

# Painting The Song

## A Journey through the Song Of Songs

### Painting Descriptions :

Our forebears thought that the mystery of the Song of Songs was in the subject matter – that is, in how physical love could serve as a mirror to understand the human relation to God. They resisted any merely erotic reading of the book.<sup>1</sup> However, the continued reverence and spiritual importance with which this poem/Song has been regarded up to today is precisely due to the depth of mystical meaning (understanding God) as well as erotic (human/earthy) symbolism contained within it.

This was indeed one of the inspirational springboards for our collaboration.

From the Zohar, Terumah 143a & b: "...Rabbi Jose said 'This song King Solomon poured forth when the Temple was erected and all the worlds, above and below, had reached their perfect consummation... The day on which this hymn was revealed on earth was perfect in all things, and therefore the song is holy of holies... The Holy One, blessed be He, then experienced such joy as He had not known since the creation of the world... This song comprises the whole Torah: it is a song in which those that are above and those that are below participate; a song formed in the likeness of the world above, which is the supernal Shabbat, a song through which the supernal Holy Name is crowned. Therefore it is holy of holies. Why so? Because all its words are instinct with love and joy. This is because the "cup of blessing" was given with the Right Hand (Chesed); and when this is so... all the words of the Song of Songs are perfect with love and with joy..."<sup>2</sup>

According to Kabbalah, the Godly attributes (Sefirot) referred to in these notes are as follows: KETER - Will, CHOCHMAH - Wisdom, BINAH - Understanding, (DAAT - Knowledge), CHESED - Love, GEVURAH - Judgment, TIFERET - Beauty, NETZACH - Endurance, HOD - Splendour, YESOD - Foundation, MALCHUT - Mouth, Kingship.

1. 1:1-2 I would have you mouth to mouth.

The Hebrew letter Peh stands for Peach mouth, the organ of speech. Metaphorically, according to Kabbalah, the letter Peh is made up of the letters; Kof (symbolising a container or the Sfir Keter) and the letter Yud (symbolising the Divine). "The mouth makes man able to fulfil the ultimate purpose of creation; to sing the praises of the Almighty..." The commentator Onkelos interprets the phrase 'living being' (man) as a "speaking spirit".<sup>3</sup> The Song of Songs, sung by Solomon (a metaphor for G-d or The Throne of Glory) is a reference (Kabbalistically) to Malchut; the feminine, receptive aspect of G-d's emanation. Malchut is also referred to as the 'mouth' of the Sefirot. "Kiss me..." is a

reference to Tiferet; the masculine pole of creative energy in the realm of Divine emanation. The Song is therefore sung (directed) by Tiferet (beauty, peace) through Malchut (kingdom, presence, speech).<sup>4</sup> Mouth to mouth!

Over a backdrop of a raised Mt Sinai, is a large, blue, Hebrew letter Peh with its Yud downturned as if about to kiss, coming down from above, about to meet an open mouth in profile that is about to receive its 'song' (text at the bottom of the painting): Mt Sinai is 'separating' the divine from the receiver (secular). The commandments are being 'spoken' by God, from the mountain. The receiver is 'thirsty for the divine words and is pleading to be cooled by the G-dly fragrance – aloe and myrrh. 'The sound was visible' says the Midrash in reference to the Sinai experience. The 'visible' sound of the 10 utterances is represented metaphorically by the 10 hand signs of the alphabet in sign language. These are coming down as fiery sparks. Together with the droplets of aloe and the flowers of myrrh (cooling agents) they descend towards the text in the shape of an open mouth, a receptacle and an organ of received speech and consummating kiss at the same time. 'Mouth to mouth' is in fact the 3500 year tradition of passing on this archetypal event from generation to generation.

2. 1:3-4 Let us run

1:4 "Take me by the hand, let us run together! My lover my king... We will laugh, you and I, and I count each kiss better than wine..."<sup>5</sup> "CARRY ME AWAY, from the material substance separating me from seeing God – through the bestowal of prophetic flow. For then, with the resting of the spirit upon me, I will be able to abandon my physical body, i.e. Solomon's chambers. You will have drawn me out beyond the body, in a wholly spiritual connection and then: WITH YOU; LET US FLEE. My handmaidens, i.e. the intellectual powers of the mind and I will follow G-d..."<sup>6</sup> A cry to the G-dly emanations and a wish to follow (be true to them) G-d.

Over a landscape spanning (symbolically) the whole of Israel from the Mediterranean sea (Rosh Hanikra - top right) to the Negev (bottom of painting) are depicted the two guiding beacons that directed the Jewish people through their exile from Egypt and their wonderings in the desert; a pillar of smoke (black turning into red, centre of painting) during the day and a pillar of fire (top left) during the night.

