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The Song of Songs—Seeking Wisdom through the Divine Feminine

“The whole Torah is Holy,” says Rabbi Akiva, “but the Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies.”

This project is a personal attempt at translating the Song of Songs—the objective here is not so much to find the literal meaning as much as discovering the nuances that seem to be hidden within the biblical, holy words. To the reader, this effort will come across as an interpretation, which is essentially the purpose of this endeavor; just as an observer of a piece of art deciphers for themselves the hidden meaning within. In addition to my own observations, I will be examining various translations and interpretations from additional seekers of truth and beauty in the Song, including Marcia Falk, Rabbi Rami Shapiro, Rabbi Shefa Gold, and Ariel and Chana Bloch. The ultimate intention of this creative pursuit is to gain access to the divine feminine, the preeminent image found in the Song, and to allow the portrayal of her splendor and grace to stimulate a connection with the Mystery, the unknowable God. In an effort to accomplish this task, a few guided meditations will accompany the interpreted chapters, acting as warm-up exercises before diving into the deep, textual waters.

“The Song sings to all whose hearts lie awake, waiting to be roused by God, our true love, Who is knocking and Who calls us to become ourselves and to be

connected in sacred union with all of Creation and with the Source of All”¹. If we open ourselves up to the possibility that the universe, and therefore God, is designed to be in a love relationship with human beings then we will allow that radiant energy to flow, creating a synergy between the divine and mortal realms.

Rabbi Rami Shapiro, in his book Embracing the Divine Feminine, discusses his take on the essence of the Song—“I am reading the Song of Songs as a fully sexualized allegory of love between Wisdom and the seeker of Wisdom, a celebration of the psychosexual-spiritual awakening to the unity of God, woman, man, and nature that happens when a seeker of Wisdom embraces and is embraced by Wisdom herself. As such, the sexual union at the heart of the Song is vitally important.”² This stance is basically where I am at in my reading of the Song, agreeing that the ultimate image/vision/goal of the text is to convey the importance of union that Rabbi Shapiro outlines here.

As the artistic endeavor here is to combine translation and interpretation, it is important to address the inherent challenge in doing so, specifically with a text such as the Song. The personal enjoyment gained during this process is the satisfaction that comes from putting my own experience of passionate love into the translation. This aspect is what makes it art, not simply another translation of a biblical text. Drawing from these multiple translations I am guided in the direction I

¹ Gold, Rabbi Shefa. In the Fever of Love—An Illumination of the Song of Songs. Ben Yehuda Press: Teaneck, NJ, 2009. Page 4.

² Shapiro, Rabbi Rami. Embracing the Divine Feminine—Finding God Through the Ecstasy of Physical Love—The Song of Songs Annotated and Explained. Jewish Lights Publishing: Woodstock, VT, 2014. Page 5.

wish to take, while cultivating my own understanding of the meaning of the text.³ In this way I fully merge with its essence and unite with the Divine in a unique way, able to reconnect with the original Hebrew and its trope with fresh eyes and a profound sense of the Song's spirit.

Despite the attempts to allegorize and label the Song as a metaphor for God's relationship with Israel, I reiterate that I believe it should be read as a pure love song. Reading it this way makes it clear that we are not afraid of its contents, accepting it as a major part of what it means to be human, and giving permission to its exploration.

In chapter three of her book, Falk's focuses on the love lyrics of the Song, bringing up issues of gender inequality. She points out the peculiarity that the Song places an emphasis on women's voices that are palpably honest and candid, a feature that is uncommon.

Because male speakers in the love monologues (and, in fact, throughout the Song) only rarely seem to fantasize or address third persons but instead address their beloveds explicitly, one might conjecture that, in the Song's original culture (as in ours), males were allowed more forthrightness than females. But women's speech in the Song is hardly reserved or shy; on the contrary, it is uninhibited and even outspoken, and the Song's female speakers do not hesitate to initiate action. The propensity to fantasize thus does not seem to be inversely related to the ability to speak or act directly; at least among female speakers, both modes are prevalent, and one is not a substitute for the other.⁴

³ While I make use of Rabbi Shefa Gold, Ariel and Chana Bloch, and Marcia Falk's translations, I feel most in sync with Rabbi Rami Shapiro's translation and commentaries. His approach to the Song is most closely aligned with how I view the text. I am in awe, enthused, stimulated, moved, and inspired by his close reading and interpretation of the poetry and romanticism of the text. My approach in translation/interpretation is loosely based on his take on the Song.

⁴ Falk, Marcia. The Song of Songs – A New Translation and Interpretation. Harper Collins Publishers: San Francisco, 1990. Page 117.

It is indeed a unique feature that is unforeseen in most, if not all, biblical texts, that a female voice is visibly and unapologetically frank in her language of fantasy and intimacy.

