

The Approach of Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra

1. Ibn Ezra, Introduction to Shir haShirim

ובו סוד סתום וחתום כי החל מימי אברהם אבינו עד ימות המשיח. וכן כתב בשירת האזינו "בהנחל עליון גוים" החל מן דור הפלגה עד שוב ישראל מהגלות אחר מלחמת גוג ומגוג.

ואל תתמה בעבור שהמשיל כנסת ישראל לכלה והמקום דודה, כי כן דרך הנביאים: ישעיה אמר... יחזקאל אמר... הושע אמר... ובספר תהלות... וחלילה חלילה להיות שיר השירים בדברי חשק כי אם על דרך משל.

And in it is a secret, closed and sealed, for it begins from the time of Avraham Avinu [and continues] until the time of Mashiach. And so He wrote in the song of Haazinu, "From the time the Highest One assigned to nations," starting from the generation of the dispersion, until Israel returns from the exile after the war of Gog and Magog.

And don't be surprised that it compares Israel to a bride, and Gd to her beloved, for such is the way of the prophets. Yeshayahu... Yechezkel... Hosheia... Tehillim... Gd-forbid and Gd-forbid, for Shir haShirim to be a romance! But it is strictly allegory.

2. Ibn Ezra, Introduction to Shir haShirim

ואחר שהעיד הפסוק שנראה המקום לשלמה פעמים (מלכים א' י"א:ט) מה תימה יש בו שיתנבא על דבר עתיד כי ברוח הקדש דיבר זה הספר. וכן תמצא באסף המשורר והימן שחברו שירות ברוח הקדש שנקראו נביאים וחוזים.

Since the text testifies that Gd appeared to Solomon twice, why would it be shocking that he would prophesy about the future? For this book speaks with Divine inspiration. And so you find of Asaph the singer and Heiman that they composed poems with Divine inspiration, and they were called prophets and seers.

3. Ibn Ezra to Shir haShirim 1:2

החל מאברהם שהוא העיקר ו"נשיקות הפה" הם התורה והמצוות כאשר כתוב "עקב אשר שמע אברהם בקולי וישמור משמרת מצותי חקותי ותורתי. (בראשית כו:ה)"

It begins with Avraham, who is the essence. And the "kisses of the mouth" are the Torah and mitzvot, as it is written, "Because Avraham listened to My voice, and he guarded My preserve - My mitzvot, My statutes, my Torot."

4. Ibn Ezra, Introduction to Shir haShirim

ודע כי "בנות ירושלים" השתבשו בו אנשים רבים אחר שכנסת ישראל היא המדברת מה ענין בנות ירושלים? יש אומרים כי שתיים הנה, אחת בשמים ואחרת בארץ תחתיה כנגדה, וענין "בנות ירושלים" המלאכים של מעלה. ואחרים אמרו שהם אומות העולם כטעם "ונתתי אתהן לך לבנות. (יחזקאל טז:סא)" והנכון בעיני שהמשל הוא על אשה המדברת עם נפשה ותשיב אמריה לה (שופטים ה:כט) כאילו תאמר עם מחשבותיה, והן בנות ירושלים.

And know that many have been confused about the "daughters of Jerusalem". Israel is speaking, so what are "daughters of Jerusalem"? Some say there are two – one in Heaven and one on Earth below opposite her, and "daughters of Jerusalem" are the *malachim* above. And others say these are the nations of the world, like "I will make them daughters." It appears correct in my eyes that the parable is about a woman speaking to herself, and responding with her own statements, as though conversing with her own thoughts, and these are the daughters of Jerusalem.

Rambam makes use of it

5. Rambam, Letter to the Jews of Yemen

ושלמה המלך עליו השלום דמה אותנו לאשה יפה בתכלית היופי שאין בה דופי, שנאמר (שיר השירים ד' ז'): "כלך יפה רעיתי ומום אין בך". ודמה שאר האמונות והסברות שרוצים להמשיכה אליהם ולהחזירה לאמונתם כאנשי הבליעל השטופים בזמה והמפתים הנשים שהן בנות חיל להשיג מהן תאותם המכוערת. כן אירע לנו עם אלו שהם משיאים אותנו ומפתים להחזירנו לדתותיהם, ואולי נאחז ונסתבך בסבכי פחזותם ובענפי שקריהם.