G-dly emanations represented by the Sefirot, in hand with the image of a 'bride' representing Israel are inside the 'cloud of



glory' that lived/existed within their camp. Symbolically this represents G-d and the people of Israel as being always together and inseparable.

### 3. 1:5-17 Holding onto heaven

Over a field of flowers (Garden of Eden/paradise) a pattern of linear henna and myrrh blossoms creates a lattice through which (God) is perceived. Red, orange and yellow flowers form two large, fertile breasts (reference to 1:13 My love is a bundle of myrrh, lying all night between my breasts, and 1:14 My beloved is like a cluster of camphire, in the vineyards of Ein Gedi).<sup>7</sup> Through the dark (blue/purple) flowers is an outline of two eyes like in black mascara, referring to the self referencing of Israel as it addresses other nations about its transgressions; 1:5 "Though I am black with sin, I am comely with virtue..."<sup>8</sup> Through the bed of flowers, three 'windows' are painted/inserted. 1. Parting of the Red Sea as Jews flee the Egyptian army as alluded to in 1:9 of the Song, 2. The Golden Calf incident as referred to in 1:6 of the Song and 3. Jerusalem of gold, the mystical and virtual capital of Israel to which ultimately all nations will pay homage to with recognition. This painting is a poetic response to the lush, eroticism of the words, their rich imagery and symbolic looking back into history and forward to its future by the nation of Israel.

### 4. 2:1-7 Dreamed/Tasted

Rabbi Chizkiyah<sup>9</sup> explains that "the spiritual forces that protect and watch over us (Israel) are called the 13 Attributes of Mercy. Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai amplifies this concept further "She (Israel) receives 13 qualities of Mercy from above (from G-d), represented by the 13 petals and the 5 loving-kindnesses (chasadim) represented by the 5 sepals (leaves) which guard her from the dark forces represented by the thorns".<sup>10</sup>

The 'lily' becomes arose in this painting in order to achieve a more erotic portent is painted with 13 petals and 5 leaves as metaphors for the above. It is surrounded by thorns that threaten the fragility of the flower, yet (the rose) it is resilient enough (through Torah knowledge) to withstand it.

Song of Songs 2:5: 'comfort me with apricots: I'm gripped with love'<sup>11</sup> are metaphors for the thirst of Torah, both written and oral: Chalachah = legal code and Aggadah = non legal doctrine – both sustain a Jew. 2:6 'his left hand under my head, his right arm embraces me'<sup>12</sup> are metaphors for Chesed (love) and Gevurah (judgment) with which G-d gave the Torah. The flower could also be a metaphor for Torah itself as it is being 'threatened' by the thorns (evil forces) from outside.

The lily/rose is held/entwined between two letters shin. The shin from above symbolises the G-dly attribute of Keter with its three pronged arms of Binah (understanding), Daat (knowledge) and Chochmah (wisdom). The shin from below symbolises the attribute of Malchut (kingship, presence, creation). The flower is held between the loftiest shin and the worldliest shin. Both are filled with an overabundance of ripe apricots – symbols of sweetness and nourishment – Torah.

Just as the covenant referred to above fructified the lily (Torah), the Hebrew alphabet (God's language/building block of creation) that descends through the painting is fructifying the world.

Each letter is encased inside a droplet of apricot juice - creation through sweetness and love.

### 5. 2:8-13 The other side of sound

A field of spring flowers, cherry blossoms, ripe figs and grapes surround the two 'windows', each in the shape of a heart. One depicting a fragment of the Western Wall with prayers written on bits of paper, inserted into the cracks, the other depicts an aerial view, over the desert where the 'Cloud of Glory' led the Jewish people to safety .

The inserted prayers into the cracks of the wall represent our supplications to G-d, our attempt to communicate with 'the other side of sound'. The nightingale, in mid song sprouting poetry is another, poetic metaphor for such lofty communication .

The fig is a metaphor for intellectual abilities and enlightenment (Proverbs, 16:24)... ,grapes metaphors for prophecy and the divine spirit.<sup>13</sup> The total painting is covered by a linear lattice of hearts, referencing the divider from which 'the lover watches' <sup>14</sup> – a love of love.

### 6. 2:14-17 I am my beloved's...

"O my dove in the clefts of the rock..." <sup>2:14</sup> Rashi explains that this verse refers to the time shortly after leaving Egypt, when Pharaoh was pursuing the Jews and found them encamped at the sea. The Jews were trapped – with the sea before and the Egyptian army behind them. What did they resemble? A dove which was fleeing from a hawk, it flew into the cleft of a rock, and found a serpent lurking there. It could not enter because of the snake nor turn back because of the hawk.<sup>15</sup> This is depicted in the top right insert of the painting.

