allowing the plain meaning of the text to be preserved while not disregarding the interpretation of the Oral Law.

It must be stated that even when written without qualification, the interpretations offered are not meant to be seen as authoritative. They are no more than suggestions, occasionally novel ones, which are compatible with the simple meaning of the text and which speak to the average reader. There are no systematic exegetical considerations behind the decision to adopt any particular interpretation.

Much thought and labor have been invested to ensure that the design of this work is as aesthetically pleasing and convenient for the user as possible. This design is the fruit of an ongoing collaboration between the team at the Institute for Talmudic Publications and Koren Publishers. Our thanks to Rabbi Meir Hanegbi, whose wisdom, conviviality, and efficiency contributed greatly to the success of the project. Rabbi Hanokh Ben Arza, may his memory be for a blessing, was the father of the two editors in chief of the Hebrew edition; his spirit and respect for the written word inspired them in their work.

The Editors

# **The Song of Songs**



# The Song of Songs

## INTRODUCTION TO THE SONG OF SONGS

The Song of Songs is a collection of love poetry. Despite the literary unity of the book and its themes, it is hard to discern a coherent narrative running through it all. Between the obscure starting point of the book and its conclusion, which could point toward marriage, there are elusive circles of mutual courtship and pursuit. Nevertheless, there is an overall harmony to the poems, and despite the peaks and troughs in the relationship between the lovers who are the poems' focus, there is no open conflict between them. They occasionally become distanced from one another, but soon return and become close once again.

Other characters apart from the two lovers make brief appearances, but they do not participate in the main events, and are marginal figures, who sometimes serve to provide a different perspective on the relationship between the principal couple.

The encounters depicted here are more intimate than the accepted manners of courtship in the ancient Jewish world. It is certainly possible that the poems do not tell of real face-to-face meetings, but rather represent the lovers' tender fantasies. The dreamlike vagueness of the narrative throughout the book supports this suggestion.

The love between man and woman, which is the focus of the entire book, has been understood throughout the generations as an allegory for the relationship between the people of Israel as a whole and the Holy One.<sup>1</sup> The Song of Songs evokes a relationship of intense longing and intimacy using very specific imagery. This representation of the love between God and His people through metaphors of sexual love is far from unique in the Bible, and not at all foreign to Jewish tradition. In the Bible this characterization is especially prevalent in the Prophets. Some of the prophets evoke a marital relationship, both as the ideal of the covenant and as the model for the betrayal and jealousy felt by God when Israel sins.<sup>2</sup> This imagery is often highly physical and even erotic. Nevertheless, the tone of The Song of Songs differs from these metaphors.

Allegorical love poems that express religious devotion and a believer's feeling for his god were not unusual in the ancient Middle East. For example, ancient Sumerian poems have been discovered that are broadly similar in their themes to The Song of Songs, and some of them were expressly designed for use in ritual ceremonies of worship. This fact serves to undermine the oft-heard suggestion that the allegorical reading of The Song of Songs offered by the Sages is the anachronistic reaction of a prudish culture shocked by its explicitness. It is rather an instance of an ancient and well-established phenomenon.

Notwithstanding the similarities between The Song of Songs and similar poems from other cultures, The Song of Songs is neither generic nor universal. The images are well defined, detailed, and local. They refer to the Land of Israel, its scenery and ways of life, with especial attention paid to Jerusalem and its environs. Although there is a certain continuity in the setting of the characters and events described, the book does not provide a well-articulated representation of the characters and their relationship as one finds typically in ancient Greek literature. Every so often, the characters shift and display different aspects of themselves, and thus another feature of the poem is revealed, inviting more and more exegetical interpretations and further investigations into hidden levels of meaning. Each detail remains vital and sensuous, and yet at the same time symbolic and fundamental. Over the generations, The Song of Songs has become a timeless recounting of the love between the nation of Israel and God.

It has been the custom since the Middle Ages to recite The Song of Songs on the festival of Passover, which always occurs in the spring. This is the season of the events described in the book, and Passover also represents the springtime of Israel as a nation.<sup>3</sup>

Many communities also have the custom of reading The Song of Songs every week, just before the start of Shabbat.

# The Song of Songs

## Song of the Young Woman to Her Beloved

THE SONG OF SONGS 1:1

At the simplest level, The Song of Songs is the poetic expression of the passion of two young lovers. It has always been understood as referring also to other sorts of love relationships. Beyond the allegorical reading of the Sages, in which The Song of Songs depicts the love between the Jewish people and God, the entire book can be read as the portrayal of the love of an individual soul for its Creator. Each level of interpretation, that of the collective Jewish people's relationship with God and that of the individual's relationship with God, makes use of different symbols.

