

The Five Books

חֲמֵשׁ מִגִּילוֹת

SPS Draft

The Five Books

חֲמֵשׁ מְגִלּוֹת

קֹהֶלֶת Kohelet

אֶסְתֵּר Ester

שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים Shir HaShirim

רוּת Rut

אֵיכָה Eicha

*A new translation based on traditional and contemporary sources
with full transliteration and notes
by Irrev. Dr. Joe Lewis*

*The Singlish™ Publication Society
www.SinglishPS.com*

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Hebrew text based on the Westminster Leningrad Codex, by the J. Alan Groves Center for Advanced Biblical Research*

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Distinguished rabbis of Venice endorsed Salomone Rossi's copyright when he published "The Song of Songs" in 1623, threatening any Jewish person who stole or bought stolen intellectual property with:

The decree of angels,	גְּזֵרַת עִירִין	gezerat irin
the sentence of the holy ones,	וּמֵימַר קַדִּישִׁין	umeimar kadishin,
with the biting snake.	בְּנַחֲשׁ הַנוֹשֶׁךְ	banachash hanoshech

I am grateful to Professor Marty Herman for bringing this early copyright warning to my attention, and I hope that anyone who is tempted to copy this work without permission will think better of it! For a copyright violation is a bit like a snakebite: it may seem like nothing at first, but it can spread through the body and grow until it's out of control. So it is with the theft of intellectual property: by the time the author finds out it's happened, it's very difficult to stop. So please, if you want to copy part of this book, ask first. Thank you.

Introduction

The Five Megillot, five “scrolls,” are five short books of Hebrew scripture that form part of Jewish seasonal liturgy.

Hebrew scripture in traditional manuscript form has no vowels or cantillation marks; these are in the Masoretic (“traditional”) version, which is the printed version. Sometimes the print version is changed for emendation or other reasons; we mark these changes in notes on the Hebrew text.

A manuscript has no verse or paragraph marks. Some lines are written with a gap, with more words on the same line; other lines are left blank after a few words. These are “closed” and “open” divisions, also noted in the Hebrew text.

We read the Speaker’s Book (usually known as Ecclesiastes) first during our year, on the Shabbat of Sukkot, sated with the harvest festival’s abundance and wondering after all the struggles to make a living whether there’s any point to it all. Depression can follow great effort and achievement; we sometimes question the value of all our toil and wonder if we can repeat success. In an agricultural society, there’s an extra dimension: farmers know that success depends on factors beyond human ability—weather, soil and the mysterious fertility of nature. The limit of human influence, the valuation of human achievement, these are themes of the Speaker’s Book.

At Purim, in early spring, we read the Book of Ester (usually written as Esther), a story of Persian Jews saved from hatred. God is not mentioned in the book, but just as the unseen force of fertility prepares to display its seasonal splendor, so (we may say) does God’s invisible influence underlie the deliverance of the Jews.

The Best Song (usually known as The Song of Songs) is a springtime poem; we read it on the Shabbat of Pesach, when nature is roused to profusion. The story of the Exodus displays God’s

love and faithful commitment to the Hebrew people for all the world to see, and this book of erotic poems publicizes the love and commitment of a young couple. Small wonder that our tradition views this book as an allegory of God’s love for us, and may our love for God be as fervent and steadfast!

In the height of summer, at Shavuot, we read the story of Rut (usually spelled Ruth), a pastoral idyll. Shavuot is often considered the time when we received the Torah and when we who were delivered from Egypt finally became Jews. Rut herself joins the Jewish community, and she becomes the progenitor of King David.

Later in the summer, as we mourn the destruction of the First and Second Temples on the Ninth of Av, we read the book of Lamentations. This ancient book is one of the saddest tales in literature. Some of the scenes it describes are harshly inhuman, hard for tender souls to comprehend, but such are the consequences of war. If we learn from our tradition that divisive factions among our own people brought about our national disaster, perhaps we will heed the lesson and work for Jewish unity.

The translation is new, and I’m happy when it offers an alternative interpretation to standard translations. Translators make the best sense they can out of the original, and though some translations are enshrined by hoary tradition or admired for fidelity to new understanding of ancient language or cherished for their beauty, I think fresh possibilities can deepen understanding of the Hebrew text.

A more capable person would have made a better book, but I’ve done my best. I’ll be well rewarded if this book helps someone understand, enjoy and participate in Jewish tradition.