The painting depicts a nude (vulnerable female/Israel) reclining in a 'bed of lilies' illuminated by the moon as if she is (a visage) in a dream being lustfully observed by the 'the little foxes' <sup>2:15</sup> – a sexual symbol of lust. "Dodi Li V'ani Lu" –My Beloved is Mine and I am his" the linear, circular pattern emanating from this Hebrew inscription that covers the painting is the unifying pattern of these two, seemingly unrelated scenes of the painting – a metaphor for the central theme of the Song and Judaism.

### 7. 3:1-6 See him rise

In these verses can be felt a cry of longing. In the depth of night - the female (Israel/Jewish people) is anchored to her bed, unable to move/flourish due to a lack of sustenance (love) from G-d. According to Rabbi Ezra Ben Solomon of Gerona this symbolises the longing but the inability of the Jewish people to enter the land of Israel. According to Rashi; night is a metaphor for the 'darkness', lack of communication from G-d following the sin of the Spies (Numbers: 13). The Shekchina departed and prophecy ceased for 38 years while the Jewish people 'wondered' in the desert. And yet she doesn't give up but pursues a continuous search throughout the long years of wonderings (through the city - Jerusalem) for her beloved (G-d). Moses and Aaron continue in their duties while awaiting the word of G-d.

The painting depicts the bottom part of a bed as if the viewer is the protagonist of the poem. Beyond the bed, like in a dream, one is led to the narrow streets, nooks and crannies of the deserted 'city' through which 'she' searches in the night.<sup>16</sup> Even though there wasn't any direct communication with G-d (for 38 years), none the less, the presence of G-d was manifest as the pillar of smoke that guided the Jewish people through their desert wonderings. The implied eroticism of her longing



(the orifices of the city streets) is balanced against the phallic symbolism of the 'pillar of smoke' which is rising from the bed. The pillar of smoke is depicted as a column of flowers in the form of a date palm tree (a Hebrew linguistic connection). Both flowers and palm tree (pillar of incense) are implied metaphors of abundance both physical (shape) and spiritual (smell).

#### 8. 3:7-11 Let us feast

Allegorical language refers to the Mishkan (Tabernacle). When G-d needed to speak to the Jewish people, He spoke from between the two cherubs on top of the Mishkan. The reference to "...encircled by 60 warriors..."<sup>17</sup> carries a multitude of interpretations (as does most of text of the Song of Songs): the guarding of the Mishkan by the strongest men (the one who knows how to deal with the argumentation essential to the study of the Torah – a sharp minded person), priests who were camping around the Mishkan and were skilled in the Divine Service (Rashi), 'public servants', the 60 letters of the priestly blessing as a shield for the Jewish people.<sup>18</sup> However, in keeping with the multilayered interpretations of this text, another, more erotic interpretation of this 'guarding' is against involuntary, nocturnal ejaculation of semen.<sup>19</sup>

Like most paintings in this series, this image is of a multilayered series of 'curtains'. The impression is of a gradually revealing series of layers (levels of interpretation, PARDES), each contributing to the ephemeral sense of pictorial space.

Over the field of flowers (erotic paradise, fragrant garden, G-d's place) that covers the whole painting is painted a linear lettuce of angels. Like soldiers guarding a very special place.

Over that layer are the two cherubim of the Mishkan (from which G-d spoke), each containing a section of the 60 word Hebrew priestly blessing, the mystical protection of the Jewish people: "May Hashem bless you and safeguard you. May Hashem illuminate His countenance for you and be gracious to you. May Hashem lift His countenance to you and establish peace for you".<sup>20</sup>

#### 9. 4:1-5 Hidden and concealed.

As the Art Scroll edition of the Song of Songs points out that: "until this point her general beauty is praised. Now her specific features are praised...Israel allegorised as a beautiful woman, is now praised for the specific beautiful characteristics that have endeared her to her Beloved (G-d)".

The painting is structured by vertical divisions, implying a veil through which certain features are outlined or visible: doves for eyes (metaphor for the 'loyalty of Israel's sages), mouth for pure speech (comely, like a thread of scarlet – metaphor for the red thread attached to the scapegoat's horn which turned white, purifying the sins of Israel), breasts (metaphors for Moses – splitting of the sea and Aaron – his staff which sprouted almonds as a result of his authority being tested during the revolt of Korach).<sup>21</sup> The whole painting is engulfed in flowers = erotic metaphors for the 'loving descriptions' of (her) Israel's beauty = fragile but strong, gentle but forceful, beautiful but not conceited.

