



1. William Shakespeare, Sonnet 95

How sweet and lovely dost thou make the shame
Which, like a canker in the fragrant rose,
Doth spot the beauty of thy budding name!
O in what sweets dost thou thy sins enclose!...

2. Proverbs 31:30

(ל) שֶׁקֶר הַחַן וְהַגִּבּוֹל הַיָּפִי אֵשֶׁה יִרְאֶתֶהּ הִיא תִתְהַלֵּל:

(30) Grace is deceptive, Beauty is illusory; It is for her fear of the LORD That a woman is to be praised.

3. Rashi on Proverbs 31:30

(א) שֶׁקֶר הַחַן. אִשְׁת׃ הַחַן וְיֹפִי אֵין מֵהַלְלִין אוֹתָהּ אֵלָּא הַכֹּל הֵבֵל וְשֶׁקֶר אֲבָל אִשָּׁה יִרְאֶת ה' הִיא לְבַד תִּתְהַלֵּל:

The woman of grace and beauty - we do not praise her. Rather, all is vain and false. However, a woman who fears G-d - she alone shall be praised.

4. II Samuel 14:25

(כה) וְכָאֲבִשָׁלוֹם לֹא־הָיָה אִישׁ־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּכָל־יִשְׂרָאֵל לְהֵלֵל מִמֶּנּוּ רִגְלוֹ וְעַד קִדְקֵדוֹ לֹא־הָיָה בּוֹ מוֹם:

(25) No one in all Israel was so admired for his beauty as Absalom; from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head he was without blemish.

5. Radak on II Samuel 14:25

סמוך לסיפור המרד שמרד באביו ספר מה גרם לו זה כי היה יפה ובכל ישראל לא היה כמוהו ונתגאה ביופיו ובשעריו ותשב כי אין ראוי למלוכה מבני דוד כמוהו ומרד

Prior to the account of his rebellion against his father, [Scripture] relates what brought it about – because he was beautiful, there being nobody like him in all of Israel, and he was proud of his beauty and his hair, and he thought that none of the sons of David were as fit for the throne as he was, and so he rebelled."

6. Rabbi Amnon Bazak

[I]t may be argued that the section explains not only Avshalom's thinking, but also his great success in deceiving the people and in beginning the rebellion, for his beauty certainly had a considerable influence on the people.

- Rabbi Bazak himself suggests that Dovid has a soft spot for beauty that often caused him to make mistakes, as he does by Bat Sheva and he does with Avshalom and Adoniyahu.

7. Genesis 12:11

(יא) וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר הִקְרִיב לְבֹאֵ מִצְרַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־שָׂרַי אִשְׁתּוֹ הִנֵּה־נָא יְדַעְתִּי כִּי אֵשֶׁה יִפְת־מְרֹאֶה אָתָּה:

(11) As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, "I know what a beautiful woman you are.

8. Genesis 24:16

(טז) וְהַנַּעֲרָ טַבַּת מְרֹאֶה מְאֹד בְּתוּלָהּ וְאִישׁ לֹא יָדָעָהּ וַתֵּרֶד הָעַיִנָּה וַתִּמְלֵא כְדָהּ וַתַּעַל:

The maiden was very beautiful, a virgin whom no man had known. She went down to the spring, filled her jar, and came up.

9. Genesis 29:17

(יז) וַעֲיִנֶי לֵאָה רַכּוֹת וְרַחֵל הֵיטָהּ יִפְת־תָּאֵר וַיִּפְת־מְרֹאֶה:

(17) Leah had weak eyes; Rachel was shapely and beautiful.

10. I Samuel 25:3

(ג) וְשֵׁם הָאִישׁ נָבָל וְשֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ אַבְיָגַי וְהָאִשָּׁה טוֹבַת־שֵׂכֶל וַיִּפְת־תָּאֵר וְהָאִישׁ קָשָׁה וְרַע מַעַלְלִים וְהוּא כְּלָבִי:

(3) The man's name was Nabal, and his wife's name was Abigail. The woman was intelligent and beautiful, but the man, a Calebite, was a hard man and an evildoer.

11. I Kings 1:3-4

(ג) וַיִּבְקְשׁוּ נַעֲרָה יָפָה בְּכָל גְּבוּל יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּמְצְאוּ אֶת־אֲבִישַׁג הַשּׁוֹנֵמִית וַיָּבִיאוּ אֹתָהּ לְמֶלֶךְ: (ד) וְהַנַּעֲרָה יָפָה עַד־מְאֹד וַתְּהִי לְמֶלֶךְ סִכְנָת וַתִּשְׁרָתָהּ וַהֲמֶלֶךְ לֹא יָדָעָהּ:

(3) So they looked for a beautiful girl throughout the territory of Israel. They found Abishag the Shunammite and brought her to the king. (4) The girl was exceedingly beautiful. She became the king's attendant and waited upon him; but the king was not intimate with her.