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Table of Contents

THE SPEAKER'S BOOK ▪ קהלת ▪ KOHELET 10

Chapter 1.....	11
Chapter 2.....	14
Chapter 3.....	18
Chapter 4.....	22
Chapter 5.....	24
Chapter 6.....	28
Chapter 7.....	30
Chapter 8.....	34
Chapter 9.....	37
Chapter 10.....	41
Chapter 11.....	43
Chapter 12.....	45

THE BOOK OF ESTER ▪ אֶסְתֵּר ▪ ESTER..... 50

Chapter 1.....	51
Chapter 2.....	56
Chapter 3.....	63
Chapter 4.....	67
Chapter 5.....	71
Chapter 6.....	74
Chapter 7.....	77
Chapter 8.....	79
Chapter 9.....	85
Chapter 10.....	92

THE BEST SONG ▪ שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים ▪ SHIR

HASHIRIM 94

Chapter 1.....	94
Chapter 2.....	96
Chapter 3.....	99
Chapter 4.....	101
Chapter 5.....	104
Chapter 6.....	107
Chapter 7.....	108
Chapter 8.....	111

THE BOOK OF RUT ▪ רוּת ▪ RUT..... 117

Chapter 1.....	118
Chapter 2.....	122
Chapter 3.....	127
Chapter 4.....	131

LAMENTATIONS ▪ אֵיכָה ▪ EICHA..... 137

Chapter 1.....	137
Chapter 2.....	142
Chapter 3.....	147
Chapter 4.....	153
Chapter 5.....	157

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The Speaker's Book

קַהֲלָה

The Speaker's Book • קהלת • Kohelet

The book takes its name from the word for congregation, so it's often translated as preacher, and we use Speaker. One can readily assume that Kohelet is the type of person who gathers a group (congregation) in order to address them with words of guidance, inspiration, admonition, and so on. However, it's hard to know how such a person fits the social context of Biblical times; maybe it's someone like one of the prophets.

The book is difficult to understand. I presume its idioms are lost to modern language. Its imagery must have been natural for those who practiced agriculture and commerce in ancient times, but parts of the book have long been considered allegory, and for us the flow and intention of the verses is often difficult. I have translated as best I could, but I look forward to future days when obscure points will become clearer.

The theme of the book is that all human activity is pointless since it ends in death; it's hard to argue with that, eh? The writer's advice is less embarrassing than advice from your (loving but clueless) parents, and the less palatable parts are open to interpretation; that must be why this book is a winner. (Oh, and for everyone who grew up in the 60s, there's the Pete Seeger song and the reference in *The Waste Land*.) Read this book and ponder the meaning and purpose of life, as if you were reading *Hamlet*.

We read this book on the Shabbat of Sukkot, which we think of as a harvest festival. Perhaps it warns proud harvesters that all their work leads to the grave; and perhaps it reflects the emotional slump that sometimes follows a grand achievement.

Scholars often consider this book part of ancient Wisdom literature, a genre popular for several centuries at the end of the Biblical period. Writers personified Wisdom to different degrees; in this book, wisdom is an ideal (often spurned by the ignorant); in Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, she is fully personified and visits the prisoner to bring him comfort. Wisdom is a personal ideal that can appeal to those who lead a contemplative life rather than running a business or a farm or a town.

I hope this version will help people who wish to study this book supply this version's deficiencies with their own better understanding.

Chapter 1

¹ Here are the topics¹ of Speaker,²

son of David, king in Jerusalem.³

² Pointless,⁴ just pointless (says Speaker);

Pointless, just pointless, it's all pointless.

³ What is the benefit for a person,

for all the work

he does under the sun?

⁴ One age passes, another comes,

while the land stays *the same* forever.

⁵ The sun rises, the sun sets,

eager to return to the place

from which it shone.

⁶ The wind heads south,

then turns to the North,

whirling, whirling goes the wind;

whirling, the wind returns to its start.

⁷ All rivers flow to the sea,

but the sea is not filled.

Toward the place where the rivers flow,

there they return to flow *again*.

דְּבַרֵי קֹהֶלֶת

בֶּן־דָּוִד מֶלֶךְ בִּירוּשָׁלַם

הַבֵּל הַבָּלִים אָמַר קֹהֶלֶת

הַבֵּל הַבָּלִים הַכֹּל הַבֵּל

מַה־יִּתְרוֹן לָאָדָם

בְּכָל־עֲמָלוֹ

שֵׁי־עָמַל תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ

דֹּר הֹלֵךְ וְדֹר בָּא

וְהָאָרֶץ לְעוֹלָם עֹמֶדֶת

וְזָרַח הַשָּׁמֶשׁ וּבָא הַשָּׁמֶשׁ

וְאֵל־מְקוֹמוֹ שׁוֹׁׁף

זֹרֵחַ הוּא שָׁם

הֹלֵךְ אֶל־דָּרוֹם

וְסוֹבֵב אֶל־צָפוֹן

סוֹבֵב | סֹבֵב הֹלֵךְ הָרֹחַ

וְעַל־סִבִּיבוֹתָיו שָׁב הָרֹחַ

כָּל־הַנְּחָלִים הַלְכִים אֶל־הַיָּם

וְהַיָּם אֵינֶנּוּ מֵלֵא

אֶל־מְקוֹם שֶׁהַנְּחָלִים הַלְכִים

שָׁם הֵם שׁוֹבִים לָלֶכֶת

Divrei Kohelet

ben David, melech blrushala'im.