Rabbi Shefa Gold, is another spiritual seeker who wishes to dive into the text of the Song in such a way that it resembles going on a journey of love with her partner: “I read every word of “The Song” as a word that I address to God my Beloved AND as a word that is addressed to me by God. Each word of the Song is also the word that I address to my lover AND each word is spoken by my lover to me. Love is given and received at once. If the *Song of Songs* is a story, then it is the kind of story where the end suffuses the beginning and the beginning echoes the end. This story takes place in a Timeless Time, forever beginning, forever unfolding, forever ending.”⁵ The intimacy with which she approaches the Song is essential— one cannot fathom the romantic nature of the text if one does not understand what it means to be in love, clearly, and this is something that cannot be overstated.

Chapter One

1. The Song of all Songs, by Solomon.

2. Cause him to kiss me from the caresses of his lips

For you and your love energy is more enchanting than wine.
3. Your bodily emollients exude a pleasing scent, your oil is your namesake—

For this reason you are adored and lusted after by beauties.
4. Seduce me and we will rush together

Oh dominant ruler, carry me to your quarters

⁵ Gold, Rabbi Shefa. *In the Fever of Love—An Illumination of the Song of Songs*. Ben Yehuda Press: Teaneck, NJ, 2009. Page 11.

- We will bask in your ecstatic bliss
Reveling in your love energy more passionate than wine—
You are candidly adored.
5. Darkly exotic am I, and glowing
Young damsels who dwell in Jerusalem—
As dark as the tents of Kedar
As rich as Solomon's draperies.
6. Do not glare at me because of my dark hue
From the sun's rays that have kissed my skin.
The sons of my mother have fought with me,
Compelling me to protect their vineyards;
But my own vineyard, I did not tend.
7. Express to me, my soul's love,
Where do you tend your flock?
Where do you rest them at midday?
Let me not be like one who wanders
Among the herds of your friends.
8. If you do not know, my most radiant among the ladies,
Go out and follow the path of the flock
And graze your kids by the shepherds' pavilions.
9. My gorgeous darling, your likeness is akin
To a stallion among Pharaoh's chariots.
10. Your cheeks are framed with decorative circles

- Your neck emblazoned with jewels.
11. We will create for you circles of gold
With enhancements of silver.
12. While the king is on his couch
My body exudes its scent.
13. My beloved is a fragrant sack of myrrh
Resting between my breasts.
14. My beloved is a cluster of henna flowers
From the vineyards of Ein Gedi.
15. I am overcome by your beauty, my darling
You are gorgeous—your eyes are doves.
16. You are handsome, my beloved
Gorgeous, indeed!
Our bed is green...
17. The walls of our house are cedar,
The rafters are of cypress and pine.

Now that we have had a taste of the text we can turn our attention to the discussion of the divine feminine—*Shekhinah*. The term *Shekhinah* is most famously associated with Kabbalah as the divine feminine, but in ancient times it simply signified the settling of God, referring to the divine presence of God's sacred dwelling on the *Mishkan*. It has since developed into multiple other meanings as well, riffing on the original connotation—"Divine Glory"; "Divine Manifestation";

“Divine Power”, etc. There are numerous ways of grasping the aspect of *Shekhinah*, and Zalman Schachter-Shalomi’s approach is worth noting. Chava Weissler, in her article “Meanings of Shekhinah in the ‘Jewish Renewal’ Movement,” quotes Reb Zalman on his view on the *Shekhinah*, from a January 2004 Jewish renewal conference for Rabbis: “He warned: ‘Don’t try to shlep the Shekhinah into the cognitive realm. The word Shekhinah has the same *gematria* [numerical value] as *ha’arafel* [the fog]. We must be comfortable in “endarkenment” as well as in enlightenment.’ Clearly, for Schachter-Shalomi, there *is* an ‘eternal feminine’; he understands Shekhinah as a mythical figure, expressing a feminine essence that is non-cognitive and mysterious.”⁶

Rabbi Shapiro extrapolates on the aspect of *Shekhinah* by explaining that, “The *Shekhinah* is God’s dwelling—not the place in which God dwells, but any place that God dwells. Whenever you find yourself in the presence of God, you are in *Shekhinah*.”⁷ Shapiro then brings in a teaching from Pirkei Avot 3:7:

Rabbi Chalafta ben Dosa of Kfar Chanania teaches,

If ten people sit together and study Torah,

the *Shekhinah* rests among them...

This is also true of five...It is also true of three...

It is also true of two...This is even true of one, for it says,

“In every place where I cause My Name to be mentioned,

I will come to you and bless you.”

⁶ Weissler, Chava. “Meanings of Shekhinah in the “Jewish Renewal” Movement.” *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women’s Studies & Gender Issues*. No. 10, Jewish Women’s Spirituality (2) (Fall, 5766/2005), pg. 62.

⁷ Shapiro, Rabbi Rami. Embracing the Divine Feminine—Finding God Through the Ecstasy of Physical Love—The Song of Songs Annotated and Explained. Jewish Lights Publishing: Woodstock, VT, 2014. Page 24.

Shekhinah is a divine presence that we may call upon or invoke whenever we are engaged in holy work—study, worship, any type of sacred act, when we try to reach our potential in the world as divinely created beings, when we act as “godly” beings—we bring the *Shekhinah* into our midst.

