



**MRS. LEAH FEINBERG**

OU ISRAEL FACULTY

Torat Imecha  
**NACH YOMI**

בס"ד

# Love and Repentance

On Tzom Gedaliah, we concluded our study of Sefer Iyov and began our study of Shir HaShirim as we ushered in Shabbat Shuvah. Shir HaShirim is a poetic rendering of the immutable love between Hashem and the Jewish people, represented by the metaphorical love between a man and woman.

Rav Kook, in his introduction to Shir HaShirim, cites the teaching of the Kuzari that Shabbat cleanses us of the accumulated stresses and distractions that cloud the pure relationship between the Neshama and its Creator, just as the weekly sacrifices offered by Iyov attempted to exonerate his sons from any sins they may have committed while feasting. Since Shabbat signifies the intimate relationship between Hashem and the Jewish people, we experience an arousal to repentance as Shabbat approaches, both

individually and nationally; thus many people embrace the custom of reciting Shir HaShirim at the onset of Shabbat, expressing the longing we feel for the restoration of our intimate relationship with Hashem

Rabbi Akiva taught that the world was never as worthy as the day upon which Shir HaShirim was given to Israel; all the writings (of Tanach) are holy, but Shir HaShirim is the holy of holies.<sup>1</sup>

There is no sufficient imagery to express the love between Hashem and the Jewish nation other than the love between man and woman, and no language to express the magnitude of that love other than that of the Beit HaMikdash. According to the Zohar, Shir HaShirim was composed by Shlomo HaMelch upon the completion of the building of the Temple, when the upper and lower spheres were united. On that day, there was no greater joy before the Holy One blessed be He, since the day of Creation.<sup>2</sup>

Rav Aviner teaches that in Shir HaShirim we apprehend that which the Jewish nation saw upon their pilgrimage to the Beit HaMikdash, when the doors to the Holy of Holies were opened and we witnessed the Keruvim atop the Aron HaKodesh. If the Keruvim, which had male and female likenesses, were facing one another in an embrace, then we knew with certainty that the loving relationship between Hashem and the Jewish people was in good standing; if, Heaven

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1. משנה ידים ג:

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forbid, they were turned away from one another, we knew that the relationship was in trouble. This image of love is expressed in Shir HaShirim, which according to Rashi expresses the entire history of the relationship between Hashem and the Jewish nation.<sup>3</sup>

Rav Kook further teaches that it is highly significant that it was precisely Rabbi Akiva who likened Shir HaShirim to the Holy of Holies. Whereas a base and materialistic soul might erroneously view Shir HaShirim as a literal expression of sensual love between man and woman, Rabbi Akiva, who experienced a most loving relationship with his wife, was able to translate that ephemeral love into an exalted expression of eternal love, ultimately sacrificing his very life for the sanctification of G-d. Rabbi Akiva's sublime soul enabled him to experience the embrace of Hashem even while being tortured by the Romans. Who better than him to reveal the true holiness of this sacred text?

It is fortuitous that our study of Shir HaShirim coincides with the Aseret Yemei Teshuvah. In the concluding chapter of Hilchot Teshuvah, the Rambam discusses the allegory of Shir HaShirim, explaining that our goal is to serve Hashem with the kind of love-sickness that Shlomo HaMelech describes in Shir HaShirim. We aspire to perform Mitzvot out of pure love for Hashem, not

out of a desire for reward or fear of consequences should we fall short. We should feel intimately connected with Hashem, so much so that we can't separate our thoughts from Him for even an instant. The way to attain such love is through knowledge and understanding of His ways; the more we study and apprehend Hashem, the more our love for Him will increase, until like Rabbi Akiva, we merit to fulfill the dictum of loving Hashem with all our heart and soul.<sup>4</sup>

May this season of Teshuvah be enhanced through our study, and may we merit to once again experience the revelation of the Holy of Holies upon Aliyah laRegel in the newly rebuilt Beit HaMikdash, במהרה בימינו. ■

4. רמב"ם, הלכות תשובה פרק י' הלכות א,ג,ו.

**Mrs. Leah Feinberg** is a master educator who taught at the SKA High School for Girls in Hewlett for twenty-one years, also serving as Tanach Department chairperson and New Teacher Mentor. Leah is currently on the faculty of the OU Israel Center and has taught in all three cycles of the OU Women's Initiative Nach Yomi program

In the **OU Women's Initiative Nach Yomi series**, currently in its third cycle, women scholars deliver a daily shiur on the books of Prophets (Neviim) and Writings (Ketuvim) at the pace of a chapter a day. Shiurim are geared toward learners of all levels who would like to participate in the two-year Nach Yomi study cycle. Visit the OU Women's Initiative to register for additional content.

3. הרב שלמה אבינר, פירוש לשיר השירים א

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