Havel havalim, amar Kohelet;

havel havalim, hakol havel.

Mah yitron la'adam

bechol amalo

sheya'amol tachat hashamesh?

Dor holech vedor bah,

veha'aretz le'olam omadet.

Veazarach hashemesh uva hashemesh,

ve'el mekomo sho'ef

zore'ach hu sham.

Holech el darom

vesovev el tzaфон,

sovev, sovev, holech haru'ach,

ve'al sevivotav shav haru'ach.

Kol han'chalim hol'chim el hayam

vehayam einenu maleh;

el mekom shehan'chalim hol'chim,

sham hem shavim lalachtet.

¹ The Hebrew word דבר means word or matter or thing or topic.

² From the Hebrew for assembly or congregation; if it's a noun, it has a feminine ending, and if it's a name it means something like "one who organizes a rally." Translators often use the word "Preacher" because public preachers can draw a crowd (to see this today, try London's Hyde Park Corner).

³ "King in Jerusalem" may refer to David or to his son (usually thought to be Solomon).

⁴ The Hebrew הבל is a noun, pointlessness or futility, but the adjective "pointless" seems the most straightforward translation into English.

⁸ Every topic is exhausted.

Nobody has anything to say,
nobody can see it satisfactorily
and nobody can hear it through to the end.¹

⁹ What happened, that's what will happen;
what has been done, that's what will be done;
there's nothing new under the sun.

¹⁰ Take a topic of which someone claims,
“Look at this; it's new.”

No! It's been around forever;
it happened *long* before us.

¹¹ There's no remembering the old times;
and even the later times that are to come,
there will be no memory of them
along with what comes *still* later.²

¹² I'm the Speaker.

I was king over Israel,
in Jerusalem.

¹³ I devoted my thoughts³
to investigating and exploring wisdom,
through everything that's done
under the sun.

It's a tough task that God has given
for humanity to work on.⁴

כָּל־חֲדָבְרִים יָגֵעִים
לֹא־יֻחַל אִישׁ לְדַבֵּר
לֹא־תִשְׁבַּע עֵינָי לִרְאוֹת
וְלֹא־תִמְלֹא אָזְנוֹ מִשְׁמָע
מִה־שֶּׁהָיָה הוּא שֶׁיִּהְיֶה
וּמִה־שֶּׁנַּעֲשָׂה הוּא שֶׁיַּעֲשֶׂה
וְאֵין כָּל־חֲדָשׁ תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ
יֵשׁ דָּבָר שֶׁיֹּאמַר
רְאֵה־זֶה חֲדָשׁ הוּא
כְּבָר הָיָה לְעֹלָמִים
אֲשֶׁר הָיָה מִלְּפָנֵינוּ
אֵין זִכְרוֹן לִרְאשֹׁנִים
וְגַם לְאַחֲרֹנִים שֶׁיִּהְיוּ
לֹא־יִהְיֶה לָהֶם זִכְרוֹן
עִם שֶׁיִּהְיוּ לְאַחֲרָנָה
פ

אֲנִי קֹהֶלֶת
הָיִיתִי מֶלֶךְ עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל
בִּירוּשָׁלַם
וְנָתַתִּי אֶת־לִבִּי
לִדְרוֹשׁ וּלְתוֹר בְּחִכְמָה
עַל כָּל־אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה
תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם
הוּא אֲנִי רַע נָתַן אֱלֹהִים
לִבִּי הָאָדָם לַעֲנוֹת בּוֹ

Kol hadvarim yege'im;
lo yuchal ish ledaber,
lo tisbah ayim lirot
velo timaleh ozen mishmo'ah.
Mah shehayah, hu sheyiheyeh;
umah shena'asah hu sheye'aseh,
ve'ein kol chadash tachat hashamesh.
Yesh davar sheyomar,
“Re'eh zeh; chadash hu.”
Kevar hayah le'olamim,
asher hayah milfanenu.
Ein zichron larishonim,
vegam la'acharonim sheyiheyu
lo yiheyeh lahem zikaron
im sheyiheyu la'acharonah.
Ani Kohelet;
hayiti melech al Yisra'el
bIrushala'im.
Vanatati et libi
lidrosh velatur bachochmah,
al kol asher na'asah
tachat hashamayim.
Hu inyan rah natan Elohim
livnei ha'adam, la'anot bo.

¹ Or, “All topics are wearying. A person cannot speak, an eye cannot satisfy (or satisfy itself) with seeing, and the ear cannot be filled with hearing.” It's not clear whether the topics are exhausting because you can't get enough information or because you lack patience to hear it through.