Part of our sacred work as human beings created in the image of the divine is to connect body, mind, and spirit, and one way to do so is through meditation. Rabbi David Cooper shows how meditation can become an integral part of life, renewing and reviving us in our daily encounters with ourselves. Cooper’s book, [The Handbook of Jewish Meditation Practices](#), contains a guided meditation that is appropriate in further connecting with the text of the Song—[Divine Protection](#)—and it is designed as an ongoing meditation practice to empower the guide within to protect us as we go through life. Beginning with a quote from chapter two in the Song, Cooper guides the meditator through a calming and supportive journey, setting up the inner guide for divine protection and love:

“Like an apple among trees, so is my beloved.

I sit within his comforting shadow;

I taste his sweet, refreshing fruit.

It brings me to a state of inebriation.

Sheltering me under his love;

Sustaining me, comforting me;

I am helpless under his banner of love.

His left [arm] is under my head;

His right embraces me. *Song of Songs 2:3-6*

1. Close your eyes and sit quietly, observing the movement of the chest as you breathe. Do this for at least five minutes.
2. Imagine that you are on a wonderful vacation, lying on a beach on a warm sunny day, listening to the surf.
3. Imagine that you are now floating on your back in the water in perfect safety and comfort. You are being supported by an unsinkable foam cushion that is securely fastened to your body. You have absolutely nothing to fear because you are in a bubble of protection and nothing can harm you, yet you can experience nature and the sea around you in their fullness.
4. Now, allow yourself to realize that the cushion and the protection around you are really a form of divine embrace; you are in the arms of God, perfectly safe, relaxed, floating on a sea of love. Enter this experience fully, taking as much time as you wish, dwelling in the embrace of the Divine.
5. Imagine that this is a source of divine protection and is available to you whenever you call on it. Ask it to give you a name, a word, or a symbol by which you will be able to summon it in the future. Let this name, word, or symbol sink deeply into your memory.
6. Now imagine that you are back on the beach, lying in the sun, relaxed.
7. Two or three times, use the name, word, or symbol to enter into the embrace of the Divine, and then come back to the beach. In this way you will become accustomed to summoning the divine protection.

8. When you are ready, open your eyes. Know that your individual angel of protection is always available at a moment's notice.⁸

We are now ready to embrace the holy words of the second chapter of the Song of Songs.

Chapter Two

1. I am a rose of Sharon,
A wild lily of the valleys.
2. Like a wild lily among the brambles,
Such is my darling, whom I choose, among the young damsels.
3. As an apricot tree branches out in the forest of trees,
My beloved stands out among the young men.
In his shade I have frequently sat and lingered,
As his fruit sweetly penetrates my mouth, I taste his love.
4. He has brought me to the wine house
And he envelops me with his love.
5. Feed me raisin cakes,
Refresh me with apricots;
For I am lovesick.
6. His left hand is under my head,
And his right arm is embracing me.
7. "Oh daughters of Jerusalem, promise me,

⁸ Cooper, Rabbi David. The Handbook of Jewish Meditation Practices. Jewish Lights Publishing: Vermont, 2005. Pg. 138-139.

- by the gazelles, or by the deer of the field,
do not disturb or wake us until we are through with our lovemaking.
8. I hear the voice of my beloved,
Here, it comes! Bounding over the mountains,
Leaping across the hills.
9. My beloved is comparable to a gazelle or a young stag,
There he stands behind our wall, on the other side,
Looking into the windows,
Gazing through the lattice frames.
10. My beloved calls and says to me,
“Awaken, my darling, my beauty,
and come away!
11. The winter has passed,
The rains are over and done.
12. Wildflowers are blossoming, appearing on the land,
The time of singing has come,
The song of the turtledove is heard in our land.
13. The fig trees are growing their new fruit,
The vines are in blossom, giving off their scent.
Awaken, my darling, my beauty,
And come away!
14. My dove, in the clefts and nooks of the rock,
Hidden in the shadows of the cliff,

Let me see your face,
Let me hear your voice,
For your voice and song are stunningly sweet and delicious,
And your face is gorgeous.”

15. Catch us the foxes,

The little rascal foxes that ruin and raid the vineyards—
And our vineyards are blossoming.

16. My beloved is mine and I am his

Browsing and feasting among the lilies.

17. Before the day breathes its last sigh

And the shadows of night are gone,

Set out, my beloved,

As a gazelle or a young stag

Onto the mountains of spice.

