ASTORIA CENTER OF ISRAEL
Judaism With Open Arms

Pesah: A Heart of Many Rooms

Rabbi Joshua Rabin, Astoria Center of Israel, Astoria, New York[1]

Shir HaShirim 7:9	
אָמַרְתִּי אֶעֱלֶה בְתָמָר אֹחֲזָה בְּסַנְסִנָּיו וְיִהְיוּ־נָא שָׁדַיִךְ כְּאֶשְׁכְּלוֹת הַגָּפֶן וְרֵיחַ אַפֵּךְ כַּתַּפּוּחִים:	I say: Let me climb the palm, Let me take hold of its branches; Let your breasts be like clusters of grapes, Your breath like the fragrance of apples,

1. All of Israel

Bavli Sanhedrin 93a	
אָמַר רַבִּי שְׁמוּאֵל בַּר נַחְמָנִי אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹנָתָן: מַאי דִּכְתִיב ״אָמַרְתִּי אֶעֱלֶה בְתָמָר אֹחֲזָה בְּסַנְסִנָּיו״? ״אָמַרְתִּי אֶעֱלֶה בְתָמָר״ – אֵלּוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְעַכְשָׁיו לֹא עָלָה בְּיָדִי אֶלָּא סַנְסַן אֶחָד שֶׁל חֲנַנְיָה מִישָׁאֵל וַעֲזַרְיָה.	**Rabbi Shmuel bar Naḥmani says** that **Rabbi Yonatan says** on a similar note: **What** is the meaning of that **which is written: “I said: I will climb into the palm tree; I will grasp its boughs”** (Song of Songs 7:9)? **“I said: I will climb into the palm tree”; this is** a reference to **the Jewish people,** who are likened to a palm tree, as they are upright and have one heart directed toward their Father in Heaven. God continues: **And now** that I have tested them by means of the decrees of Nebuchadnezzar, **I have succeeded** in grasping **in My hand only** the **one bough of Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah,** as only they were willing to give their lives.

Rashi on Shir HaShirim 7:9	
אָמַרְתִּי אֶעֱלֶה בְתָמָר. מִתְפָּאֵר אֲנִי בֵּין חֲיָלוֹת שֶׁל מַעְלָה בָּכֶם, שֶׁאֶתְעַלֶּה וְאֶתְקַדֵּשׁ עַל יְדֵיכֶם בַּתַּחְתּוֹנִים, שֶׁתְּקַדְּשׁוּ אֶת שְׁמִי בֵּין הָאֻמּוֹת:	**I said, I will ascend the palm tree.** I boast of you among the heavenly hosts, that I will be exalted and sanctified through your actions in the earthly abodes, when you will sanctify My Name among the nations.

2. Some of Israel

Bavli Sanhedrin 93a	
הַקְרֵב אֶת מַטֵּה לֵוִי וגו' (במדבר ג, ו), הֲדָא הוּא דִּכְתִיב (תהלים צב, יג יד): צַדִּיק כַּתָּמָר יִפְרָח וגו' שְׁתוּלִים בְּבֵית ה' וגו', צַדִּיק כַּתָּמָר יִפְרָח, מָה הַתָּמָר הַזֶּה צְלָלָהּ רָחוֹק, כָּךְ מַתַּן שְׂכָרָן שֶׁל צַדִּיקִים	**“The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Bring the tribe of Levi near and stand it before Aaron the priest, and they shall serve him” (Numbers 3:5–6).** “Bring the tribe of Levi near” – that is what is written: “The righteous man will blossom like a palm tree; [like a

[1] All translations are from Sefaria, unless otherwise noted.