² Oh, how the moderns are ignorant. They don't even know how to dial a rotary phone.

³ “Heart,” which the ancients thought was the seat of thinking powers.

⁴ לענות (root ענה) connotes “oppress” or “respond”; several translations would be possible.

¹⁴ I examined all the achievements
accomplished under the sun.

Look, it's all pointless
and heartbreak.¹

¹⁵ Something twisted can't be straightened,
and what's missing can't be counted.

¹⁶ I said to myself,
“Look, I increased
and added wisdom,
more than any that preceded me
as ruler over Jerusalem”;
my mind perceived
great wisdom and knowledge.

¹⁷ I devoted my thoughts to experiencing
wisdom and knowledge,
riddles and mystery²;
I knew that this too
would be grasping the wind.³

¹⁸ For in much wisdom is much bother;
more knowledge, more *headache*.⁴

רָאִיתִי אֶת־כָּל־הַמַּעֲשִׂים
שֶׁנַּעֲשׂוּ תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ
וְהִנֵּה הַכֹּל הֶבֶל
וְרֵעוּת רוּחַ

מֵעוּט לֹא יוּכַל לִתְקֹן
וְחֶסְרוֹן לֹא יוּכַל לִהְיוֹת
דִּבַּרְתִּי אֲנִי עִם־לִבִּי לֵאמֹר
אֲנִי הִנֵּה הִגְדַּלְתִּי

וְהוֹסַפְתִּי חֲכָמָה
עַל כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־הָיָה לִפְנֵי
עַל־יְרוּשָׁלַם
וּלְבִי רָאָה

הַרְבֵּה חֲכָמָה וְדַעַת
וְאַתְנָה לִבִּי לְדַעַת
חֲכָמָה וְדַעַת
הוֹלָלוֹת וְשִׁכְלוֹת

יָדַעְתִּי שֶׁגַם־זֶה הוּא
רַעְיוֹן רוּחַ

כִּי בְרוּב חֲכָמָה רַב־כָּעַס
וְיוֹסִיף דַּעַת יוֹסִיף מַכְאוֹב

Ra'iti et kol hama'asim
shena'asu tachat hashamesh,
vehineh hakol hevel
ure'ut ru'ach.

Me'uvat lo yuchal litkon,
vechesron lo yuchal lehimanot.

Dibarti ani im libi lemor,
“Ani, hineh, higdalti
vehosafti chochmah
al kol asher hayah lefanai
al Yerushala'im.”

Velibi ra'ah
harbeh chochmah vada'at.

Va'etnah libi lada'at
chochmah veda'at,
holelot vesichlut;
yadati shegam zeh hu
ra'yon ru'ach.

Ki berov chochmah rav ka'as,
veyosif da'at yosif mach'ov.

¹ The root רעה means tend, or associate with, or break, while רוח means wind, spirit or spacious; so many translations are possible for this phrase. I wouldn't pick “breaking wind” since I think it's an English idiom.

² Some translate “madness and folly,” but שכלות seems related to שכל (common sense that confronts and perhaps unravels confusing or mysterious problems) so הוללות seems more likely to mean something like cleverness. The root הלל means (among other things) “confound” so the plural noun can mean puzzles, enigmas, or posers.

³ This translation derives רעיון from the root רעה as in verse 14.

⁴ “And one who adds knowledge will add aching.”

Chapter 2

¹ I said to myself,

“Let’s see. I’ll try fun¹

and enjoy pleasure.”

See, this too is pointless.

² Amusements, I thought, were bizarre,

and as for fun, what’s the point?²

³ I finally thought³

to apply myself to *drinking* wine⁴

while my thoughts would head for wisdom

and lay hold of mystery,⁵

until I’d see

how this could benefit human beings,

who complete beneath the sky

the number of their life’s days.

⁴ I did great things:

built myself houses,

planted myself vineyards.

⁵ I made myself gardens and orchards

and planted in them trees of every fruit.

⁶ I made myself pools of water

with which to irrigate

a forest sprouting trees.

אֲמַרְתִּי אֲנִי בְלִבִּי

לְכַהֵן אָנֹכִי בְשִׂמְחָה

וּרְאֵה בְטוֹב

וְהִנֵּה גַם־הוּא הָבֵל

לִשְׂחֹק אֲמַרְתִּי מְהוֹלָל

וּלְשִׂמְחָה מַה־זֶּה עֹשֶׂה

תַּרְתִּי בְלִבִּי

לִמְשֹׁךְ בַּיַּיִן אֶת־בְּשָׂרִי

וּלְבִי נֹהֵג בַּחֲכָמָה

וּלְאִחֲזוֹ בְּסִכְלוֹת

עַד אֲשֶׁר־אֶרְאֶה

אִי־זֶה טוֹב לִבְנֵי הָאָדָם

אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשׂוּ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם

מִסָּפֶר יָמֵי חַיֵּיהֶם

הִגִּדְלִי מַעֲשֵׂי

בְּנִיתִי לִי בָתִּים

נִטַּעְתִּי לִי כֶרְמִים

עָשִׂיתִי לִי גִנּוֹת וּפְרָדֵסִים

וְנִטַּעְתִּי בָהֶם עֵץ כָּל־פְּרִי

עָשִׂיתִי לִי בְּרִכּוֹת מַיִם

לְהַשְׁקוֹת מֵהֶם

יַעַר צֹמַח עֲצִים

Amarti ani belibi,

“Lecha nah, anas’cha vesimcha

ure’ch vetov.”

Vehineh gam hu havel.

Lis’chok amarti meholal.

ulesimcha, mah zoh osah?

Tarti velibi

limshoch bayayin et besari,

velibi noheg bachochmah

vele’echoz besich’lut

ad asher ereh

ei zeh tov livnei ha’adam

asher ya’asu tachat hashamayim

mispar yemei chayeihem.

Higdalti ma’asai,

baniti li batim,

natati li keramim.

Asiti li ganot ufardesim

vanatati vahem etz kol peri.

Asiti li berechot mayim

lehashkot mehem

ya’ar tzome’ach etzim.

¹ “Go on, please. I’ll test *the experience* of fun ...”

² “What does this accomplish?”

³ “I drifted in my thoughts/heart.”

⁴ “To draw/attract to/with wine my flesh/body.”

⁵ Some translate this as “folly.” I think it’s related to שָׂקָל (common sense) as in 1:17.

⁷ I acquired male and female servants;

I had house-born slaves,

wealth in cattle and sheep, too.

I had lots,

more than ever were before me in Jerusalem.¹

⁸ I amassed gold and silver, too,

royal treasure and provincial taxes;

I made myself male and female singers,

the delights of human beings,

a wife² and mistresses.

⁹ I became great and had more

than all who preceded me in Jerusalem;

my wisdom, too, stayed with me.

¹⁰ Everything my eye fancied

I didn't resist;

I denied myself no pleasure

as I rejoiced in all I accomplished;

this was my reward for all my effort.

¹¹ I turned

to all I had accomplished,

all the effort I had expended,

and see, it was all pointless, heartbreak,

nothing gained under the sun.

קָנִיתִי עֲבָדִים וְשִׁפְחוֹת

וּבְנֵי-בֵית תְּנִה לִי

גַּם מִקְנֶה בָּקָר וצֹאן

הַרְבֵּה תְנִה לִי

מִכֹּל שֶׁהָיוּ לִפְנֵי בִירוּשָׁלָם¹

כָּנַסְתִּי לִי גַם-כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב

וּסְגֻלַּת מַלְכִּים וְהַמְדִּינוֹת

עָשִׂיתִי לִי שָׁרִים וְשָׁרוֹת

וְתַעֲנוּגֹת בְּנֵי הָאָדָם

שִׁדָּה וְשִׁדּוֹת

וְגָדַלְתִּי וְהוֹסַפְתִּי מִכֹּל

שֶׁהָיָה לִפְנֵי בִירוּשָׁלָם

אֶף חֹכְמַתִּי עָמְדָה לִי

וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר שָׁאֲלוּ עֵינַי

לֹא אֲצַלְתִּי מֵהֶם

לֹא-מָנַעְתִּי אֶת-לִבִּי מִכָּל-שִׂמְחָה

כִּי-לִבִּי שִׂמַּח מִכָּל-עֲמָלִי

וְזֶה-הָיָה חֶלְקִי מִכָּל-עֲמָלִי

וּפָנִיתִי אֲנִי

בְּכָל-מַעֲשֵׂי שִׁעְשׁוֹ יָדִי

וּבְעֵמָל שִׁעְמַלְתִּי לַעֲשׂוֹת

וְהִנֵּה הַכֹּל הֶבֶל וְרֵעוֹת רוּחַ

וְאֵין יִתְרוֹן תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ

Kaniti avadim ushefachot,

uveneï vayit hayah li;

gam mikneh vakar vatzon

harbeh hayah li

mikol shehayu lefanai b'Irushala'im.

Kanasti lik gam kesef vezahav

usegulat melachim vehamedinot,

asiti li sharim vesharot

veta'anugot benei ha'adam,

shidah veshidot.

Vegadalti vehosafti mikol

shehayah lefanai b'Irushalayim;

af chochmati amdah li.

Vechol asher sha'alu einai

lo atzalti mehem;

lo manati et libi mikol simcha

ki libi same'ach mikol amali,

vezeh hayah chelki mikol amali.