ואחר כך חזר בחכמתו בלשון תשובת האומה, כאלו היא אומרת לאותם שהם רוצים לפתותה, ולהראות להם שסברתה מעולה מסברתם: לאיזה דבר מתחזקים ביי? התוכלו להראות לי כמו "מחולת המחנים" (שיר השירים ז' א')? כלומר שהאומה תטעון כנגדם ואומרת להם: הראוני כמו מעמד הר סיני שהיה בו מחנה אלקים ומחנה ישראל זה לעומת זה, אז אשוב לעצתכם!...

And King Solomon a"ח compared us to the most beautiful woman, with no flaw, as in Shir haShirim 4:7, "All of you is beautiful, My beloved, and there is no blemish in you." And he compared other beliefs and ideas toward which people wish to draw us, to bring us to their faiths, as wicked people, immersed in immorality, seducing the women who are women of substance, to try to fulfill their ugly desire with them. So happened to us with these who persuade us and seduce to bring us to their religions, and perhaps we might be held and ensnared in the snares of their foolishness and the branches of their lies.

And after that [King Solomon] repeated in his wisdom, in the language of the nation's response, as though she were saying to those who wished to seduce her, to show them that her argument is greater than their argument: For what do you hold on to me? Can you show me something like "the dance of the encampments (Shir haShirim 7:1)"? Meaning, that the nation will argue against them, saying: Show me something like the gathering at Mount Sinai, in which there were the camp of Gd and the camp of Israel opposite each other. Then I will go to your counsel!...

A Modern Application: Kol Dodi Dofek

6. Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, UVikashtem MiSham, Footnote 1

לאמיתו של דבר, שני הפירושים לעניין אחד נתכוונו: ליחס שבין הקב"ה והעולם. ברם, זיקת זו מתגלמת בינו לבין היחיד וגם בינו ולבין הציבור. כשם שהאלוק מתגעגע להתדבק ביחיד, כך הוא מתאוה להתמיד שכינתו בציבור מיוחד, בציבור נבחר ובאומה מיוחדת. המתחנות היא דו-פרצופית, אוניברסלית על-היסטורית ולאומית היסטורית.

In truth, the two explanations refer to the same thing: the relationship between Gd and the world. But this bond takes shape between Gd and the individual as well as between Gd and the community. Just as Gd yearns to draw close to the individual, so Gd desires to continually place His Shechinah with the special community, with the chosen community, the special nation. The tension is of two faces, universal and above history as well as national-historical.

7. Rabbi Shalom Carmy, *Kol Dodi Dofek: A Primer*, YU Yom ha'Atzmaut To Go 5778

http://download.yutorah.org/2018/1053/Yom_Haatzmaut_To-Go_-_5778_Rabbi_Carmy.pdf

During his many years as Honorary President of the American Mizrahi, R. Soloveitchik delivered many addresses articulating his conception of Religious Zionism. Several of his Yiddish speeches were transcribed and published in Yiddish, along with Hebrew and English translations of varying quality. Kol Dodi Dofek (KDD), delivered on Yom haAtzmaut 1956, is his most ambitious statement and the only one that he later prepared for print (in Hebrew). Bearing in mind how little the Rav published in those years, the pains he took over KDD testify to the importance of the essay and its message. It was quickly adopted as part of the Israeli school curriculum in Jewish thought. In truth, KDD is much more than a Zionist speech. It formulates a fundamental outlook on the nature of history and Jewish peoplehood. The ideas are of great importance and the structure is also significant.

