



1. Rambam, Introduction to Moreh Nevuchim (Friedlander tr.)

The key to the understanding and to the full comprehension of all that the Prophets have said is found in the knowledge of the figures, their general ideas, and the meaning of each word they contain. You know the verse: - "I have also spoken in similes by the Prophets" (Hosea xii. 10); and also the verse, "Put forth a riddle and speak a parable" (Ezek. xvii. 2). And because the Prophets continually employ figures, Ezekiel said, "Does He not speak parables?" (xxi. 5). Again, Solomon begins his book of Proverbs with the words, "To understand a proverb and figurative speech, the words of the wise and their dark sayings" (Prov. i. 6)

Prelude to the literary approach: Outlining Shir haShirim

Phase 1: Introduction to the love (1:1-2:7)

- The *ra'ayah* states her love for the *Dod*, and wants to find Him
- The *Dod* responds: Go out with the sheep, and shepherd your young goats (1:8)
 - Rashi – To find Me in Egypt, examine the ways of your ancestors
 - Ibn Ezra – To find Me in Egypt, develop your faith
 - Malbim – To find Me, examine My deeds and control your materialism
- Songs of praise for each other
- The *ra'ayah* tells the daughters of Jerusalem that the *Dod* loves her, and she makes them swear (2:4-7)
 - Rashi – Warns other nations not to lead us astray
 - Ibn Ezra – Warns herself not to start too early, as Ephraim did in leaving Egypt
 - Malbim – Warns the traits of the body not to draw Shlomo away from Gd, or to draw Shlomo toward Gd too early

Phase 2: A lost opportunity (2:8-3:5)

- The *Dod* called to the *ra'ayah* from behind the wall
- *Ra'ayah* says something about taking foxes until the day ends (2:15-17)
 - Rashi – Hashem eliminated the Egyptians and took us from Egypt and was with us, until we created the Golden Calf
 - Ibn Ezra – This is a command to us to eliminate those who served the Eigel in order to draw near to Hashem
 - Malbim – This is a command from Shlomo's soul to the material aspects of the spirit to become involved with other activities and stop distracting Shlomo from Hashem
- *Ra'ayah* describes dreaming of finding the *Dod*

Interlude: The beauty of the *Ra'ayah* and the majesty of Shlomo (3:6-11)

- Rashi – The Jews travelling in the midbar, with the Mishkan of Hashem
- Ibn Ezra – The Jews entering Israel
- Malbim – Shlomo haMelech finds Gd, via the Beit haMikdash

Phase 3: A turning point: The major lost opportunity (4:1-6:3)

- The *Dod* describes the beauty of the *ra'ayah*, and wants to be with her
- The *ra'ayah* fails to respond, and then seeks the *Dod* and is attacked by the guards (5:2-7)
 - Rashi – Failure to find Gd and to listen to the prophets, in the first Beit haMikdash. Attacked by Nevuchadnezzar
 - Ibn Ezra – Failure to leave Persia to go to Israel. But then built the second Beit haMikdash. And was attacked by Greece
 - Malbim – Shlomo forgets Gd due to his political marriages, then seeks Gd, but is under the body's control

- The *ra'ayah* praises the *Dod*
- The *Dod* descends to His garden, and the *ra'ayah* expresses her love for the *Dod* (6:1-3)
 - Rashi – Gd came to get us from our exile and bring us back
 - Ibn Ezra – Gd went up to Heaven
 - Malbim – Shlomo feels that Gd is coming to him, to take him from the body

Phase 4: The *Dod* is still interested (6:4-7:10)

- The *Dod* describes the beauty of the *ra'ayah*
- The *ra'ayah* is supposed to be in the garden with the *Dod*, but doesn't know what to do (6:12)
 - Rashi – We sinned in the second Beit haMikdash, fighting with each other and bringing in the Romans
 - Ibn Ezra – ?
 - Malbim – Shlomo knew nothing more of the body, and was prepared to expire
- The *Dod* praises the beauty of the *ra'ayah*

Phase 5: The *Ra'ayah* pursues the *Dod* (7:11-8:4)