Ufaniti ani

bechol ma'asai she'asu yadai

uve'amal she'amalti la'asot,

vehineh hakol hevel ure'ut ru'ach,

ve'ein yitron tachat hashamesh.

¹ "More than all that were before me (before my time) in Jerusalem."

² The word שִׁדָּה occurs only here in all of Tanach; its meaning is uncertain. If it's related to pleasures, we can imagine a progression from money to entertainment to consorts, and the word may be associated with breasts or perhaps she-demons. The word occurs a few times in the Talmud, where (according to Jastrow) it means box or chest, and Rashi says it's a fancy saddle or litter (litter is related to the French *lit*, a bed; it's an enclosure for transporting someone) like a covered wagon. The Alcalay Hebrew dictionary says it's a box or chest of drawers, or a pretty woman. If you think the speaker is King Solomon, you'll remember he had 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kings 11:3).

¹² I turned to examine
wisdom, riddles and mystery.¹
What can anyone *accomplish*
who comes after the king *has done it all*?
Only what has already been done!

¹³ I realized there's more *value*
to wisdom than to folly,
just as light is better than darkness.

¹⁴ The wise one has eyes in his head
while the fool walks in darkness;
but I knew—yes, I—that the same thing
happens to them all.

¹⁵ I said to myself:
What happens to the fool
happens to me too,
so why did I get so much extra wisdom?
I thought, this *wisdom*, too, is pointless.

¹⁶ The wise man is remembered
no more than the fool, ultimately,²
for the time is coming
when all is forgotten;
the wise one dies *just* like the fool.

¹⁷ I hated living;
I detested the work
accomplished *here* under the sun,
for it's all pointless, heartbreak.

וּפָנִיתִי אֲנִי לְדַאוֹת
חֹכְמָה וְהוֹלָלוֹת וְסִכְלוֹת
כִּי מֶה הָאָדָם
שֶׁיָּבֹא אַחֲרַי הַמֶּלֶךְ
אֶת אֲשֶׁר-כָּבַד עָשִׂיהוּ
וְרָאִיתִי אֲנִי שֶׁיֵּשׁ יִטְרוֹן
לְחֹכְמָה מִן-הַסִּכְלוֹת
כִּי־יִטְרוֹן הָאוֹר מִן-הַחֹשֶׁךְ
הֶחָחָם, עֵינָיו בְּרֹאשׁוֹ
וְהַפֶּסֶל בַּחֹשֶׁךְ הוֹלֵךְ
וַיַּדְעֵתִי גַם־אֲנִי שֶׁמִּיקְרֵה אֶחָד
יִקְרֶה אֶת־כֻּלָּם
וְאָמַרְתִּי אֲנִי בִלְבִי
כִּמִּיקְרֵה הַפֶּסֶל
גַּם־אֲנִי יִקְרֵנִי
וְלָמָּה חֲכַמְתִּי אֲנִי אִם יוֹתֵר
וְדִבַּרְתִּי בִלְבִי שֶׁגַּם־זֶה הֶבֶל
כִּי אֵין זִכְרוֹן לְחֹכָם
עַם־הַפֶּסֶל לְעוֹלָם
בִּשְׁכָּר הַיָּמִים הַבָּאִים
הַכֹּל נִשְׁכַּח
וְאִידָּה יָמוּת הֶחָחָם עַם־הַפֶּסֶל
וְשָׁנַאתִי אֶת־הַחַיִּים
כִּי רָע עָלַי הַמַּעֲשֶׂה
שֶׁנַּעֲשֶׂה תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ
כִּי־הַכֹּל הֶבֶל וְרֵעוּת רוּחַ

Ufaniti ani lirot
chochmah veholelot vesichlut;
ki meh ha'adam
sheyavo acharei hamelech?
Et asher k'var asuhu.
Vera'iti ani sheyesh yitron
lechochmah min hasichlut
keyitron ha'or min hachoshech.
Hechacham, einav berosh,so,
vehaksil bachoshech holech;
veyadati, gam ani, shemikreh echad
yikreh et kulam.
Ve'amarti ani belibi:
Kemikreh haksil
gam ani yikreni,
velamah chachamti ani az yoter?
Vedibarti velibi shegam zeh havel.
Ki ein zichron lechacham
im haksil le'olam,
beshek'var hayamim haba'im
hakol nishkach,
ve'eich yamut hechacham im haksil.
Vesaneti et hachayim
ki rah alai hama'aseh
shena'asah tachat hashamesh
ki hakol hevel ure'ut ru'ach.

¹ 1:17 explains our translation of these words.

² “For there is no remembering the wise one *in comparison* with the fool, forever.”

¹⁸ I hated all my effort
that I had expended under the sun
since I would *have to* leave it to someone
who will be *in my place* after I'm gone.

¹⁹ Who knows
whether he'll be wise or a fool, *the one*
who gains control of all my hard work,
my labor and wisdom
under the sun?
This too is pointless.

