

11 For now the winter is past,
The rains are over and gone.
12 The blossoms have appeared in the land,
The time of pruning has come;
The song of the turtledove
Is heard in our land.
13 The green figs form on the fig tree,
The vines in blossom give off fragrance.
Arise, my darling;
My fair one, come away!

11 כִּי־הִגָּה הַסֵּתוּי עָבַר
הַגֶּשֶׁם חָלַף הַלֶּקֶךְ לוֹ:
12 הַנְּצַנִּים נִרְאוּ בְּאֶרֶץ
עַת הַזְּמִיר הִגִּיעַ
וְקוֹל הַתּוֹר
נִשְׁמַע בְּאֶרְצוֹ:
13 הַתְּאֵנָה הַנֹּטָה פִּגְיָה
וְהַגִּפְנִים וְסִמְדָר נִתְנוּ רִיחַ
קוּמִי לְבִי לֵךְ רַעֲיָתִי
יִפְתִּי וּלְבִי־לֵךְ: ט

Peshat

11. The sequence begins with the passing of the cold, wet season—the verse's two clauses (about the winter and its rains) being complementary in nature (Riq).

winter This period is called *setav*, indicating the winter or rainy season (thus distinct from modern Hebrew "autumn"). This is the common sense in Aramaic (cf. Targum Onqelos at Gen. 8:22, where *horef*, "winter," is translated *sitva*).

12. *The blossoms...The song* The imagery evokes the character of the spring: the blossoms (*nitzanim*) are seen, and the voice or song (*qol*) of the turtledove is heard. Nature awakens in sight and sound.

time of pruning Or "singing" (Transl.). This clause *'eit ha-zamir biggi'a* bridges the verse's other two clauses. It is a play on the noun *zamir*.¹⁸¹ Pointing back to the first clause, it refers to pruning (see Lev. 25:3; Rashbam);¹⁸² pointing toward the last clause, it refers to singing (see Isa. 24:16; Rabbi Shlomoh; Riq; Ibn Ezra; and Rid).¹⁸³ These activities are inseparable emblems of springtime.

13. *The green figs form on the fig tree* Literally, "The fig [tree] forms its green fruit." The noun *te'enh* can denote either the tree or its fruit; here it must be the former.

green figs The fig is presented at the initial stage when the unripe fruit is in formation. The verb *hanetah* ("formed") indicates something

like a primary "swaddling" of the seed (cf. Gen. 50:2); the plural noun *pagim*, which in the Bible occurs only here, denotes "the fruit before it has ripened—as in Arabic" (Ibn Ezra).

The vines in blossom The phrase's unusual syntax follows the pattern of *ki ha-se'orah 'aviv ve-ha-pishtah giv'ol*, "for the barley was in the ear and the flax was in bud" (Exod. 9:31; Ginsburg).¹⁸⁴

in blossom The noun *semadar* is found only in the Song; it marks the budding of the vine (Ibn Janah; Ibn Ezra) or budding in general (cf. Targum Jonathan on Isa. 18:5).¹⁸⁵

give off fragrance The vines' palpable perfume (*natenu reiah*) reinforces the likelihood that the previous clause indicates that the figs are likewise ripening and beginning to exude an aroma. Both odors add to the aphrodisiac atmosphere. Moreover, the echo of *natan reiho* ("gave forth its fragrance") in 1:12 gives this image an added overtone (see above; and 7:14, below).

Stylistics. The male's speech is framed by an *inclusio*—the opening exhortation is repeated at the end. In both cases, the phrase is chiasmic in structure ("arise, my x | my x, and come away"). The appeal to go (*lekhi*) addressed to her (*lakh*) is repeated, which connotes insistent imploring.

Depictions of nature's revival are multiple. The fixed pattern is noun-plus-verb, with occasional augmentation. This sequence directs attention first to a feature of nature, then to the

transient characteristic emphasized (the passing of winter, the emergence of buds, and the smell of grape blossoms). In verses 11 and 12a the parallelisms are asyndetic (without any conjunction); whereas the clause in verse 12b opens with the conjunction *ve-* ("and"), and the parallel pair in verse 13 is similarly conjoined. In the first case, the conjunction joins seeing and hearing; in the second, the conjunction indicates the end of a series.