Rabbi Arthur Green, a prominent theologian and pluralist, provides some insight on the subject of the feminine in Judaism. He asks, “Why is it that men, in talking about their relationship with God, turned to images of the feminine in order to describe themselves? This seems to be a major issue in understanding the psychology of a religious community.” Green goes on to address this issue in very plain terms, providing a practical vision that helps to shed light on the power of the Song of Songs:

What I want to propose is simply this: in the search for the kind of intimacy, tenderness, and warmth that such people wanted to express in talking about the relationship between God and Israel, they could not remain in the domain of the all-male universe where they lived their public lives. There is no way,

without turning to images of the feminine, or without thinking of the relationships between men and women, that most men can express the degree of love, passion, and warmth that the spiritual life may arouse in them.⁹

In addressing these feminist terms, Green describes the divine feminine in relevant and relative expressions pertaining to this work. His words are presented here as a warm up to the sixth chapter of the Song:

“The *Shekhinah*, the mysterious woman, queen or princess, hidden or coming from a place beyond, is the only one we see, the only one we greet. What is her place, what is her origin? These are hidden somewhere in the mysteries of God beyond. All we can say of the God we know, of that feminine God we encounter is ‘Blessed is she and blessed is her place.’ The glory of God is apparent to us, the glory of God lies within the realm of human experience. The *Shekhinah* is the God we know. Surely, that *Shekhinah* stand in relation to a transcendent deity, whether decribed in male terms or in terms of more pure abstraction, but our knowledge of that is only through her. Blessed is she and blessed is her place.”

The seeking of divine feminine wisdom continues in this next chapter, opening with the daughters of Jerusalem asking her, inquiring after her lover. Her lover, of course, is the seeker, the reader of this holy text, or in more general terms, all of human kind that yearns for the ultimate union with the divine—Us! Our search never ends, even after we reach union, for that union is only a momentary

⁹ Heschel, Susannah, Ed. On Being a Jewish Feminist—A Reader. “Bride, Spouse, Daughter—Images of the Feminine in Classical Jewish Sources—Arthur Green. Schocken Books: New York, 1983.

lapse in the grand scheme of life. If we are lucky and successful in our quest for divine wisdom, our lives are filled with these moments of unity, providing us with a taste of the world to come.

Rabbi Rami Shapiro posits that Wisdom, or the divine feminine voice in the Song, is ready to unite with her lover. According to 6:2—“Dodi yarad l’gano—My beloved has descended to his garden...” she is no longer distinguishing her garden from his. Up to this point in the text, only she is referred to as a garden (4:12), and Shapiro believes that this means “she and she alone controls who has access to her.”¹⁰ In other words, Wisdom is ready to enter into union with her lover, eliminating the division between them, allowing a mutuality to emerge. This idea is proven more strongly with the next verse, 6:3—“Ani l’dodi, v’dodi li, haro’eh bashoshanim”, perhaps the most famous of all verses in the Song, recited at many Jewish weddings, by the bride to her bridegroom when her ring is presented to her. This verse harkens back to Chapter 2:16—“Dodi li v’ani lo, haro’eh bashoshanim”, when the divine feminine is proclaiming that her beloved, the seeker, belongs to her, whereas in 6:3, she belongs to you.

It is clear that now there is balance between the seeker and the divine feminine, viewed here as perfectly harmonized lovers. It is a beautiful moment in the Song that captures the intimate passion that lovers feel for each other in ecstatic situations, in moments of cherished unison, when both lovers are creating a divine connection through their spiritual and physical love. This type of moment, between two human lovers, or between the seeker and divine feminine wisdom, illustrates

¹⁰ Shapiro, Rabbi Rami. Pg. 102.

the meaning of being in sync, feeling aligned, when our whole being—body, mind, and soul are grounded and fully in accord with the universe.

These moments of elated bliss, of delight, of thrilling bonding are rare for most and are therefore considered sacred and holy. When we find someone whom we feel an affinity with, and ultimately build a deep connection with, we feel bonded to that person in an often, indescribable way, similar to how we may feel toward the divine. We feel the love but it is difficult, and sometimes nearly impossible to fully describe that love. The Song of Songs is a gift we have in helping us describe the yearning for and discovering that love.

Some of the guided meditations in this project were written personally by myself. In addition to those, I call on the influential and inspirational work of others to enter into connection with *Shekhinah*. Rabbi Leah Novick is one such voice, having composed a variety of guided meditations in her book, *On the Wings of Shekhinah*. Expressing her passion for seeking the divine feminine through the following guided meditation, her powerful words connect us to the presence of *Shekhinah* as we begin the journey of chanting and exploring the words of chapter seven of the Song of Songs:

The Sacred in Nature—*Rabbi Leah Novick*¹¹

It is the spring equinox, and you are going out into nature on this beautiful day to celebrate the change in the seasons. The hills are blanketed with velvety rich

¹¹ Novick, Rabbi Leah. *On the Wings of the Shekhinah—Rediscovering Judaism's Divine Feminine*. Quest Books-Theosophical Publishing House: Wheaton, Ill., 2008. Pages 46-48.

green colors, a gift from the winter rains. All around you is the miracle of the earth coming back to life.

As you ascend a familiar trail, you are struck by the number of flowers that have opened only recently. Your eyes take in the luscious hues—pinks and lavenders, deep purples and dark reds. The smells of the reemerging growth are intoxicating, and the air is so pure that you feel yourself coming fully alive. In this precious moment, you realize that all the colors represent *Shekhinah*, embracing all the natural world.

You are also aware of the many small animals in this environment—bugs and spiders, lizards and rabbits. All around you is the sound of birds singing as they perch in the flowering shrubs and trees. Hawks circle in the sky, and occasional flocks of geese and migrating ducks make their way to the water nearby.