#### 10. 4:6-9 Dream of dawns

This painting depicts a dream or a mystical vision at night. Nothing is concrete. The whole terrain of modern day Israel is depicted and compressed within the painting; from Mt Hermon in the north, Mt Tabor in the middle to Jerusalem and the Negev. The Shekhinah, 'reclining' upon its Sefirot, on Mt Hermon is 'awakened' and 'drawn' to her city – Jerusalem. The direction of the lines of text draw one to the mystically emblazoned Jerusalem with the Temple in its midst. It is surrounded by an outline of an eye = a reference to the idea of having one eye looking outward (physical reality) and one (hidden) looking inwards (spiritual reality).

#### 11. 4:10-16 Guard the gates

Israel is singled out from amongst the nations as an object of love (...so superior is your love to wine and your spreading fame to all perfume...sweetness of Torah drops from your lips...) 22 because of its devotion to the Torah. Reference to bride and sister is a Kabbalistic reference to the purity of Israel's soul, emanating from Chaya at the level of Ruach (Neshama = mother and Nefesh = daughter).<sup>23</sup> Locked garden, a vivid, erotic symbol references the chastity of Israel, "Locket to all but its rightful owner".<sup>24</sup> The virtues of Israel and her future generations are further allegorised as the finest spices. The well of water (spring water) references purification as well as the written and oral Torah as a source of sustenance.

The final verse is an invitation to G-d to "...come into His garden and taste..." – an invitation to 'partake of its fruit'. Again, this has a double edged interpretation: a) as an invitation to G-d to dwell amongst His people and b) the erotic, flirtatious invitation to possess her garden

The first impression of the painting is of a luscious garden. The access to it being blocked by the outline of two hands which are decorated in Henna patterns - a Middle Eastern custom of brides decorating themselves with complex patterns. The two hands also symbolise the two tablets of the 10 commandments 'as a gate'. Another interpretation of 'the gates' is a reference to "...the body's sensory organs the eyes, ears, skin, nose and mouth. These serve as the "gates" through which we take in information from the environment. We are enjoined to "appoint judges" at these gates, so that even our physical perception will be permeated by the guidance of the Torah...".<sup>25</sup> Beyond these 'gates' one can just barely recognise the image of a reclining nude female, her legs spread open as an 'invitation'.

#### 12. 5:1-8 A secret bed of light.

These verses suggest Israel's perseverance and attachment to G-d, even in exile. According to Divrei Yedidah: "...When His Shekhinah departed the Temple, it descended among His people, accompanying them into exile".<sup>26</sup> A love that knows no bounds and a covenant that will stand the test of time.

This painting represents a dreamscape of longing and unfulfilled desire. Dream like sequence of images emanates from the face, sleeping (bottom left) as if visualising the 'dream'. A winding river in a black space, leads the viewer to the distant hills of Jerusalem

with the Temple on fire (top right). The Shekhinah in amongst its Sefirot looks on at the burning Temple from a distance. Over the whole painting sparks of fire drop from above and these are balanced by the drops of water also spread across the whole picture. Sparks/ fire – symbolise the wrath of G-d and the droplets/tears = dew/aloe – symbolise the longing/redemption of Israel.



The depth of space which gives the painting the dream like appearance is another metaphor for exile = a distancing, a withdrawal.

13. 5:9-16 Let us make man

These verses seem to take their influence from the Arabic, poetic form called wasf: consisting of "an elaborate and detailed praise of the bride's (and less frequently (as in this case) the bridegroom's beauty from head to toe".<sup>27</sup>

I find these verses resonating with the suggestiveness of "He made darkness His concealment...His clouds passed over with hail and fiery coals...He terrified them...And the depth of the water became visible, the foundations of the earth were laid bare; by Your rebuke, Hashem, by the blowing of the breath of Your nostrils... He took me, He drew me out of deep waters. He saved me...from my enemies when they overpowered me".<sup>28</sup> And further "Above the expanse that was over their heads... there was a likeness like the appearance of a man...I saw something like...a brilliance surrounding it. Like the appearance of a rainbow...so was the brilliance all around. That was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of Hashem".<sup>29</sup>

The background of this painting is of deep water (allusion to Torah) as if we are looking from under the water upwards. Two eyes, dove like seem to be looking at us. The form of the painting takes on the shape of a face. We become aware of lips, painted full of aromatic flowers- reference to G-dly (power of speech) attributes described in these verses. An outline with 'rainbow like' colours defines a male figure (a template rather than a particular figure) in the centre of the painting. He in turn is superimposed with the fiery outlines of the Sephirot. I'm suggesting both: Adam and the attributes of G-d, intertwined. We possess a G-dly soul (a part of G-d) and we are 'created in His image'.