- 1 **1 The song of songs,**<sup>D</sup> the most special of poems, **which is Solomon's.**<sup>D</sup> Solomon king of Israel is said to have composed a great number of poems.<sup>4</sup>

## The Opening Poem

The first poem expresses the intensity of new love, while hinting at other dimensions of the love relationship.

THE SONG OF SONGS 1:2–4

- 2 The poem opens without identifying its speaker, but its grammatical context, which addresses a male beloved, leaves no doubt that these are the words of a young woman: **May he kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, as your love<sup>B</sup> is better than wine.**<sup>5</sup> Alternatively: The wetness of your mouth is better than wine.<sup>5</sup> The speaker's transition from employing third person pronouns to directly addressing her subject likely alludes to a process in which passionate fantasies feel more and more real, eventually giving the impression that the beloved is present even if he is not.
- 3 The woman continues to praise her beloved: **By the fragrance of your good oils, even your name is pleasant like poured oil [shemen turak],<sup>B</sup> and therefore, the young women love you.** The young woman speaks not only of love for her partner and a yearning for personal closeness to him, but also of her admiration for him, noting that he is loved by all.
- 4 **Draw me; after you we will run** together. The verse portrays a budding romance: The young man woos the young woman,

and she takes hold of his hand and runs with him. However, they do not run aimlessly: **The king brought me to his private chambers.** At this point, another layer is added to the poem, as the woman discovers that her beloved is no ordinary man but the king himself. Although the beloved will sometimes be described as a shepherd, perhaps the king prefers to appear as a simple man rather than a ruler when courting his loved one. However, when they finally run together, the king takes her specifically to his palace chambers. Alternatively, in the eyes of the woman, her beloved shepherd is a king, and she feels like a queen whose groom, the king, is leading her to his home.<sup>6</sup> This motif does not seem typical of a love poem. It reveals another layer of meaning: The soul, which until now has wandered in the familiar outside world, finds itself inside the chamber of the beloved king. There **let us exult and rejoice in you. We will recount your love,** which is sweeter and **more intoxicating than wine. Rightly [meisharim] do they love you,** or upright individuals love you.

## An Address to the Daughters of Jerusalem

THE SONG OF SONGS 1:5–6

In the following few verses, the woman speaks to other figures, real or metaphorical.

- 5 The woman declares: **I am black but lovely,<sup>BD</sup> daughters of Jerusalem.** The city of Jerusalem serves as the backdrop for the poem. I am black **like the tents of the tribes of Kedar.**<sup>B</sup> These tents were made from the wool of the local goats, which were typically black, **like the curtains of Solomon,<sup>B</sup>** which were most splendid, and perhaps also black. The woman's black and beautiful appearance is illustrated by a pair of contrasting images: coarse wool and royal drapes.



Tents in the wilderness

## שיר השירים

שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים אֲשֶׁר לְשִׁלְמֹה: יִשְׁקֵנִי מִנְשִׁיקוֹת פִּיהוּ כִּי־טוֹבִים דְּדִיךְ מִיַּיִן:  
 לְרִיחַ שְׁמֵנֶיךָ טוֹבִים שָׁמֶן תּוֹרֵךְ שֶׁמֶךְ עַל־פֶּן עֲלָמוֹת אֶהְבוֹךְ: מִשְׁבְּנֵי אַחֲרֶיךָ  
 נְרוּצָה הֵבִיאֵנִי הַמֶּלֶךְ חֲדָרָיו נִגְיֵלָה וְנִשְׁמַחָה בְּךָ נִזְפִּירָה דְּדִיךְ מִיַּיִן מִיִּשְׁרָיִם  
 אֶהְבוֹךְ: שְׁחוּרָה אֲנִי וְנֹאזָה בְּנֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם פֶּאֱהֵלִי קָדָר פִּירֵיעוֹת

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### BACKGROUND

1:2 | **Your love [dodekha]:** This word has two meanings: First, it is the plural form of *dod*, “beloved,” as in the verse “This is my beloved [*dodī*], and this is my companion” (5:16). Second, it denotes lovemaking, based on a similar Akkadian term, and this is the meaning of *dodekha* in this verse (see also verse 4, 4:10, 7:13; Proverbs 7:18).