רָחוֹק מֵהֶם עַד לָעוֹלָם הַבָּא. מָה הַתָּמָר הַזּוּ עוֹשָׂה תְּמָרִים רְטוּבִים, נִיקוֹלַוְוסִין, נוֹבְלוֹת, וְעוֹשָׂה סוֹלִין. כָּךְ הֵם יִשְׂרָאֵל יֵשׁ בָּהֶם בְּנֵי תוֹרָה וְיֵשׁ בָּהֶם עַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ, וְיֵשׁ בָּהֶם בּוּרִים. מָה הַתְּמָרָה הַזּוּ יֵשׁ בָּהֶם נוֹבְלוֹת שֶׁאֵינָן נִכְנָסוֹת לָאוֹצָר וְעוֹשָׂה תְּמָרִים וְהֵם נִכְנָסוֹת לָאוֹצָר, כָּךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּשֶׁהָיוּ בַּמִּדְבָּר מֵהֶם נִכְנָסוּ לְאֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵהֶם לֹא נִכְנָסוּ. מָה הַתְּמָרָה הַזּוּ עוֹשָׂה תְּמָרִים וְעוֹשָׂה קוֹצִים וְכָל מִי שֶׁהוּא מְבַקֵּשׁ לִגְבּוֹת תְּמָרִים הַקּוֹצִים שֶׁיֵּשׁ בָּהּ שׁוֹלְטִין בּוֹ, כָּךְ הֵם הַצַּדִּיקִים כָּל מִי שֶׁאֵינוֹ מְשַׁמֵּר עַצְמוֹ מֵהֶם נִשְׁיָכָתָן נְשִׁיכַת שׁוּעָל, וַעֲקִיצָתָן עֲקִיצַת עַקְרָב, וּלְחִישָׁתָן לְחִישַׁת שָׂרָף, וְאַף כָּל דִּבְרֵיהֶם כְּגַחֲלֵי אֵשׁ.	cedar in Lebanon, he will grow tall]. Planted in the House of the Lord, [they will blossom in the courtyards of our God]" (Psalms 92:13–14). "The righteous man will blossom like a palm tree" – just as this palm tree, its shade is far removed, so, the righteous, the granting of their reward is far removed from them, until the World to Come. Just as this palm tree produces juicy, *nikolaos*, and unripe dates, and produces thorns, so are Israel: there are Torah personalities among them, there are plain citizens among them, and there are ignoramuses among them. Just as on this palm tree there are unripe dates that do not enter the storehouse and it produces dates and they enter the storehouse, so, Israel, when they were in the wilderness, some of them entered the Land of Israel and some of them did not enter. Just as this palm tree produces dates and produces thorns, and anyone who seeks to steal dates, the thorns that are on it grip him, so are the righteous: anyone who does not protect himself from them, their bite is the bite of a snake, their sting is the sting of a scorpion, their hiss is the hiss of a serpent. And all their statements are like fiery coals.
דָּבָר אַחֵר, מַה תְּמָרָה זוֹ אֵין בָּהּ פְּסוֹלֶת אֶלָּא תְּמָרִים לַאֲכִילָה, לוּלָבִין לְהַלּוּל, חֲרָיוֹת לְסִכּוּךְ, סִיבִים לַחֲבָלִים, סַנְסַנִּים לַכְּבָרָה, שִׁפְעַת קוֹרוֹת לִקְרוֹת בָּהֶן אֶת הַבַּיִת. כָּךְ הֵם יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵין בָּהֶם פְּסֹלֶת אֶלָּא מֵהֶם בַּעֲלֵי מִקְרָא, מֵהֶם בַּעֲלֵי מִשְׁנָה, מֵהֶם בַּעֲלֵי אַגָּדָה, מֵהֶם בַּעֲלֵי מִצְוֹות, מֵהֶם בַּעֲלֵי צְדָקוֹת וְכָל הָעִנְיָן…	Another matter: Just as this palm tree has no waste, but rather, dates for eating, soft branches for extolment, hard branches for roofing, bast for ropes, leaves for a sieve, planks to roof the house, so are Israel: they have no waste, but rather, some of them are masters of Bible, some of them are masters of Mishna, some of them are masters of *aggada*, some are performers of mitzvot, some are givers of charity, and so on. Another matter: Just as this palm tree, its heart is directed upward, so, Israel, their heart is directed to their Father in Heaven, as it is stated: "My eyes are always toward the Lord, for He takes my feet from the net" (Psalms 25:15)....

Tzror Ha'Mor on Shir HaShirim 7:9	
אעלה בתמר. הנני מבטיח לך שאפי' לא יהי' צדקתך רק מעט כתמר אסייע לך ואקדש אותך ואעלה בך ואשרה שכינתי עליך:	**"I will climb the date palm"** – I promise you that even if your righteousness is only as minimal as that of the date palm, I will support you, sanctify you, elevate you, and cause My Presence to dwell upon you.

3. A Heart of Many Rooms

Rabbi David Hartman, *A Heart of Many Rooms: Celebrating the Many Voices Within Judaism*
Rabbinic Judaism was fully aware of the various risks that Jewish communal spirituality entailed. When one strives to build one's spiritual life within a living community, one must give up viewing religion in terms of salvation of the soul; one must be spiritually prepared to take great risks and make compromises. If one does not do that, one cannot build a relationship to God within the framework of community. In Judaism, love for God must lead to a love for real people. One who can love only an idealized community of the elect remains the victim of messianic abstractions, unable to embrace the community of real Jews in this imperfect world.

Big Question: Why might some commentaries emphasize the unity of the Jewish people and others its diversity?