The painting is illuminated by a light in the centre of the deep water (Tiferet). Fiery sparks or cinders cover the whole picture as an allusion to the 'G-dly chastisement'.<sup>30</sup>

14. 6:1-3 Running

Contemporary interpretations find a 'certain ambiguity' in the language of these verses. It certainly is a love poem but there seems to be also a 'biblical allusion' to read these as a love poem to a beloved land.<sup>31</sup> "Nations will perceive your righteousness... Then you will be a crown of splendour in the hand of Hashem... It will no longer be said of you "Forsaken One" and of your land it will no longer be said "Desolate Place"...like a bridegroom's rejoicing over his bride, so will your G-d rejoice over you".<sup>32</sup>

G-d has 'descended' into His garden, to the bed of spices = Tiferet, the Beloved, "descends" from Chochmah, bringing sustenance for Himself and Shekchinah, His garden.<sup>33</sup>

Amongst the 'garden' of flowers are outlines of the Sefirot and the Bride/Shekchinah as they fly on a cloud of flowers, in this mystical garden high above the land of Israel with its jewel, Jerusalem lit up as the light in the darkness of the land.

15. 6:4-12 Beauty falling on your thirsty soul.

Within a tropical, luscious field/garden/paradise is depicted the 'dove' with its wings spread in flight and filled with pomegranate seeds (symbolic of both; the people of Israel as well as the tzaddikim (righteous ones) 'as numerous as pomegranate seeds'). Within each 'wing' are delineated eyes, wide open looking at the creation. These are in turn overlapped with the Sefirot which are painted in the various colours attributed to each as well as the suggestion of Keter descending through Tiferet into Malchut (from His world to our world). The whole painting is covered with droplets of water – symbolic of the 'life sustaining' waters of Torah.

16. 7:1 On the yearning point of prayer.

A range of interpretations of this verse include a Midrash which sees Shulemite (maiden of peace) as 'The nation which G-d will one day settle in an abode of peace'. The 'perfect one' that comes through unscathed after all kinds of tribulations inflicted upon her (Israel). The memory of the G-dly promise "I will dwell amongst you" is what kept the Jewish people in the clinging hope to survive even during the most trying times, especially during the Shoah. *Fugue of Death*, Paul Celan's poem was inspirational for my painting of this verse.

*Black milk of morning we drink you at dusktime  
We drink you at noontime and dawntime we drink you at night  
we drink and we drink  
we scoop out a grave in the sky where it's roomy to lie...  
Black milk...*

*There's a man in this house who cultivates snakes and who writes  
Who writes when it's nightfall nach Deutchland your golden hair  
Margareta  
Your ashen hair Shulamite we scoop out a grave in the sky where  
it's roomy to lie...  
Your golden hair Margareta  
Your ashen hair Shulamite*

This powerful invocation of the Shulamite from the Song of Songs as the epitome of the Jewish suffering is contrasted with the 'golden haired Margareta' of Aryan beauty.

This painting depicts a (shower block) gas chamber not unlike the one in Auschwitz or Majdanek where the human finger nail scratches on the walls are still visible. A concrete, cold, impersonal tomb, leading the viewer to the tunnel (oven) where the train tracks that delivered Jews to their extermination end.

Where was G-d in the Shoah? This question is continuously debated. And yet as suggested by the Song of Songs, G-d dwelled amongst the Jews as promised by His covenant. This is hinted at by the menorah located in the 'oven' of the gas chamber. The plaque stuck in the railway tracks is symbolic of the hundreds of such plaques placed at Auschwitz Birkenau at the end of the March of the Living each year as memorials of a personal tomb stone to family members who died during the Shoah. The plaque in this painting depicts the bone at the bottom of the spine from which the resurrection as prophesised in the Torah will take place during Messianic times.

17. 7:2 Holy mountain's golden light.

Nobility in this verse is a reference/metaphor for the lineage back to Abraham<sup>35</sup> as well as to the pilgrimages to the Temple in Jerusalem during the 3 festivals: Passover, Shavuot and Succot. 'Your thighs are like jewels, Shaped by a master craftsman' is an allegorical reference to the pits underneath the altar that descended into the abyss and are supposed to have existed since the Six Days of Creation and into which the wine from



the libations was gathered.<sup>36</sup> The 3 festivals referred to in some interpretations of this verse are depicted symbolically at the top of the painting. The feet in sandals are outlined in the patterns of henna designs of brides in Middle Eastern cultures. These feet overlap what is a barely visible female thigh in the allusion to the 'wine pits' of the verse.