1:3 | **Poured oil [shemen turak]:** The word *turak* means poured or emptied. Alternatively, it is related to *tamruk*, cosmetics (see Vilna Gaon). According to this interpretation, *shemen turak* is perfumed oil. A similar term in Akkadian means a perfume or spice.

1:5 | **I am black, but lovely [nava]:** In Akkadian, *nawru* means sparkling, shiny, and colorful. Indeed, a woman whose skin was darkened as a result of guarding vineyards (see verse 6) might stand out among her friends. It is worth noting the statement in the Mishna (*Nega'im* 2:1) concerning the typical complexion of the Jewish people in ancient times: “Rabbi Yishmael says: The children of Israel, may I be an atonement for them! They are like the box tree, neither black nor white, but in between.” The color of the box tree, of the genus *Buxus*, is somewhere between ivory and light brown.

**Kedar:** In the Torah, Kedar is listed as Ishmael’s second son (Genesis 25:13), and in the Prophets it refers to a nomadic tribe, or group of tribes, that raised cattle and camels and engaged in commerce (see Isaiah 42:11, 60:7; Jeremiah 49:28; Ezekiel 27:21). Assyrian records refer to the leaders of Kedar and their wanderings in the region of the Syrian-Arabian desert. Pliny the Elder lists them together with the Nabateans as migrants and settlers in Babylonia, present-day Jordan, and the Sinai Peninsula.

**Like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon:** The root *kuf-dalet-reish* means dark or black. The tribes of Kedar were known by this name due to their dark clothing and tents. Against the background of the desert rocks and light sands, the dark tents of Kedar could be seen from a great distance. The comparison of a woman to Solomon’s colorful woven curtains can be understood by noting that royal tents, as well as the Tent of Meeting in the wilderness, had two layers: an outer one of a uniform color, made of goats’ wool, and an inner, multicolored one.

### DISCUSSION

1:1 | **The Song of songs:** The Sages teach: All the Writings, or in a different version, all the poems, are holy, but The Song of Songs is the holy of holies (Mishna *Yadayim* 3:5; see *Shir HaShirim Rabba* 1:11). From a grammatical perspective, the phrase “song of songs” can be considered an expression of emphasis, like “slave of slaves” (Genesis 9:25, and Ibn Ezra ad loc.). The title of the book also reflects its dual nature: The Song of Songs is simultaneously a single prose poem or story and a compilation of individual poems each relating its own partial narrative. Indeed, the transitions from one section to another are not always smooth and are likely to leave the reader seeking clarification.

**Which is Solomon’s:** Solomon makes several appearances in The Song of Songs, not only as its author but also as a character, albeit with a somewhat obscure role. He is sometimes portrayed as a third party independent of the lovers, sometimes as a kind of custodian of the young woman, whom he presents to others. At other times, Solomon appears in the role of the beloved himself, although several other verses indicate that the beloved is not a king but a shepherd. According to the allegory, the figure of King Solomon in The Song of Songs represents God (see, e.g., *Shevuot* 38b). But even without resorting to the allegory, it is clear that the figure of Solomon is an amalgamation of a historical person and a symbol. This is one of the many fluid and enigmatic aspects of the book.

1:5 | **I am black, but lovely:** This expression has been understood in an apologetic light: Although I am dark or tanned, and I do not perfectly match your image of ideal beauty, I am nevertheless beautiful. The perception of beauty expressed in the verse is typical of the ancient Middle East, where the inhabitants, particularly the poorer ones who worked outside, were usually of a dark complexion, while paler skin tones were associated with the elites and were considered more beautiful.



Wanderings of the tribes of Kedar

- 6 **Do not gaze at me** disrespectfully,<sup>7</sup> seeing that I am dark, for this is not my natural color; rather, **the sun has tanned me.**<sup>8</sup>

### The Young Woman's Declaration and the Beloved's Response

THE SONG OF SONGS 1:7–2:7

- 7 **Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where do you herd<sup>d</sup> your flock? Where do you rest your flock at noon?<sup>b</sup> Why should I be as one bound to the flocks of your colleagues?**

Alternatively: Why should I wrap myself up or veil myself for reasons of modesty, in following the flocks of other shepherds? If you tell me where to find you, I will not be forced to wander in the company of strangers.