As you watch the movement around you, you realize that everything that lives or breathes is enlivened by the breath of *Shekhinah*. Nothing that exists is devoid of her presence.

There is such a sense of peace, such an inner knowing of the Song of Songs: “The rains are over and gone, and the time for nature’s song has come...”

...You continue on your way, meeting up later in the day with groups from many different backgrounds and ethnic groups converging on the mountaintop for the equinox ceremony, in the hope that different belief systems can unite to enjoy and protect the earth and its fullness.

You walk together up a high hill. The sun sets in golden glory over the ocean to the west, and the moon rises in her brightness above the hills in the east. When

you arrive at the site, a fire is already blazing, and the drummers have begun the essential beat for bringing the group together. A giant shofar is blown to herald the beginning of the ritual, and the sounds are picked up and echoed by numerous young people blowing *shofarot*.

The music and dance amplify the joyous energy of the assembled group, and the chanting creates the atmosphere for welcoming the Divine Presence. Different teachers come forward, sharing teachings of the Divine Mother from their respective traditions.

You are listening with your heart,
Feeling the teachings with your mind,
Understanding within your body organs, deep down,
That ALL IS ONE.

The images are different, the practices vary, but the origin is ONE.

All memories of the Great Mother in her many forms

With her thousands of faces are welcomed here:

Pouring out her abundance,

Giving blessings for creativity,

Ensuring equity and justice,

Providing compassion and healing,

And embracing with unending love

All the life forms that emerged from her womb.

And you know that you are one with her.

Chapter 6

1. “Where has your beloved gone,
Oh most beautiful of all women?
In which direction has your beloved turned?
Let us seek him with you.”
2. My beloved has descended to his garden,
To the beds of spices,
To graze in the gardens, and to gather lilies.
3. I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine;
He grazes amidst the lilies.
4. You are gorgeous, my darling, like Tirzah,
Magnificently glorious like Jerusalem,
“And yet as terrifying as an army
Marching with banners unfurled.”¹²
5. Lower your eyes from my gaze,
For they make me quiver and quake!
Your hair is like a herd of goats
Flowing down from the mounds of Gilead.
6. Your teeth are as white and even as a flock of ewes,

¹² Shapiro, Rabbi Rami. Embracing the Divine Feminine—Finding God Through the Ecstasy of Physical Love—The Song of Songs Annotated and Explained. Pg. 105—Shapiro explains his take on the text at this point being at odds with the metaphors of gardens and lovemaking—as being “a terrifying force, a violent force, a destructive force.” He explains that Wisdom (divine feminine) is showing her dual nature “as both lover and warrior...stripping you of all your defenses.” He goes on to explain how this is relevant in the context of facing ultimate truth and Wisdom: “It is terrifying to be naked before Wisdom, to stand without the opinions, labels, and half-truths we use to make sense out of life. Yet, nothing less will satisfy her.”—Pg. 104.

- Coming up from a washing,
Each with its twin.
7. The beautiful curve of your cheek,
Behind your delicate veil,
Radiates like a burst-open pomegranate.
8. There are sixty queens and eighty concubines,
And virgins without number.¹³
9. But one alone is my dove, my perfect one,
Precious as an only daughter, the darling of her mother,
The young women call her happy,
And queens and concubines praise her¹⁴:
10. "Who is she that rises and shines like the dawn,
Gorgeous like the moon,
Glowingly radiant as the sun,
Marching with banners unfurled?¹⁵"
11. I descended to the walnut grove
To see the valley's budding,
To see if the vines had starting blossoming,
If the pomegranates were flowering.

¹³Rabbi Rami Shapiro: Pg. 104—Shapiro explains here that "the queens and concubines lead to division, Wisdom to unity; the queens and concubines offer pleasure, and Wisdom offers ecstasy."

¹⁴ Pg. 106—Shapiro translates this verse and explains it as follows: "Wisdom is perfect, meaning whole and complete. Wisdom unites the opposites of Tirzah and Jerusalem; all conflict is reconciled in her. This is why she will be called the *Shulamite*, the Woman of Wholeness and Peace (see Song 7:1)." This explanation of Wisdom as the *Shulamite* is one of the driving forces behind my desire to do this project—I am named for her and feel a strong affinity with what she represents, "the Woman of Wholeness and Peace."

¹⁵ Shapiro, Rabbi Rami. Embracing the Divine Feminine—Finding God Through the Ecstasy of Physical Love—The Song of Songs Annotated and Explained. Translation—Pg. 107.

12. And before I knew it, before I was aware of it,

My longing and craving

Set me in the most extravagant chariot.

We are now at the penultimate chapter of our sacred text—a preemptive culmination to our exploration of the divine feminine. To prepare for the chanting of the seventh chapter, I have composed an original guided meditation that will facilitate the opening of our minds and hearts to seek the wisdom of *Shekhinah*. As an introduction to the meditation journey, Rabbi Rami Shapiro helps us to comprehend the power of wisdom and her divine energy and love.