²⁰ I planned to stop caring
about all the effort I had expended
under the sun.

²¹ There are people who strive
with wisdom, knowledge and decency,
yet to someone who never worked for it
their achievement is given.
This too is pointless, really awful.¹

²² What does a person get
for all the work and headache
for which he toils under the sun?

²³ Every day brings pain
and work is *but* frustration;
even at night his mind can't rest.
This too is pointless.

וְשָׂנְאֵתִי אֲנִי אֶת־כָּל־עֲמָלִי
שֶׁאֲנִי עֹמֵל תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ
שֶׁאֲנִי חֲנוּ לָאָדָם
שֶׁיִּהְיֶה אַחֲרָי.

Vesaneti ani et kol amali
she'ani amel tachat hashamesh,
she'anichenu la'adam
sheyiheyeh acharai.

וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ
הֲחָכָם יִהְיֶה אוֹ סָכָל
וְיִשְׁלַט בְּכָל־עַמְלֵי
שֶׁעֹמְלֵתִי וְשֶׁחָכַמְתִּי
תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ
גַּם־זֶה הָבֵל

Umi yode'ah
hechacham yiheyeh o sachal
veyishlat bechol amali
she'amalti veshechachamti
tachat hashamesh?
Gam zeh havel.

וּסְבֹבֹתִי אֲנִי לֵיָאֵשׁ אֶת־לִבִּי
עַל כָּל־הָעֹמֵל שֶׁעֹמְלֵתִי
תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ

Vesaboti ani leya'esh et libi
al kol he'amal she'amalti
tachat hashamesh.

כִּי־יֵשׁ אָדָם שֶׁעֹמְלוֹ
בְּחִכְמָה וּבְדַעַת וּבְכִשְׁרוֹן
וּלְאָדָם שֶׁלֹּא עָמַל בּוֹ
יִתְּנֵנוּ חֶלְקוֹ

Ki yesh adam she'amalo
bechochmah uveda'at uvechishron,
ule'adam shelo amal bo
yitnenu chelko.

גַּם־זֶה הָבֵל וְרַעַה רַבָּה

Gam zeh hevel vera'ah rabah.

כִּי מֶה־הֹוֶה לָאָדָם
בְּכָל־עֲמָלוֹ וּבְרַעְיוֹן לְבוֹ
שֶׁהוּא עֹמֵל תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ

Ki meh hoveh la'adam
bechol amalalo uverayon libo
shehu amel tachat hashamesh?

כִּי כָל־יָמָיו מַכְאוֹבִים
וְכַעַס עֵינָיו

Ki chol yamav machovim,
vacha'as inyano;

גַּם־בַּלַּיְלָה לֹא־שָׁכַב לְבוֹ²

gam balaylah lo shachav libo.

גַּם־זֶה הָבֵל הוּא

Gam zeh hevel hu.

¹ "This too is futility, a great evil."

² Many editors take the expected reading לָבוֹ instead of לְבוֹ.

²⁴ A person can't do better than
eat and drink

and find pleasure in his work.

I've seen this, too;

but it's in God's power.

²⁵ Who can eat, who can be quick?

I'm the only one.¹

²⁶ To someone whom *God* finds good,
God grants wisdom, knowledge and joy,
while to the sinner *God* gives *hard* work

to harvest and store away,²

to give it to someone whom God finds good.³

But this too is pointless and a headache.

אֵין־טוֹב בְּאָדָם
שֶׁיֹּאכַל וְשָׂתָה
וְהִרְאָה אֶת־נַפְשׁוֹ טוֹב בַּעֲמָלוֹ
גַּם־זֶה רָאִיתִי אָנִי
כִּי מִיָּד הָאֱלֹהִים הִיא
כִּי מִי יֹאכַל וּמִי יַחֲשׁוּשׁ
חֹזֵן מִמֶּנִּי
כִּי לְאָדָם שֶׁטוֹב לְפָנָיו
נָתַן חֲכָמָה וְדַעַת וְשִׂמְחָה
וְלַחֹשֶׁא נָתַן עֲנָן
לְאֶסּוֹף וּלְכֹנֹס
לָתֵת לְטוֹב לְפָנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים
גַּם־זֶה הֵבֵל וְרֵעוּת רִיחַ
Ein tov ba'adam
sheyochal veshatah
veherah et nafsho tov ba'amalo.
Gam zoh ra'iti ani
ki miyad ha'Elohim hi.
Ki mi yochal umi yachush
chutz mimeni?
Ki le'adam shetov lefanav
natan chochmah veda'at vesimcha,
velachoteh natan inyan
le'esof velichnos,
latet letov lifnei ha'Elohim.
Gam zeh hevel ure'ut ru'ach.