#### 18. 7:3-4 Perfect world is formed

These verses like most in the Song of Songs work on a double entendre level; on one hand they allegorise the Shulemite's erotic beauty and on the other they reference the symbolic association to Jewish history and law.

The painting depicts a female torso. The breasts act as metaphors for the two tablets of the law that Moses brought down from Mt Sinai – source of Israel's nourishment (Hebrew letters stand for the 10 commandments), the belly button with a pearl hanging from it is symbolic of the general sense of beautification, the wheat (hay stacks) which cover most of the torso symbolise the staple dietary needs as well as the allusion to the extravagance that was wished for the children of that first generation that left Egypt. The torso is surrounded by a 'garden of lilies' – an erotically suggestive allusion to the lover 'grazing amongst the flowers' of his beloved.

#### 19. 7:5-7 Gazing into Secrets

The wasf description continues and finally her whole beauty is praised.<sup>37</sup> Each of these separate attributes of her beauty are also interpreted metaphorically by orthodox interpretations: neck = sanctuary and altar, eyes = Israel's wise men (Torah scholars), nose + forehead = Solomon's house that will (in the future) stretch all the way to Damascus, head = tefillin as well as every Jew being as dear to G-d as His prophets, "how fair and wonderful you are..."<sup>38</sup> G-d addressing the assembly of Israel.

"Levush Ha Techeles (32:43) notes the sages teaching (Pesachim 87b) that when the Tablets were broken because of Israel's worship of the Golden Calf, the letters that were held in place miraculously, ascended to Heaven.<sup>39</sup> The four-headed, metaphysical letter shin disappeared from our script but is commemorated in its original form on the tefillin"<sup>40</sup> The letter shin in the title of the Song of Songs (Shir Hashirim) is enlarged (just like the letter beit in Bereishit, the first letter of the Torah). It is the emblem of the alliance between G-d and Israel and therefore was also chosen to be embossed on the tefillin. As such it is the most fitting letter to stand at the head of the holiest song. The letter shin, like all the letters of the Hebrew alphabet has numerous symbolic meanings. The 3 headed shin = spirit, soul, body = revealed reality, the 4 headed shin = concealed reality.<sup>41</sup>

From the four headed letter shin spreads out a rainbow (the covenant) which is captured by the flames of the menorah at the bottom of the painting. The letter shin has a spiritual connection to the rainbow. "The rain refracts light into the three primary colours red, yellow and blue which blend in different degrees to form all the colours of the rainbow. Arching from earth to heaven and back down to earth, the rainbow is a symbol of the covenant G-d made between the celestial and the terrestrial beings after the Deluge...The rainbow appears to man like an

inverted bow, not one aimed from heaven against earth, but one pointing heavenward from earth (Ramban)..."<sup>42</sup> 6 / 7 The yellow colour (divine light) is descending into the 3 headed letter shin at the bottom of the painting thus creating a direct symbolic connection between earth and heaven.

The two eyes (G-dly presence?) look down from a celestial garden of flowers that descend down towards the spread of the landscape of Israel from the Negev to the fertile north.

#### 20. 7:8-10 Beneath my spirit

Descriptive metaphors of adoration continue here, in the vein of previous verses, expounding Israel's virtues and her erotic allure: body = righteousness, breasts/clusters of grapes/dates = source of spiritual nourishment, breath/smell of apples = inspiration of the sages, your branches = children of Israel, mouth/wine = laws.<sup>43</sup> The female (Israel) is an object of desire and the lover yearning to consummate His love.

The narrative of this painting takes place in a night time, watery, flower landscape, suggestive of a fertile paradise. The spread fingers of the hands in the form of the priestly blessing are both blessing the symbolic characters and gently holding onto the ripe breasts made out of a cluster of dates. The lips are made of apricots and apples dripping with juice. In these symbolic metaphors there is a suggestion of both ripe fertility and erotic sensuality. In turn these earthly experiences are balanced by the 10 Sefirot, suggesting a spiritual dimension to the narrative.

#### 21. 7:11-13 Heaven and Earth kiss.

These verses which literally are a mutual invitation for sexual consummation; "Come, my beloved, let us go into the field...if the blossoms have opened...There I will give you my love...I have stored for you"<sup>44</sup>

My painting is divided into areas of night and day – the point of their meeting is suggested in Debbie's take on these verses – "they kiss". Top part - night, a time of dreaming and prophecy is depicted as a luscious garden bed of mysterious flowers, over which is outlined a gigantic hand, full of henna designs (not unlike in previous depictions). It 'cradles' the Sefirot and the Shekchinah as they float in the darkness of the night garden.