- The *ra'ayah* invites the *Dod*
- The *ra'ayah* wishes the *Dod* were like her brother, and they could be together always (8:1-3)
 - Rashi – I wish Gd would comfort me, as Yosef comforted his brothers
 - Ibn Ezra – I wish Gd would be close with me, and none would disturb us
 - Malbim – I wish Gd could have been close with me when I was yet physical

Phase 6: The relationship evolves into a loving relationship (8:5-8:14)

- Rashi – We wish to leave exile and come home
- Ibn Ezra – It's about final redemption
- Malbim – Final reunion of the soul with Gd

The Nature Imagery

2. **צבאי ואיל** – Deer and Hart

- Devarim 12:15, 12:22, 14:5, 15:22
- Melachim I 5:3
- Shir haShirim
 - 2:7, 3:5
 - 2:9, 2:17, 8:14
 - 4:5, 7:4

3. Malbim to Shir haShirim, Melitzah, 2:9

דומה דודי לצבאי או לעפר האילים שניהם מטבעם שאף שמתרחקים חוזרים למקומם והצבאי מטבעו שבעת שרץ מביט לאחוריו כמ"ש חז"ל. The *Dod* resembles a deer or a young hart. Both of them, by nature, even though they distance themselves, they return to their place. And the deer, by nature, when it runs it looks back, as our Sages wrote.

4. Prof. Yehuda Feliks, Daat Mikra: Shir haShirim, pg. 16

לאחר שהעפרים גדלים ועוזבים את אמם, הזכרים דרים בתחילה נבדלים מן הנקבות ורחוקים מהן. כשמגיעה עת הייחום, יוצאים הזכרים ומשוטטים בהרים ובגבעות לחפש את בנות זוגם, וכשהם פוגשים אותן, אינם מתחברים איתן מיד, אלא במשך תקופה מסוימת רודפים בני הזוג זה אחר זה ובורחים זה מזה, מתחבאים זה מזה ומחפשים זה את זה... הצבאי והאיל הם בעלי חיים המצטיינים ביפיים וגם בנאמנותם לבן זוגם.

After the young harts mature and leave their mother, the males reside apart from the females at first, far from them. When the mating season arrives, the males go out and wander in the mountains and hills, seeking their mates. And when they encounter them, they do not join with them immediately, but for a certain period the mates chase each other and flee from each other, hiding from each other and seeking each other... The deer and the hart are creatures which stand out for their beauty and for their loyalty to their mate.

5. Gabrielle Nicole, *Deer Mating Seasons: When Do They Breed?*

<https://a-z-animals.com/blog/deer-mating-season-when-do-they-breed/>

Like most deer species, white-tailed deer engage in a reproductive strategy called *polygyny*, in which a dominant male will have multiple female partners. However, the European Roe deer is a species that prefers monogamy, mating with only one partner.

6. Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra, Commentary to Shir haShirim 1:17

שושנת - יש אומרים שהוא צמח לבן ויש לו ריח טוב, והוא חם מאד עד שריחו יכאיב הראש. ויתכן להיותו כן, יהיה פירושו מן "שש" כי לעולם היא ששה עלים לבנים... ויהיה פירושו "שפתותיו שושנים" בריח לא בעין:

Shoshanat – Some say this is a white plant with a good smell, and it is very 'hot', such that its scent causes a headache. Perhaps, given this, its meaning is from *shesh* (6), for it always has six white petals... And the meaning of "his lips are *shoshanim*" would be about their scent, not their appearance.

7. Prof. Yehuda Feliks, *Daat Mikra: Shir haShirim*, pg. 19

כונת הכתובים היא לשושן הצחור, מין ליליום (לא ורד!), מן היפים והריחנים שבפרחי הבר של הארץ.

The text refer to the *shoshan tzachor*, a kind of lily (not a rose!), among the most beautiful and most aromatic wild flowers in the land.