8. Two good resources

Text of Kol Dodi Dofek, with David Z. Gordon translation https://www.sefaria.org/Kol_Dodi_Dofek

Tradition 50th Anniversary Retrospective https://traditiononline.org/archives/?_sft_category=2006-issue-39-3

9. Knock #1: The United Nations Vote, Gordon translation

First, the knock of the Beloved was heard in the political arena. From the point of view of international relations, no one will deny that the rebirth of the State of Israel, in a political sense, was an almost supernatural occurrence. Both Russia and the Western nations supported the establishment of the State of Israel. This was perhaps the one resolution on which East and West concurred [*during the Cold War era*]. I am inclined to believe that the United Nations was especially created for this end — for the sake of fulfilling the mission that Divine Providence had placed upon it. It appears to me that one cannot point to any other concrete accomplishment on the part of the United Nations. Our Rabbis of blessed memory already expressed this view: At times rain falls on account of one individual and for one blade of grass ([Breishit Rabbah 66:2](#)). I do not know who the representatives of the press, with their human eyes, saw to be the chairman in that fateful session of the General Assembly in which the creation of the State of Israel was decided, but he who looked carefully with his spiritual eye saw the true Chairman who conducted the proceedings — the Beloved. He knocked with his gavel on the lectern.

10. Knock #2: The War of Independence, Gordon translation

Second, the knock of the Beloved was heard on the battlefield. The tiny defense forces of [*the State of*] Israel defeated the mighty Arab armies. The miracle of “the many delivered into the hands of the few” materialized before our eyes, and an even greater miracle happened! G-d hardened the heart of Ishmael and commanded him to go into battle against the State of Israel. Had the Arabs not declared war on Israel and instead supported the Partition Plan, the State of Israel would have remained without Jerusalem, without a major portion of the Galilee, and without some areas of the Negev. If thousands of years ago Pharaoh had allowed the children of Israel to leave immediately, as Moses had originally requested, Moses would have been bound by his word to return in three days. Pharaoh, however, hardened his heart and did not listen to Moses...

11. Knock #3: The Overthrow of Christian Supersessionism, Gordon translation

Third, the Beloved also began to knock on the door of the tent of theology, and possibly this is the strongest beckoning. I have, on several occasions, emphasized in my remarks concerning the Land of Israel that the theological arguments of Christian theologians to the effect that the Holy One has taken away from the Community of Israel its rights to the Land of Israel, and that all of the biblical promises relating to Zion and Jerusalem now refer in an allegorical sense to Christianity and the Christian Church, were all publicly shown to be false, baseless contentions by the establishment of the State of Israel. One must have a broad familiarity with theological literature from the time of Justin Martyr down to the theologians of our own day to comprehend the full extent of this marvel by which the central axiom of Christian theology was shattered. We should pay careful attention to the learned explanation of our Secretary of State, Mr. Dulles (who served as the deacon of an Episcopalian Church), to a Committee of the United States Senate that the Arabs hate the Jews because they killed the founder of their religion. This “explanation” possesses hidden and deep symbolic significance. I am not a psychiatrist and surely not a psychoanalyst, but I know how to study Talmud, and I remember well what our Rabbis of blessed memory said about Balaam: “from his blessings ... you may learn what was in his heart” (TB [Sanhedrin 105b](#)). Sometimes, when a person speaks too much, something of the truth slips out. When one of the Senators asked the Secretary of State, “Why do the Arabs hate the Jews?” he really wanted to answer, “Personally, I too, as a Christian, have no great love for them, because they killed our messiah and consequently forfeited their portion of Abraham’s heritage.”...

I find satisfaction in reading about the State of Israel in the Catholic and Protestant newspapers. Despite themselves they must mention the name of Israel when they report the news of Zion and Jerusalem, which we possess. I always have a special sense of satisfaction when I read in the paper that Israel’s reaction is not as yet known because today is Saturday and government offices are closed or when I read, on the eve of Passover, an item from the United Press that “Jews will sit down tonight to the seder table in the hope that the miracles of Egypt will return and recur today.” Listen! My Beloved Knocks!