Flock of sheep

- 8 For the first time, the lover's response is heard: **If you do not know** where I am, you, **the fairest among women, go out in the footsteps of the sheep and herd your kids.** Apparently, in addition to being a keeper of vineyards, the woman is also a shepherdess. A young shepherdess would generally be given a small flock of kids, while the larger flocks were shepherded by men. The matriarch Rachel likely shepherded such a small flock.<sup>9</sup> You must seek me **by the tents of the shepherds.** The beloved is unable to give the young woman an address where she can find him. Rather, she must go out to seek him. Similarly, the final destination of the soul's great journey, like that of Israel's travels in the wilderness, lies beyond the horizon.

The woman now addresses how a fair and modest daughter of Jerusalem faced such exposure to the sun: **The sons of my mother were incensed at me; they placed me as guard of the family vineyards,<sup>b</sup>** to chase away any animals that attempted to infiltrate. However, because of the task imposed upon me, **my own vineyard I did not guard.** I too have a vineyard of my own, but the members of my family who quarreled with me cared only for their vineyards, while mine was left abandoned. This verse can be understood as the personal struggle of a woman who wishes to extricate herself from the plight of her perceived external ugliness, and to reveal her hidden beauty. However, the verse can also be interpreted metaphorically as a declaration by the Jewish people: Admittedly we are not clean and pure as snow, but the blackness of our sins is not a natural blemish, nor was it caused by circumstances of our own choosing. As a nation, we have been forced to wander frequently. Because of the other nations, we were forced to fulfill various roles for the benefit of the world, to preserve their vineyards. Therefore, we were left without the time or opportunity to protect our own vineyard.

The woman now turns to her beloved, who presumably was not present during her conversation with the daughters of Jerusalem. Perhaps this is not a real exchange, but an expression of a secret wish.

- 9 The lover briefly expresses his love for the woman, even more emphatically than her expressions of affection for him: **To a mare in Pharaoh's chariots I have likened you, my love.** Horses are generally considered beautiful creatures. A horse harnessed to one of Pharaoh's chariots would be perfect and adorned with decorations.<sup>10</sup>



Horse pulling Pharaoh's chariot, fresco, Abu Simbel, southern Egypt, thirteenth century BCE

שְׁלֹמֹה: אֶל-תִּדְאָנִי שְׂאֲנִי שְׁחַרְחֹרֶת שְׁשׂוּפַתְנִי הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ בְּנִי אֲמִי נִחְרוֹבֶי שְׁמֹנִי  
 נִטְרָה אֶת-הַפָּרָמִים כְּרָמִי שְׁלִי לֹא נִטְרָתִי: הַגִּידָה לִּי שְׂאֵהָבָה נִפְשִׁי אֵיכָה  
 תִּרְעָה אֵיכָה תִּרְבִּיץ בְּצִהְרִים שְׁלֹמָה אֵהִיָּה פְעֻטָּיהָ עַל עַדְרֵי חֲבֵרֶיךָ: אִם-לֹא  
 תִּדְעִי לָךְ הִיפָּה בְּנָשִׁים צְאִי-לָךְ בְּעַקְבֵי הַעֲזָן וְרַעֲוִי אֶת-גְּדִיתֶיךָ עַל מִשְׁפְּנוֹת  
 הָרַעֲוִים: לְסִסְתִּי בְּרֻכְבֵּי פִרְעֹה דְּמִיתֶיךָ רַעֲוִיתִי: נֶאֱוֹן לְחַיִּיךָ בַּתָּרִים  
 צֹאֲרֶךְ בַּחֲרוּזִים: תִּוְרֵי זֶהָב נַעֲשֶׂה-לָךְ עִם נִקְדּוֹת הַכֶּסֶף: עַד-שֶׁהַמֶּלֶךְ בְּמִסְבּוֹ

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- 10 Like the horse in Pharaoh's chariot, **your cheeks are lovely** and decorated with **rings**, apparently large earrings that rest on the cheeks; **your neck is decorated with beads**.
- 11 You are worthy of even grander jewelry: **We will make you golden rings with studs<sup>11</sup> of silver.**<sup>B</sup> Silver studs stand out prominently on



Necklace, Egypt, seventh century BCE

a golden background, like white spots on dark fur. Allegorically, the chariots of Pharaoh recall Israel's exodus from Egypt, while the various ornaments are reminiscent of the great wealth taken from there by the children of Israel. This combination of gold and silver has been given many other interpretations, some of them mystical.



Gold earring, Italy, fourth century BCE

- 12 The young woman's response again expresses her desire to be close to her

#### BACKGROUND

1:6 | **Guard of the vineyards:** The main work in a vineyard, namely the harvesting and storage of grapes, and the production of wine and raisins from the fruit, is performed over the course of a three- to five-month period. During this time, the vineyard is vulnerable to animals and to thieves who might take grapes without permission. To protect against these threats, vineyard owners and their families would guard their vineyards. In many cases, round, tall structures suitable as lookouts were built to house the guards. These structures were typically constructed from stones gathered from a clearing, with a booth erected at the top of each of them.