12. Sanhedrin 39b:21

(מלכים א א, ד) והנערה יפה עד מאד א"ר חנינא בר פפא עדיין לא הגיעה לחצי יופי של שרה דכתיב עד מאד ולא מאד בכלל:
"And the damsel was very fair [yafa ad me'od]" (I Kings 1:4). **Rabbi Hanina bar Pappa says: She still did not reach half the beauty of Sarah, as it is written: "Ad me'od,"** which can be translated as "up to very fair," but not including the praise of "very fair." By contrast, it is written concerning Sarah: "She was very fair" (Genesis 12:14).

13. Genesis 39:6

(ו) וַיַּעַזֵב כָּל-אֲשֶׁר-לוֹ בְּיַד יוֹסֵף וְלֹא-יָדָע אֶת־מְאוֹמָהּ כִּי אִם-הִלָּחֵם אֲשֶׁר-הוּא אוֹכֵל וַיְהִי יוֹסֵף יָפֵה-תָאֵר וַיְהִי מְרֻאָה:
(6) He left all that he had in Joseph's hands and, with him there, he paid attention to nothing save the food that he ate. Now Joseph was well built and handsome.

14. Yoma 35b:11-12

רשע אומרים לו מפני מה לא עסקת בתורה אם אמר נאה הייתי וטרוד ביצרי הייתי אומרים לו כלום נאה היית מיוסף אמרו עליו על יוסף הצדיק...
And if a wicked man comes to judgment, the members of the court **say to him: Why did you not engage in Torah? If he said: I was handsome and preoccupied with my evil inclination,** as I had many temptations, **they say to him: Were you any more handsome than Joseph,** who did not neglect Torah despite his beauty?...

15. Vilna Gaon on Mishlei (Explaining why Matriarchs are described as beautiful)

וצריך לומר דהפירוש בפסוק כך הוא: שקר החן והבל היופי היינו כשהן בלתי יראת ה', והם כנזם זהב באף חזיר אבל אשה יראת ה' היא תתהלל ר"ל דגם החן והיופי תתהלל. ועל דרך זה יש לפרש ג"כ הפסוק (ירמיהו ט, כב - כג) אל יתהלל חכם בחכמתו וגבור בגבורתו וכי' כי בזאת יתהלל המתהלל השכל וידוע אותי דבפסוק זה רבו הדקדוקים אבל לפי הנז"ל ל"ל דהפירוש כך הוא שאין להתהלל בחכמה ובגבורה ובעשירות לבד אלא בזאת יתהלל ר"ל בכל אלה תתהלל כשישכיל וידוע אותי בהן דהיינו שידע איך להתנהג בהעשירות ובהגבורה ובחכמה שהכל יהיה כוונתו לשם שמים".

It must be that the verse means as follows: grace is deceptive, beauty is illusory, is when they lack fear of G-d. Then they are like a ring in the note of a pig. However, a woman who fears G-d is praiseworthy, meaning then her grace and beauty shall be praiseworthy. With this we can explain the verse in Jeremiah. "The wise man should not exult in his wisdom, nor the strong person in his strength... rather, in this you should exult - understand and know Me!" Many interpretations have been offered, but based on the above it seems that it should be understood as follows: One should not exult in wisdom, strength, or wealth alone, but rather he should exult in this. Meaning, when he understands and knows Me, he is praiseworthy for all of these, for he will know how to behave with his wealthy, strength, and wisdom, for in everything his intent is for Heaven.

16. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks adapting the Lubavitcher Rebbe

When a man finds himself in an environment detrimental to his standards, there are three ways in which he can preserve his integrity:

- (i) He can strengthen himself inwardly not to be influenced by his surroundings. But this is an incomplete victory, for if he were to relax his self-control he would capitulate, thus implying a lowering of status.
- (ii) He can separate himself from those around him. But again his victory is only because he has removed himself from temptation: He has not met it head-on, and is as prone as ever to be lowered.
- (iii) Lastly, he can set out to influence his environment and raise it to his own level. This is a complete triumph over one's surroundings—the dangers have not only been avoided, they have been removed entirely...

This is why the Midrash explains that Sarah was, at 100, like she was at 20, only after it has cited the verse from Psalms and added, "just as they are perfect so their years are perfect." Only by perfection of a life comes that state of changelessness which characterized Sarah. And the repetition of the word "years" in the Sidra tells us that each total (100, 20 and 7) is compared to the others: At 100 Sarah was as far from the possibility of sin as she was at 20 or at 7. In other words, she had attained the highest of the three degrees of integrity. But how can we reconcile this with the fact that she did undergo changes, and that there was a time when she lost her beauty? The word "shnotam" which means "their years" also means "their changes." So the Midrash may subtly be telling us also that even "their changes were perfect." Even though (and indeed, because) externally the righteous alter and undergo vicissitudes, these ultimately serve only to reveal their underlying constancy, as the light of their souls shines undimmed.