

Song of Songs 4:1-5:1

Man:

- ¹ How beautiful you are, my love,
how very beautiful!
Your eyes are doves
behind your veil.
Your hair is like a flock of goats,
moving down the slopes of Gilead.
² Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes
that have come up from the washing,
all of which bear twins,
and not one among them is bereaved.
³ Your lips are like a crimson thread,
and your mouth is lovely.
Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate
behind your veil.
⁴ Your neck is like the tower of David,
built in courses;
on it hang a thousand bucklers,
all of them shields of warriors.
⁵ Your two breasts are like two fawns,
twins of a gazelle,
that feed among the lilies.
⁶ Until the day breathes
and the shadows flee,
I will hasten to the mountain of myrrh
and the hill of frankincense.
⁷ You are altogether beautiful, my love;
there is no flaw in you.
- ⁸ Come with me from Lebanon, my bride;
come with me from Lebanon.
Depart from the peak of Amana,
from the peak of Senir and Hermon,
from the dens of lions,
from the mountains of leopards.
⁹ You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride,
you have ravished my heart

- with a glance of your eyes,
with one jewel of your necklace.
¹⁰ How sweet is your love, my sister, my bride!
how much better is your love than wine,
and the fragrance of your oils than any spice!
¹¹ Your lips distil nectar, my bride;
honey and milk are under your tongue;
the scent of your garments is like the scent of
Lebanon.
¹² A garden locked is my sister, my bride,
a garden locked, a fountain sealed.
¹³ Your channel is an orchard of pomegranates
with all choicest fruits,
henna with nard,
¹⁴ nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon,
with all trees of frankincense,
myrrh and aloes,
with all chief spices—
¹⁵ a garden fountain, a well of living water,
and flowing streams from Lebanon.
¹⁶ Awake, O north wind,
and come, O south wind!
Blow upon my garden
that its fragrance may be wafted abroad.
- Woman:**
Let my beloved come to his garden,
and eat its choicest fruits.
- Man:**
⁵ I come to my garden, my sister, my bride;
I gather my myrrh with my spice,
I eat my honeycomb with my honey,
I drink my wine with my milk.
- Chorus:** Eat, friends, drink,
and be drunk with love.

Meditation

This poem is usually attributed to the man, counterpointing the woman's voice in Chapter 3 and culminating in the choric exhortation in 5:1, which some scholars believe was a conventional feature of ancient wedding poems. The detail with which the man describes the woman's body follows the conventions of the *wasf*, a genre of ancient Middle Eastern love poetry. While the images may seem strange to us, they create an intricate pattern that does two things. First, it is a way of expressing a love that encompasses, and indeed recreates, the world. Paradoxically, this private love includes all the world; together, the lovers are not cut off from the world but rather are more deeply connected to it. Second, the images continue the juxtaposition of the pastoral and the urban, interior and exterior, wildness and domesticity. Robert Alter suggests that Lebanon has the connotation of a land that is distant and wild, a place—like their love-- beyond the boundaries of what is familiar and safe.

This poem by Mary Oliver is a modern expression of this chapter's spiritual meaning :

Mary Oliver, "Mysteries, Yes"

*Truly, we live with mysteries
too marvelous
to be understood.
How grass can be nourishing in the mouths of the lambs.
How rivers and stones are forever
in allegiance with gravity
while we ourselves dream
of rising.
How two hands touch and the
bonds will
never be broken.
How people come, from
delight or the
scars of damage,
to the comfort of a poem.

Let me keep my distance, always,
from those who think they have the
answers.
Let me keep company always with those
who say
"Look!" and laugh in astonishment,
and bow their heads.*