You are searching for wisdom, seeking to find a way in to know her, to hear her, to unite with her. Wisdom is always there—lingering, waiting for your embrace, she is in no hurry. The ultimate union with wisdom cannot be rushed, it takes time, and therefore an intentional search is necessary for trust and respect to be gained. “The goal of this search isn’t to escape your body and unite with wisdom in some non-physical realm, but to find wisdom through the body and awaken to the holiness and wholeness of physical and spiritual together as a single reality. In this way the Song of Songs is a celebration of the union of the seeker of Wisdom with Lady Wisdom herself.”¹⁶

The meditator seeks to transcend the physical world, and so it is not a requirement to be in a literal field or garden for this meditation, however, it may prove to be an enhancement to the experience. It may also be the case for some that

¹⁶ Shapiro, Rabbi Rami. Embracing the Divine Feminine—Finding God Through the Ecstasy of Physical Love—The Song of Songs Annotated and Explained. Pg. 14.

being outside might be too distracting, but this “issue” propels the meditator to experiment with each setting and to observe how he/she reacts to being outside vs. inside.

We start in a seated position, either in a chair or on the ground, feet on the floor, or in a lotus position, hands on thighs, palms facing upward. Take a deep breath in and slowly let it out. Take three more breaths just like this, attempting to slow down the breath with each one.

You find yourself in a beautiful field, a rose garden, or any other type of flower garden—as you arrive you notice the beauty that surrounds you, feeling its holiness. Lift your face slowly. Now lift your chest slowly. Feel the emanation of the divine love fill your heart. Allow it to flow freely within you. Breathe deeply and appreciate the *shefa*, the divine flow cruising through your body. Feel yourself returning it to its source with

“What do I value beyond everything else?”

“Can I open myself up to the possibility of bending my will to the world, rather than the world bending to my will?”

“Am I ready to heed the call of wisdom, to awaken to the limitless, unconditional love of the Divine? She is constantly sharing of herself and always allowing her love to flow freely, infinitely. This love is a gift, beautiful and sacred, found in many forms—the bounty of nature, the physical and inner radiance of human beings, the essence of being a good person, etc...all of these forms are manifestations of her love.

Allow the worry to drop away—Allow your mind to empty its contents, even for a moment. Allow the flow of energy to commence. When we give up control and go with the flow we join with the Divine and “ride the wave” of life, as opposed to trying to tame it.

Allow any walls, borders, shields, restrictions to dissolve—the union cannot occur if there are obstructions or distractions in place. Allow the full opening of the heart and let her love enter. Breathe in her sweet nectar—allow her passion to fill you up, seeping into every part of yourself—you are drenched in her love. Her warmth has embraced you and you have embraced her in return. Be aware of your breath as you linger in this ecstasy.

When the heart is open and ready to receive and give in a constant, rhythmic motion, it is only then that she is present. When we swim with the current, flow down the river, cut with the grain, we are uniting with her essence. If we are able to do this, we can live to our full potential—wisely and well.

Here is an excerpt from Shefa Gold’s translation of the beginning of chapter 7, the introduction to the Divine feminine, named as the Shulamit, followed by her interpretation of this passage:

***Turn and return, Oh Shulamit,
Turn and return that we may gaze upon you!***

***Why do you gaze upon the Shulamit
As she dances through the camp?***

In Shefa Gold’s interpretation of this passage from chapter seven, she focuses on the language used and applies the meditative, reflective angle to draw meaning out of these verses. In this way, the modern Jew reading this passage today might

gain an alternate understanding of the text, while being able to appreciate the original intent of the scene. The commentary that Gold provides is one of intimacy with the text while expressive of her own personal values and beliefs, showcasing to the reader an ideal way of life.

“I am riveted to her beauty. She is pure color, essence of fragrance, true vitality, hidden grace. She reaches out a delicate hand of invitation that I might join her in this dance of turning.

And this is my dance:

Turning
 away from the habits of shallow breathing,
Returning
 to my true depths,
Turning
 away from cynical judgments—
 my armor against the terror of being judged in turn,
Returning
 to my open heart, where the courage and humility to remain
 vulnerable yield treasure upon treasure of surprises.” (65)

Marcia Falk’s interpretive translation of chapter 7:1-6:

Dance for us, princess, dance,
 as we watch and chant!

What will you see as I move
 in the dance of love?

Your graceful, sandalled feet,
Your thighs—two spinning jewels,
Your hips—a bowl of nectar
 brimming full

Your belly—golden wheat
Adorned with daffodils,
Your breasts—two fawns, the twins
 of a gazelle

Your neck—an ivory tower,
Your eyes—two silent pools,
Your face—a tower that overlooks
the hills

Your head—majestic mountain
Crowned with purple hair,
Captivating kings
within its lock

Chapter 7

1. Turn and dance, Shulamite!¹⁷,

Turn and dance again,

So we may gaze upon you.

Why do you look at the Shulamite,

Just as you look upon a dance between two camps?¹⁸
2. How beautifully graceful are your steps in sandals,

Oh noble daughter!