8. תפוח

- A place name
- Yoel 1:12 and Mishlei 25:11
- Shir haShirim 2:3, 2:5, 7:9, 8:5

9. Rabbeinu Tam in Tosafot to Shabbat 88a

"פריו קודם לעליו" - הקשה ר"ת שהרי אנו רואים שגדל כשאר אילנות! ומפרש ד"תפוח" היינו אתרוג, "וריה אפך כתפוחים" מתרגמין "כריחא דאתרוגא". ואתרוג פריו קודם לעליו שדר באילן משנה לשנה, ואחר שנה נושרין עליו של אשתקד ובאין עלין אחרים. הוי פריו קודם לאותם עלים...

"Its fruit precedes its leaves" – Rabbeinu Tam asked, for we see that it grows like other trees! And he explained *tapuach* as the etrog. "And the scent of your forehead is as *tapuchim*" is translated as "like the scent of the etrog". And the *etrog's* fruit precedes its leaves, for it stays on the tree from year to year, and after a year the last year's leaves fall and other leaves come. Its fruit precedes those leaves.

10. Jewish Encyclopedia, "Apple" <https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/1666-apple>

There is perhaps no Biblical plant-name that has given rise to more discussion than has the identification of the תפוח. Four distinct fruit-bearing trees, the Apple (*Pyrus malus*), the citron (*Citrus medica*), the apricot (*Prunus Armeniaca*), and the quince (*Cydonia vulgaris*), have been suggested as its equivalent. Of these, two may be dismissed at once—the Apple and the citron. The Apple, far from being a native of Palestine, is, on account of the tropical climate, but rarely cultivated there, and with no success. The fruit is small, woody, and of very inferior quality.

11. Jehuda Feliks, *Encyclopedia Judaica*, "Apple"

The tappu'ah of the Bible has been variously identified as peach, citron, and even mandrake. Yet it undoubtedly refers to the apple – *Pirus malus* (*sylvestris*). This is confirmed by the references to its characteristics in rabbinic literature, for instance, the season of its ripening, the trees on which grafting would be permitted, the preparation of applesauce and apple cider, etc. (see Tosef., Kil. 1:3; tj, Ma'as. 1:4, 49a; tj, Ter. 10:2, 47a; Tosef., Ber. 4:2). In Arabic the apple is called tufah. In ancient times the aromatic strains apparently were most widely cultivated, and the odor evoked high praise.

Wild Nature and Stable Maturity

12. Rabbi Mosheh Lichtenstein, Shabbat Chol Ha-Moed Pesach: Shir haShirim, translated by David Strauss

<https://torah.etzion.org.il/en/shabbat-chol-ha-moed-pesach-shir-ha-shirim>

13. The relationship

She is confused and frustrated; why doesn't he reveal himself to her and immediately take her as his bride?

The answer to this question lies in the personality of the ra'aya. Her entire being is a bursting emotional storm. She does not think out her steps, but leaps forward in a torrent of stormy love. There is no calculation of gradual and progressive measures, nor is there development and deepening of the relationship over time, but a wild rush forward along a path that ascends to the heights of holy love. These are the distinguishing features of the ra'aya; they are what drive her to cling to her beloved dod and pursue him at all times, but they also constitute an obstacle and stumbling-block on the road to actualizing her love...

As stated above, the ra'aya bursts forward with no restraints and the dod tries to calm her down and put her to ease in order to allow for their love to deepen in a gradual manner. This finds expression in two ways: First, the dod explicitly declares this grand principle: "I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles and by the hinds of the field, that you stir not up, nor awake my love, till it please" (2:7). In the previous verse the ra'aya had stormily proclaimed, "For I am sick with love," and from this she concluded that she was facing a situation of "his left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me." The dod, therefore, cries out and clarifies that her longings have outpaced (for the time being) reality, and that love should not be stirred up prematurely. Similar circumstances prevail also the second time that the dod charges the daughters of Jerusalem, and immediately afterwards we are informed that sixty men surround Shelomo's litter, i.e., his bed is guarded against the ra'aya so that she should not be able to burst in to his room.

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

14. The instability of the ra'ayah

... the ra'aya, physically and emotionally drained by her restless running after the dod under the burning afternoon sun (1:7) and late at night (3:2) in an intensive search before its time, fails to get up to open the door for the dod when the great and long-awaited moment finally arrives...

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