Derash

11-13. These verses continue the preceding historical vectors, providing reasons and motivations. Thus "the winter has passed" (v. 11) indicates that the 400 years of bondage decreed in the time of Abraham (Gen. 15:13) has expired (SongsR 2.xi.1);¹⁸⁶ "the rains are over" intimates that the most intense period of servitude is complete—this being 86 years (according to R. Tanḥum, SongsR *ibid.*; cf. Radal at PdRE 48), which tallies the time from the birth of Miriam to the Exodus¹⁸⁷ with the 86-day period of the heaviest winter rains (falling from the 17th of Heshvan to the 15th of Shevat; see Radal). The announcement (v. 12) that "the blossoms (*nitzanim*) have appeared in the land" means that the two victors (*ha-natzohot*),¹⁸⁸ Moses and Aaron, have made their appearance in the land of Egypt (SongsR 2.x.4); and the "the time of pruning" (*eit ha-zamir*) announces that the time for the "cutting off" of Egyptian idolatry has come, and that the occasion for the "song" of salvation has arrived (*ibid.* xii.1; for the dual valence of *zamir*, see Peshat). Finally, "the green figs" (v. 13) stand for "the sinners of Israel," who were enamored with Egyptian ways and refused to change (remaining unripe; SongsR 2.xiii.1); whereas the "vines in bloom" refer to those who repented and were redeemed at the Exodus (being of good "fragrance"; *ibid.*).

Midrashic tradition developed a close correlation between the patterns of nature and the historical and spiritual life of Israel. This is more than a transformation of natural cycles into historical sequences. It allowed teachers to think with natural metaphors and concretize the

birth of the nation and its redemptive flowering. Jews celebrate these correlations annually with the recitation of the Song on Passover. Ordinarily the planes of natural and historical existence are kept separate: one being earthly experience, the other cultural memory. On this festival, they are joined in mind and heart.

Remez

11-13. The voice that addresses the soul ("My Beloved") speaks now of the changing seasons. What might this mean to the seeker? Is it an allusion to temporality and the need to take stock? Or might it mean that the Beloved acknowledges that the soul has begun to ripen and emit a spiritual fragrance (Ibn Aqnin)?¹⁸⁹ If so, the sequence of natural growth suggests a certain sequence of growth (Ibn Tibbon), since spiritual development requires time and cultivation (Al-Fawwāl). For the individual rooted in natural existence¹⁹⁰ and yearning for a higher wisdom, the imagery of cold rains and sprouting shoots may suggest the often fruitless desolation of spiritual beginnings, and the slow growth of new habits and thoughts (Malbim).

Simultaneously, the imagery is also a prism for the natural self that experiences itself as reborn—like a budding flower or fragrant fruit. The soul senses its emergence and growth, its spiritual awakening and transformation (Ibn Aqnin; Al-Fawwāl). Now the awakened inner eye has a glimmer of truth (Immanuel). Through labor and grace, the soul gains insight and ascends the spiritual ladder toward God (Malbim).

Sod

11. *For now the winter is past* This "now" (*hinneih*) is spiritually correlated with "there (*hinneih*) he comes" in verse 8. The sudden immanence is depicted by the Beloved's voice. The first word spoken to the heart is that the winter "is past"—the period of spiritual dormancy is "over and gone" (*lo*—that is, "for its part"). The time is now. Beyond any "why" (Rilke), a new spiritual reality has beckoned.

Exile and isolation near their end (REzra). The soul may ascend to spiritual maturity (Ibn Sahula).

12. *The blossoms have appeared* The rebirth of the soul is a budding from its earthliness; for one doesn't rescind embodiment on the spiritual path.¹⁹¹ Natural processes offer a valid analogue to the soul's renaissance. There is now a coming into appearance (sight); a pruning of excess (spiritual discipline); and a joyful exuberance of speech (song). All this is the new configuration: a breaking into view; a harnessing of possibilities; and a bursting of sound. All the senses are transfigured. A spiritual restoration is at hand (REzra); a spiritual maturation is occurring (Ibn Sahula).

13. Worldly bounty further intoxicates the senses: "figs form," with aromas and succulent seeds; "the vines . . . blossom" and exude "fragrance." These are signs that one's soul is coming to fruition. A Voice bids the soul to hasten. The earlier call resounds (v. 10), in the very same terms. Between that first call and the second (v. 13) was an explanation (*ki hinneih*, "For now [or: behold]"; v. 11). This is the flicker of rationality that tries to justify the event. At the core is a divine call—transcendent and exacting. Can the soul respond? Can it develop (Ibn Sahula)? Can one's entire being become a song of divine praise (Z. 1:97a-b)?