1:7 | **Rest your flock at noon:** A day of shepherding is generally divided into three stages: In the morning hours, the sheep graze in the fields; during the noon hours, the flock rests in the shade and chews its cud; in the afternoon, the flock grazes again until close to sunset, before returning to its pen or shelter for the night.

1:11 | **We will make you golden rings with studs of silver:** It is possible that these silver studs are to be integrated between golden spherules, in order to enhance the visual effect. The combination of gold and silver is a motif in other sources as well (see Proverbs 25:11; Mishna *Pesachim* 5:5).

#### DISCUSSION

1:7 | **Where do you herd:** This question is left unanswered. The only response the woman receives is that she should continue looking. This constant searching is an attribute of the soul and can also be metaphorically ascribed to the heavenly bodies that are constantly orbiting. This idea is echoed by the question attributed to the angels, in which they ask repeatedly: Where is the place of His glory? (*Musaf* prayer for Shabbat and festivals; see *Hagiga* 13b; *Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer* 4). This question appears in a different form as a request by Moses: "If I have found favor now in Your eyes, inform me, please, of Your ways.... Show me, please, Your glory" (Exodus 33:13–18). As with the request of the young woman, Moses appeals to God: If You love me, then allow me to approach You and to know You.

beloved: **While the king was at his feast, my lavender<sup>B</sup> emitted its fragrance.** Among all the fragrances at the king's feast, the scent of my lavender is the most pronounced.<sup>12</sup>



Lavender

- 13 **A bundle of myrrh<sup>B</sup> is my beloved to me, lying between my breasts.** The young woman dreams: If only my beloved were like a bundle of myrrh hanging from my neck and resting in my bosom.



Pendant with receptacle for fragrant herbs, Egypt, first century BCE



Trees from which myrrh is extracted

- 14 **A cluster of henna<sup>B</sup>, a fragrant plant whose fruit grows in clusters, my beloved is to me, in the vineyards of Ein Gedi,** where henna apparently grew. Perhaps the woman anticipates meeting her lover there.



Cluster from a henna tree



Date flowers

- 15 As the pace of the exchange between the beloved and his lover increases, the beloved speaks again: **Behold, you are fair, my love; behold, you are fair; your eyes are like doves.** Doves are a symbol of beauty and grace; the comparison of the woman's eyes to doves is also indicative of perfection and tranquility, which arouse the man's love.<sup>13</sup>
- 16 The young woman responds: **Behold, you are fair, my beloved, your company is pleasant too; indeed our bed is fresh.** She fantasizes of a shared home and bed.

- 17 **The beams of our houses are made of cedars,<sup>B</sup> and our rafters are junipers.<sup>B</sup>** Two aspects of the lovers' relationship are intertwined in this passage.

Alongside passionate love, there is a motif of calm and the stability of home. When the woman calls to her lover, "Draw me; after you we will run" (verse 4), the intention is not to run and play aimlessly, as the same verse concludes: "The king brought me to his chambers." The blossoming love between them, which is expressed by the fresh bed of the previous verse, is followed by the dream of sharing a home. Their relationship must eventually be brought into a stable framework. The young man and woman, though completely engulfed in a passionate love, still set as their goal a shared home, symbolizing the nation of Israel in Egypt or in the wilderness who, caught up in their romance with God, still yearned to reach their homeland.



Greek juniper

- 2 1 The young woman continues: **I am as beautiful as a daffodil of the Sharon,<sup>B</sup> a lily of the valleys.<sup>B</sup>**



Sea daffodil

- 2 Her beloved confirms: **Indeed, like a lily among the thorns, so is my love among the girls.** You stand out among all the other girls, and you are different from them. Furthermore, just as one can enjoy the conspicuous beauty of a lily, but it is difficult to approach the flower due to the thorns, so too you are not easily accessible. This depiction alludes to the simultaneous intimacy and distance present in their relationship, which can be understood at all levels of interpretation.



Madonna lily

- 3 The young woman praises her beloved: **Like an apple tree,<sup>B</sup> with its distinct aroma,<sup>14</sup> among the plain trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the boys.** In addition to its scent, the apple tree possesses other advantages: **In its shade I delighted and I sat, and its fruit was sweet to my palate.**



Apple tree