The bottom part – day is made up of vineyards as alluded to in the verses of the Song. Over this landscape are floating large pomegranate flowers, in bloom (erotically suggesting vulvas) and a ripe pomegranate fruit, suggestive of Israel's virtues as well as sexual readiness.

#### 22. 8:1-2 I will be the breath.

As the Art Scroll interpretation of these verses states: "Esoterically, Israel's 'mother' is the Shekchinah." This is manifest in the Neshamah being nurtured directly by G-d. This suggests that even in exile G-d is always connected to the Jewish people. "The soul cannot reveal its activities without the body and the body possesses no capacity for action without the soul. So too the Holy One, blessed be He, reveals His awesome deeds and signs by means of His attributes"<sup>45</sup>

Over a background of exotic flowers (Torah) and enclosed by the safety of a henna hand (bride) hovers an image of a coat (body/physical) receiving its life force/ spiritual nourishment from the pomegranate (Shekhinah). "The function of a garment is to surround (hide) a person, remaining external to him..." in Chassidic terminology, the garment acts as a makkif – that which encompasses and is aloof..."<sup>46</sup> In my painting I'm



suggesting however that 'our garment', our physical body/our physical world is not aloof from G-dly wisdom and love. Our 'garment' is pervious and exists as a receptacle for holiness.

The seeds of the ripe pomegranate (wisdom) (top of painting) are producing juices (droplets) that penetrate/sustain the floating unity of the body and soul. The physical and spiritual are in a constant, integrated balance.

23. 8:3-5 You trembled, fainted, fled.

A Midrash recounts that G-d uprooted Mt Sinai and held it over the Israelite's heads while the 10 utterances (commandments) were proclaimed. At the end of each utterance the people fled (died) and then (were resuscitated) came back. Torah Temimah suggests that in the context of this Midrash, Mount Sinai is compared to an apple since the Hebrew word for apple has the same root as to inflate. Homiletically, Mt Sinai resembled an 'inflated balloon' as if floated above their heads.<sup>47</sup> A further metaphoric connection to Mt Sinai as the apple: just as the apple tree ripens its fruit in the month of Sivan, so did Sinai bear its 'fruit' - the Torah was give also in the month of Sivan.<sup>48</sup>

In a setting amongst a mountainous desert, Mt Sinai in the shape of an apple is in flames, it 'floats' (is held over the people) above the ground. The people rather than running away as in the Midrash, are running towards the mountain to 'see' the sounds. G-dly presence is further implied by the outline of a hand over the mountain together with the Shekchinah.

24. 8:6-7 A Seal Upon your Heart

On a personal level, during a time of loss of someone dear, the only (meaningful) consolation that remains and touches one's deepest soul is 'the love of G-d'. Or conversely, G-d's love is the only source of comfort to the bereaved. Love and death in this spiritual sense are intertwined.

References to 'seal upon your heart, a sign upon your arm' are symbolically implying the importance of tefillin as man's connection/binding of the 'seal' to/with G-d.<sup>49</sup> There is also a suggestion here that G-d, like man, also puts on tefillin.<sup>50</sup> Private and universal connections are implied in these verses. Over a watery garden/paradise nightscape, replete with droplets of dew, symbolic of a dream, the perfect state for prophecy - is painted an outline of an arm with the inscription (tattoo) of verse 8:6 - a personal, private covenant.<sup>51</sup> The other outlines are of the Tetragrammaton; Yud- Key, Vav-Key entwined in tefillin. Both are the allusions to the celestial and physical 'sealing of love/ connection'.

25. 8:8-10 Under The Canopy

These verses read almost like a marriage contract where Israel (bride) is 'tested' with symbolism of a wall (steadfastness) and door (pliability) but professes a strength in her belief in the two Torah's written and oral, "which are an individual's vitality, just as the breasts provide vitality to the infant."<sup>52</sup>

The painting is designed to represent a Ketubah (marriage contract). Decorated with patterns of various types of flowers

- symbols of fertility and beauty, these surround the central piece of the 'contract' (which would normally contain the text of the marriage contract) but in this case is made up of two, inverted Hebrew letters Yud. The letter Yud is the first letter of the Tetragrammaton and the first letter of the Hebrew word Israel. As the connection between Israel and G-d is so unique and permanent, these letters Yud (facing each other - like a bride and groom, under the Chupah canopy) are surrounded by the symbol of infinity further amplifying this point. The final 'seal' is of the Sefirot, including Keter the crown that completes the witnessing of the contract.

26. 8:11-14 Listening so Deep

A sense of closure/acceptance of the cycle is implied. A prophecy intimated about the 'end of exile' and the coming of the Messiah, the final redemption as well as the creation of the third Temple in Jerusalem - the place where the physical and the spiritual world will (again) meet.

