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Kol Rinah  
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Do you know that picture which can either be the face of an old woman or a young woman, depending on how you look at it? Once you see one image, you have to stare for a while to be able to see the other image in the picture. <http://www.grand-illusions.com/opticalillusions/woman/>

So what is the image, truly? Is it of an old woman or a young woman? The truth is, it portrays both, depending on how you look at it.

But it cannot be both simultaneously. We can only see one image at a time.

With a text, however, our mind is more flexible. We can see options in words more easily than we can in images.

But we have to want to see the multiple meanings, the different layers. Because we can choose to ignore them.

Let's spend a few minutes with two delightful verses of Song of Songs. I want to read them on three different levels, but I think they have deep truths to teach us, on each level.

This is the first little dialogue in the Song of Songs. It's chapter 1, verses 7 and 8:

*Tell me, whom I love so, where you pasture your flock at noon, lest I go straying after the flocks of your companions. –If you do not know, O fairest of women, go out in the tracks of the sheep and graze your goats by the shepherd's shelter (Song of Songs 1:7-8).*

The woman asks her love where he pastures his flock during the afternoon, so she doesn't wander into the company of his companions, as opposed to him. He suggests, flirtatiously, that she follow his sheep's tracks.

This is lovely lovers' banter. New love, unabashed—not hidden at night, but in the light of day, of noon.

Don't we all long for that playfulness in our relationships? And that intensity of feeling too? Wherever we are in lives, we can be playful, and also have strong feelings within a relationship—whether the relationship is familial, platonic or romantic.

Second level of interpretation. Jewish tradition interprets all of Song of Songs not as being about two human lovers, but as being about God and the people Israel. Rashi, in his commentary on Shir HaShirim, recasts the entire Song according to that allegory.

The people Israel are asking God, "You, who we love, we are your flock. Where will you give us a place to rest in our exile, among the companions, the nations of the world?" God responds, "If you do not know where you should rest and be saved from the hand of those who oppress you, ponder the ways of your early ancestors who accepted my Torah and kept my laws..."

Follow the tracks of the sheep—which are the tracks of our ancestors, follow the Torah, which will keep us safe, suggests God, according to Rashi.

This expresses the anxiety of historical reality, according to scholar Michael Fishbane. Jews are worried about how we're going to be safe, in *galut*, exile, from our homeland, amongst the nations of the world, and the answer, we are reassured, is that safety comes

through Torah. Follow the paths of those who came before us, and will be led to the right places, to safe places.

Our own collective anxieties, fears and worries as Jews, about our Jewish continuity, about assimilation, about anti-Semitism, are anything but new, we are reminded. And the way to meet our challenges today is the same as it has always been—engagement with Torah, with our tradition. It will lead us to safe passage, safe pastures. We may need to change the vernacular, adapt, recreate for a new time and new generations. But the tracks always lead back to the wellspring of our tradition, to Torah.

This is a classic Jewish move—the return to Torah, and to tradition, but for all its familiarity and commonness, it’s something I find I do over and over and over again, to great comfort.

Let’s do one more reading of these two little verses, but let’s make them about us as post-modern spiritual seekers. Maybe it goes like this: “Tell me, ineffable one of spirit, how I find you in the light of day, when it’s not dark and mysterious. Because I’m worried that in looking for you I’ll find all the wrong things, and mistake them for you.”

How do we find holiness not in the occasional moments of our lives, but in the bright sunshine of noon, every day? How do we bring those moments of sacredness that we experience when things are dark, or dim, to the light of day? And we’re concerned that we’ll stray from the right path, get distracted by Facebook, or exercise, or work, or a million things that can fill us, but not fully satisfy us.

*If you do not know, O fairest of women, go out in the tracks of the sheep and graze your goats by the shepherd’s shelter*

The answer is not a direct instruction of how to find the one sought after. First, the doubt, the state of not knowing, is affirmed and validated. Then, we are told, find other seekers, other sheep, and spend some time out looking in the fields. Graze your goats—see what provides nourishment to what you value, to what you are responsible for. And do it near the tents of the shepherds—near others who are seeking, like you are. See who you’ll find, see what you’ll find.

So what is this verse really about? Playful lovers? An anxious Israel and a somewhat reassuring God? Each of us, looking for sustained spirituality?

For me, it’s about all of these, and more. Every Jewish text, everything, is in some way, about regular people, about our cosmic, historical, collective, covenantal relationship, and about ourselves, us—as individuals.

It just takes a little unpacking, of some words, and a little unpacking, of ourselves. Shabbat shalom.

### **שיר השירים פרק א**

(ו) הגידה לי שְׁאֵהָבָה נִפְשִׁי אֵיכָה תִרְעָה אֵיכָה תִרְבִּיץ בְּצִהְרֵי שְׁלֹמֹה אֶהְיֶה כְּעֹטֶיָה עַל עֲדְרֵי חֲבָרִיד :  
(ח) אִם לֹא תִדְעֵי לָךְ הַיָּפָה בְּנָשִׁים צְאִי לָךְ בְּעֵקְבֵי הַצֹּאן וְרַעֲי אֶת גְּדֵי תִינֹד עַל מְשֻׁכְּנוֹת הָרָעִים : ט