12. Knock #4: Stemming the Tide of Assimilation, Gordon translation

Fourth, the Beloved knocks in the heart of the youth which is assimilated and perplexed. The period of *hester panim* in the 1940’s brought confusion among the Jewish masses and especially Jewish youth. Assimilation increased, and the urge to flee from Judaism and the Jewish people reached its apex. Fear, despair, and ignorance caused many to forsake the Jewish community and “climb aboard the ship,” to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord (Jonah 1:3), just as Jonah sought to flee G-d’s presence. A seemingly unstoppable tidal wave stood over us and threatened to destroy us. Suddenly, the Beloved began to beckon to the hearts of the perplexed, and His beckoning, the establishment of the State of Israel, at least slowed the process of flight. Many who were once alienated are now bound to the Jewish State with ties of pride in its mighty accomplishments. Many American Jews who were partially assimilated find themselves beset by hidden fear and concern for any crisis that the State of Israel is at the time passing through, and they pray for its well-being and welfare even though they are far from being totally committed to it. Even Jews who are hostile to the State of Israel must defend themselves from the strange charge of dual-loyalty and proclaim daily and declare that they have no stake in the Holy Land. It is good for a Jew when he cannot ignore his Jewishness and is obliged to perpetually answer the questions “Who are you?” and “What is your occupation?” ([Jonah 1:8](#)), even when extraordinary fear grips him and he does not have the strength or fortitude to answer with true pride, “I am a Jew, and I fear the Lord, the G-d of heaven” ([Jonah 1:9](#)). The unrelenting question of, “Who are you?” ties him to the Jewish people.

13. Knock #5: Jewish Blood Is Not Hefker, Gordon translation

The fifth knock of the Beloved is perhaps the most important. For the first time in the annals of our exile, Divine Providence has amazed our enemies with the astounding discovery that Jewish blood is not cheap [actually: "abandoned" - MT]! If the antisemites describe this phenomenon as being "an eye for an eye," we will agree with them. If we want to courageously defend our continued national and historical existence, we must, from time to time, interpret the verse of an "eye for an eye" literally. So many "eyes" were lost in the course of our bitter exile because we did *not* repay hurt for hurt. The time has come for us to fulfill the simple meaning of "an eye for an eye." ([Exodus 21:24](#)) Of course, I am sure everyone recognizes that I am an adherent of the Oral Law, and from my perspective there is no doubt that the verse refers to monetary restitution, as defined by halakhah. However, with respect to the Mufti and Nasser I would demand that we interpret the verse in accordance with its literal meaning — the taking of an actual eye! Pay no attention to the saccharine suggestions of known assimilationists and of some Jewish socialists who stand pat in their rebelliousness and think they are still living in Bialystok, Brest-Litovsk, and Minsk of the year 1905, and openly declare that revenge is forbidden to the Jewish people in any place, at any time, and under all circumstances. "Vanity of vanities!" ([Ecclesiastes 1:2](#)) Revenge is forbidden when it is pointless, but if one is aroused thereby to self-defense, it is the most elementary right of man to take his revenge.

14. Knock #6: A Place of Refuge, Gordon translation

The sixth beckoning, of which we should also not lose sight, was heard at the time of the opening of the gates of the Land of Israel. A Jew escaping from an enemy's land now knows that he can find refuge in the land of his forefathers. This is a new phenomenon in the annals of our history. Up to now, when a Jewish population was uprooted, it wandered in the wilderness of the nations without finding shelter and habitation. The shutting of the gates in the face of the exiled caused total destruction for much of the Jewish people. Now the situation has changed. When any nation expels its Jewish minority, the exiled now direct their steps to Zion, and she, as a compassionate mother, absorbs them. We are all witnesses to the settlement of Oriental Jewry in Israel over the last several years. Who knows what would have been in store for these brothers of ours in the lands of their origin if not for the State of Israel, which brought them to her in planes and ships? Had Israel been born before the Hitlerian Holocaust, hundreds of thousands of Jews could have been saved from the gas chambers and the crematoria. The miracle of the State tarried somewhat, and in the wake of its delay, thousands and tens of thousands of Jews were taken to the slaughter. Now that the hour of *hester panim* has passed, however, the possibility exists for Jews who are pried from their homes to take root in the Holy Land. This should not be taken lightly. Listen! My Beloved Knocks!