Amongst a starlit night are the sun and the moon - of equal size who act as 'witnesses' to the cosmic drama of these final verses of the Song. Out of the braking chains (bottom of painting) metaphors for exile and oppression of the Jewish people throughout history, emerges a miraculous Jerusalem with the third Temple fully installed and its altar at work. A golden beam of light illuminates the Temple. It seems to come from the crown of the Sefirot that are imprinted (by the dotted pattern) as a 'shadow' of the 'wedding contract' from the previous painting.

V. Majzner 2011©



- 1 Bernard McGinn. *Mysticism and Language, The Language of Love in Christian and Jewish Mysticism*. 1992.
- 2 Rabbi Akiva says; "All the Writings are holy, but the Song of Songs is holy of holies". T. B. Yadaim III, 5.
- 3 Rabbi Michael L. Munk, *The Wisdom in The Hebrew Alphabet*. Mesorah Publications, Ltd, Brooklyn, NY, 1983
- 4 Rabbi Ezra Ben Solomon of Gerona, *Commentary on the Song of Songs and other Kabbalistic Commentaries*. Selected, translated and Annotated by Seth Brody, Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo Michigan, US 1999.
- 5 Ariel and Chana Bloch. *The Song of Songs* . University of California Press 1995.
- 6 Rabbi Worch is basing his writings on his personal translations of commentaries by Malbim; Rabbi Meir Leibush ben Jehiel Michael Weiser (1809-1879).
- 7 See English translation preceding these explanatory notes.
- 8 Shir HaShirim, Art Scroll Tanach Series, Mesorah Publications Ltd, Brooklyn NY 1977
- 9 Zohar, Vol 1. Prologue, section; The Lily
- 10 Zohar. *ibid*
- 11 English translation, *ibid*
- 12 English translation, *ibid*.
- 13 Rabbi Hershy Worch. *ibid*
- 14 English translation 2:9 *ibid*.
- 15 Art Scroll Tanach Series *ibid*.
- 16 English translation 3:2, *ibid*.
- 17 Commentary on the Song of Songs, Seth Brody *ibid*.
- 18 Art Scroll Tanach series *ibid*.
- 19 Menachem Davidson private shiur 2010.
- 20 Numbers 24-26, Tanach, Stone Edition, Mesorah Publication Ltd.
- 21 Song of Songs 4:3, Art Scroll edition *ibid*
- 22 Art Scroll Song of Songs *ibid*.
- 23 Menachem Davidson private shiur 2010.
- 24 Art Scroll Song of Songs *ibid*.
- 25 Judgment and its Application, Eli Touger, Elul 2, 5771. An essay about Parsha Shoftim. Chabad.org. 2011.
- 26 Art Scroll. *ibid*
- 27 Poetry With a Purpose, *Biblical Poetics and Interpretation*. Harold Fisch. Indiana University Press 1988.
- 28 Psalm 18: 12-18. The Stone Edition Tanach *ibid*.
- 29 Ezekiel 1:26-28, Tanach *ibid*.
- 30 See description of painting 12, verse 5:1-8.
- 31 Poetry With a Purpose *ibid*.
- 32 Isaiah 62: 1-5, Tanach *ibid*.
- 33 Seth Brody Commentary on the Song of Songs *ibid*.
- 34 Paul Celan and Jerome Rothenberg. From Paul Celan: Selections. 2005
- 35 Psalm 47:10 Tanach *ibid*
- 36 Sukkah 49a; Rashi - Art Scroll Song of Songs *ibid*
- 37 Song of Songs, Ariel Bloch and Chana Bloch, *ibid*.
- 38 English translation 7:6, *ibid*.
- 39 See my Painting the Torah, 2008, Parsha Ki Tisa from the Book of Exodus, image on page 57.
- 40 The Wisdom in the Hebrew Alphabet, Rabbi Mivchael L. Munk, Mesorah Publications 1983.
- 41 *ibid*
- 42 *ibid*
- 43 Song of Songs, Art Scroll. *ibid*
- 44 English translation 7:11-13, *ibid*.
- 45 Seth Brody, *ibid*.
- 46 Rabbi Shais Taub, Aish HaTorah, from an article on line titled Hanging by a thread 21.6.2011
- 47 Art Scroll. *ibid*
- 48 *ibid*
- 49 Deuteronomy 6:8, Tanach, *ibid*
- 50 Berakhot 6a, Seth Brody, *ibid*
- 51 Aaron Rosen's brother's tattoo, in memory of the loss of their sister, private email 2011.
- 52 Seth Brody, *ibid*