Your curvaceous thighs, smooth and round—

The work of a master craftsman.
3. Your navel a rounded goblet—may it never lack wine.

Your belly is a bushel of wheat, surrounded by lilies.
4. Your breasts are like two fawns,

Twins of a gazelle.

¹⁷ Rami Shapiro explains that the meaning of the name *Shulamite* is unclear although he goes on to describe a possible interpretation, as discussed above, based on its root. "Since *Shulamite* shares the same three-letter Hebrew root—sh-l-m—as *shaleim* (complete, whole) and *shalom* (peace), I take *Shulamite* to be "She Who Is Wholeness and Complete Peace." Pg. 108.

¹⁸ The Hebrew *machanayim* means "two camps." According to Shapiro, the two camps referred to here are the human camp and the Divine camp, and Wisdom bridges the two in this dance—pg. 108.

5. Your neck is like an ivory tower,
Your eyes—pools in Heshbon,
By the gate of *Bat-rabbim*.
Your nose is like a tower of Lebanon,
Facing toward Damascus.
6. Your head, crowning you majestically as Mount Carmel,
And your luscious locks,
Like royal purple,
A king is caught in the tresses, captivated.
7. You are absolutely gorgeous, my love,
Sweetly intoxicating, more than any other pleasure!
8. Your form, dignified and grand as a date palm,
And your breasts are the clusters of its fruit.
9. I said in my heart:
“I will climb that date palm, grasping its branches.”
And may your breasts be like clusters of grapes,
And the scent of your breath like apricots,
10. And your kisses like good wine.
“Let it flow to my beloved,
pleasing him,
gliding smoothly between my lips.
11. I am my beloved’s,
And his desire is for me, only me.

12. Come, my beloved,
Let us go out into the fields,
Let us lodge in the villages.
13. Let us rise early and go to the vineyards,
And observe if the vines have flowered
If the blossoms have opened,
If the pomegranates are in bloom.
There I will give you my love.
14. The mandrakes¹⁹ give off their scent,
And at our doors are choice fruits of all kinds,
Ripe and unripe,
Which I have kept for you, my beloved.

As we prepare to engage with the last chapter of the Song of Songs by entering into our final guided meditation, I'd like to offer some preliminary quotes to ready our minds and hearts for the journey we are about to embark on. May these words help to invoke the desire to travel deep and discover the garden within, where we allow ourselves permission to experience comfort, wholeness, and divine love.

¹⁹ *Dudaim*, or mandrakes, can be explained as “love plants.” Shapiro explains that this word is only mentioned twice in the Bible—here and in Bereishit 30:14-16, referenced as an aphrodisiac. They are part of the nightshade family, and similar to cocaine, if taken in small doses. Shapiro believes that this line is saying that Lady Wisdom has prepared a love potion—perhaps because there are dimensions of ecstasy, which cannot be reached without the help of a drug, hinting at the use of hallucinogens by those who seek Lady Wisdom. Pg. 114.

She [the Shekhinah] is sometimes called “Daughter” and sometimes “Sister” and here she is called “Mother” and she is indeed all of these.

—Zohar

Where there is no union of male and female, men are not worthy to behold the divine presence.

—Zohar

When union is for the sake of heaven, there is nothing holier and purer than this union of the righteous.

—Nachmanides

According to his will, God makes his voice heard to his Glory/Shekhinah which blesses God and presents itself in any image necessary. And the spectacle of the Glory is like consuming fire and it is called the Shekhinah.

—Rabbi El'azar ben Yehudah of Worms

*We are the tree of life
in the Garden of Shekhinah
Singing a song of wonder and love
Ki hi m'kor ha bracha [because she is the source of blessing].*

—Hanna Tiferet Siegel

*Open to me, open your heart
let my Presence live in you
I am within you, all around you
I fill the universe
Open to me, open your heart
let my Presence live in you.*

—Aryeh Hirshfeld

Sit in a chair, on the ground, or on a meditation bolster—whatever is most comfortable for you, feet on the floor or in a lotus position, hands are resting on the thighs, palms facing upward. Eyes are closed, or if open, they are directed at a focal point. Take three deep breaths in, slowing down the breath with each exhale. As you feel yourself relax with each breath, allow the mind to unwind, taking note of

each thought that arises and falls away. If you feel the breath speeding up again, breath deeply, inhaling for a count of three, and exhaling for a count of six. After this, breath at a normal pace, becoming aware of the different sounds that are surrounding you, noticing each one, and allowing yourself to dissolve into the space around you.

Now imagine that you are outside, walking leisurely on a warm, sunny day. You may be walking on a beach, in a forest, in a field—whatever feels most in tune with you—continuing to walk calmly and slowly, you breath in the clean, fresh air, noticing the scents that are accompanying you on your walk—sweet flowers maybe, or dry, herbal grass, or the salty sea. As you walk you become aware of the breeze caressing your cheeks or arms—feeling the warmth of the air on your skin, tingling it as you proceed forward.