The Personal Layer

15. Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, UVikashtem MiSham, Footnote 1

התואר "קודש קדשים" אשר בו משתמשת המשנה במס' ידים ג:ה ביחס לשיר השירים... מכונן כלפי הסמליות האלוקית המתוארת בה. ברם תואר זה מבטא עיקרון הלכתי, מגילה זו לא ניתנה להתפרש כפשוטה. בכל התורה כולה מותר לנו לפרש את הפסוקים בין כמדורשם ובין כפשוטם. פשוטו של מקרא מהווה חפצא של תורה. בשיר השירים נתמעט הפשט המילולי מחלות שם "תורה" ואת מקומו ירש מדרש הכתובים. המיתודה הסימלית יחידה היא. כל המבאר מגילה זו על פי פשוטם של הכתובים ביחס לאהבה חושנית מחלל קדושתה וכופר בתורה שבעל פה.

עיקרון כזה אנו מוצאים בהקדמת חרמב"ם לפירוש המשניות ביחס לפירושים אחרים. ישנו סוג מיוחד של פירושים המקובלים ממש רבנו שאין אדם יכול לחלוק עליהם, רק הדרשה קיימת, הפשט המילולי הופקע לגמרי. פירוש הכתובים כמו שנאמרו "וקצותה את כפה" "עין תחת עין" "פרי עץ הדר" במשמעותם המילולית היא קציצת נטיעות הקבלה...

The description "holy of holies" which the Mishnah in Yadayim uses for Shir haShirim... refers to the Divine symbolism described in it. But this description expresses a Halachic principle; this megillah was not meant to be explained according to its simple text. In the entire Torah, we may explain verses according to their midrash or according to their peshat. The peshat of the text is part of Torah. In Shir haShirim the peshat of the words is excluded from "Torah", and its place is taken by the midrash on the text. The symbolic method [of interpretation] is the only one. Anyone who explains this megillah according to the peshat of the text, regarding sensual love, desecrates its holiness and denies the Spoken Torah.

We find this principle in Rambam's introduction to his commentary on the Mishnah, regarding other explanations [of biblical text]. There is a unique kind of commentary received from Moshe Rabbeinu, against which one may not argue.

Only the midrash stands, and the peshat of the words is entirely removed. Explaining texts like "And you shall cut off her hand" "eye for an eye" "pri eitz hadar" in their literal sense is an act of cutting the saplings of Tradition...

16. Examples of the Love Relationship

Bereishit 18:19; Devarim 7:7-8; Devarim 26:17-18; Hosheia 1-2

17. Rabbeinu Bahya ibn Paquda, Chovot halevavot, Shaar Ahavat Hashem 1

מה ענין האהבה באלקים? הוא כלות הנפש ונטוטה בעצמה אל הבורא, כדי שתדבק באורו העליון. והוא שהנפש עצם פשוט רוחני, נוטה אל הדומה לה מהאישים הרוחניים ומתרחקת בטבעה מאשר הוא כנגדה מן הגופות העבות. וכאשר קשרה הבורא יתברך בגוף הזה העב והעכור, רב הקדרות, אשר רצה לנסותה בו בהנהגתה אותו, העיר אותה לחוס עליו ולמשך התועלות אליו בעבור השתוף והחברה, אשר נטבעה ביניהם מתחלת הגידול.

18. Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Teshuvah 10:3

וכיצד היא האהבה הראויה? הוא שיאהב את ד' אהבה גדולה יתירה עזה מאוד עד שתהא נפשו קשורה באהבת ד' ונמצא שוגה בה תמיד, כאלו חולה חולי האהבה שאין דעתו פנויה מאהבת אותה אשה והוא שוגה בה תמיד בין בשבתו בין בקומו בין בשעה שהוא אוכל ושותה. יתר מזה תהיה אהבת ד' בלב אוהביו שוגים בה תמיד כמו שצונו בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך. והוא ששלמה אמר דרך משל "כי חולת אהבה אני," וכל שיר השירים משל הוא לענין זה.