As you continue walking on whatever path you are on, in the environment of your choosing, you come upon a lush vineyard, abundant in sumptuous looking clusters of grapes, adorned with bright green leaves and vines. You feel overwhelmed in its beauty and feel the need to sit down. Finding a shady spot you sit, and as you do so, you feel the soft earth beneath you, embracing the shape of your body.

As you settle into your spot in the vineyard, you take a deep breath and feel complete gratitude for this moment, and you smile, feeling your heart opening up as you do so, your chest pointing upward to the sky, arms and hands reaching outward, as if you are saying “thank you” with your body. You smile again and settle your body back into its natural position. As you take another deep breath, breathing in

the sweet air, you repeat to yourself the following words, “May I be open to receiving the abundance of this earth.” Inhaling and exhaling again, you say to yourself, “May I be open to receiving divine connection.” Inhaling and exhaling once more, you say to yourself “May I be open to receiving love so that I may manifest divine union in this world.”

With this final deep breath you are able to affirm for yourself the blessing of awareness and openness within. You look around and admire the magnificence of the vineyard you are in, smiling once again in gratitude, and arise from your place. You begin the journey back to where you started, walking slowly, following you’re your path. As you head back, you feel a sense of renewed wonder and awe at the world, feeling ready to partner with the divine in creating and maintaining a beautiful world of love, splendor, and abundance.

Chapter 8

1. If only you were my brother,
Who nursed at my mother’s breast,
I could kiss you if I found you outside, in public,
And they would not shun or punish me.
2. I would lead you,
I would escort you, to my mother’s house—
The one who taught me,
I would give you spiced wine to drink,
And offer you my pomegranate nectar.
3. His left hand is placed lovingly under my head,

- And his right is embracing me, pulling me close.
4. Oh daughters of Jerusalem,
Promise me: Do not disturb, or wake us
Until we are through with our lovemaking.²⁰
 5. Who is she that is ascending from the desert,
Leaning on her beloved?
Beneath the apricot tree,
Where your mother conceived you,
Where you were born,
Is where I will arouse you.
 6. Set and bind me as a seal on your heart,
Just like the seal on your arm,
For love is as strong as death,
Desire as intense and fierce as the grave,
Its sparks are a blazing fire,
A devouring flame.
 7. Endless seas and floods,
Torrents and rivers
Never put out love's
Infinite fires.

²⁰ Shapiro, Rabbi Rami. Embracing the Divine Feminine—Finding God Through the Ecstasy of Physical Love—The Song of Songs Annotated and Explained. This verse is quite similar to the one in 2:6-7, with a couple of differences. As Shapiro explains: "In this passage the charge to the daughters of Jerusalem is stronger, and all references to gazelles and wild deer are missing. The result is a more intense image of the union of Wisdom and her lover. There is nothing abstract, metaphoric, or even poetic here. It is a flat out command: do not interrupt us!" Pg. 120.

- Those who think that wealth
Can buy them love
Only play the fool
And meet with scorn.²¹
8. “We have a little sister,
who has no breasts.
What will we do for our sister
When she is sought after by those who desire her?
9. If she is a wall,
We will build a silver turret on her.
And if she is a door,
We will craft cedar beams upon her.”
10. I am a wall,
And my breasts are towers!
And so I became, in his eyes,
A refuge of peace.
11. Solomon has a vineyard
In Ba'al-Hamon.
He gave that vineyard to watchmen
And each would earn one thousand pieces of silver
For its fruit.

²¹ For this verse I felt strongly in using Marcia Falk's interpretation, rather than creating my own. I did an overview of the other versions that I've been consulting and, for me, Falk's spoke to me directly, with conviction and ease. She captures the Hebrew poetry and all of its nuances with perfect imagery and succinctness.

12. My vineyard is all my own,
The thousand are yours, Solomon,
And pay two hundred to the watchmen of the fruit.
13. Woman who sits in the gardens,
Friends listen to your voice,
Let me hear it!
14. Hurry, my beloved,
Be as swift as a gazelle,
Or a young stag
To the hills of spices!

A Prayer to the Shekhinah—Alicia Ostriker²²

Come be our mother we are your young ones
Come be our bride we are your lover
Come be our dwelling we are your inhabitants
Come be our game we are your players
Come be our punishment we are your sinners
Come be our ocean we are your swimmers
Come be our victory we are your army
Come be our laughter we are your story
Come be our Shekhinah we are your glory
We believe that you live
Though you delay we believe you will certainly come

When the transformation happens as it must
When we remember
When she wakes from her long repose in us
When she wipes the nightmare
Of history from her eyes
When she returns from exile
When she utters her voice in the streets
In the opening of the gates
When she enters the modern world
When she crosses the land
Shaking her breasts and hips
With timbrels and with dances
Magnified and sanctified
Exalted and honored
Blessed and glorified
When she causes tyranny
To vanish
When she and he meet
When they behold each other face to face
When they become naked and not ashamed
On that day will our God be One
And their name One

Shekhinah bless us and keep us
Shekhinah shine your face on us
Shekhinah turn your countenance
To us and give us peace

²² Novick, Rabbi Leah. On the Wings of the Shekhinah—Rediscovering Judaism's Divine Feminine.
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