Chapter 3

¹ There's a *right* time for everything,
a season for every thing
beneath the sky:

לְכָל זְמַן
וְעֵת לְכָל־חֶפֶץ
תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם
ס

Lakol zeman,
ve'et lechol chefetz
tachat hashamayim:

² A time to give birth, a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot plants;

³ a time to attack, a time to retreat,⁴

a time to demolish and a time to build;

⁴ a time to cry, a time to laugh,

a time to mourn and a time to dance;

עֵת לִלְדֹת וְעֵת לָמוּת
עֵת לִטְעוֹת וְעֵת לַעֲקוֹר נָטוּעַ
עֵת לַהֲרוֹג וְעֵת לְרַפּוֹא
עֵת לִפְרוֹץ וְעֵת לִבְנוֹת
עֵת לִבְכּוֹת וְעֵת לִשְׂחֹק
עֵת סִפּוֹד וְעֵת רִקּוֹד
et laledet ve'et lamut,
et lata'at ve'et la'akor natu'ah;
et laharog ve'et lirpoh,
et lifrotz ve'et livnot;
et livkot ve'et lis'chok,
et sephod ve'et rekod;

¹ "Except for me."

² "Bring inside."

³ "To give it to the good person in the presence of God."

⁴ The root רפא can connote both "heal" and "weaken," so you can translate this as "a time to kill and a time to heal" or "a time to attack and a time to retreat (show weakness)."

⁵ a time to throw rocks
 and a time to gather rocks,
 a time to hug and a time to avoid hugging;
⁶ a time to seek and a time to forsake,
 a time to hold on and a time to let go;
⁷ a time to tear and a time to sew,
 a time to be silent and a time to speak;
⁸ a time to love and a time to hate,
 a time for war and a time for peace.

עַתָּה לְהַשְׁלִיךְ אֲבָנִים
 וְעַתָּה כְּנוֹס אֲבָנִים
 עַתָּה לְחַבֹּק וְעַתָּה לִרְחֹק מִחַבֵּק
 עַתָּה לְבַקֵּשׁ וְעַתָּה לְאַבֵּד
 עַתָּה לִשְׁמֹר וְעַתָּה לְהַשְׁלִיךְ
 עַתָּה לִקְרוֹעַ וְעַתָּה לְתַפּוֹר
 עַתָּה לִחְשׁוֹת וְעַתָּה לְדַבֵּר
 עַתָּה לְאַהֲבָה וְעַתָּה לְשׂוֹא
 עַתָּה מִלְחָמָה וְעַתָּה שָׁלוֹם.

et lehashlich avanim
 ve'et kenos avanim
 et lachavok ve'et lir'chok mechabek.
 et levakesh ve'et le'abed,
 et lishmor ve'et lehashlich;
 et likro'ah ve'et litpor,
 et lachashot ve'et ledaber.
 et le'ehov ve'et lisnoh,
 et mil'chamah ve'et shalom.

ס

⁹ What does one gain for working?¹
¹⁰ I realized what *kind of* chore
 God had given humanity
 with which to burden them.
¹¹ *God* made everything
 lovely in its time;
 however, eternity *is what*
God placed in *people's* thoughts,
 yet nobody can comprehend
 the work *God* performed
 from *its* beginning to *its* end.²
¹² I realized there's no use in *visible things*³
 except to find pleasure
 and do *some* good during one's life.

מַה־יִתְרוֹן הָעוֹשֶׂה בְּאִשֶּׁר הוּא עֹמֵל
 רָאִיתִי אֶת־הָעֵנָן
 אֲשֶׁר נָתַן אֱלֹהִים לִבְנֵי הָאָדָם
 לְעֲנוֹת בּוֹ
 אֶת־הַכֹּל עָשָׂה
 יָפֵה בְּעֵתוֹ
 גַּם אֶת־הָעוֹלָם
 נָתַן בְּלִבָּם
 מִבְּלִי אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִמְצָא הָאָדָם
 אֶת־הַמַּעֲשֶׂה אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה הָאֱלֹהִים
 מִרֵּאשׁ וְעַד־סוֹף
 יָדַעְתִּי כִּי אֵין טוֹב בָּם
 כִּי אִם־לְשֹׂמוֹחַ
 וּלְעֲשׂוֹת טוֹב בְּחַיָּיו

Mah yitron ha'oseh ba'asher hu amel?
 Ra'iti et ha'inyan
 asher natan Elohim livnei ha'adam,
 la'anot bo.
 Et hakol asah
 yafeh be'ito;
 gam et ha'olam
 natan belibam,
 mibli asher lo yimtza ha'adam
 et hama'aseh asher asah ha'Elohim
 merosh ve'ad sof.
 Yadati ki ein tov bam
 ki im lismo'ach
 vela'asot tov bechayav.

¹ “What is the benefit for the doer, in that he toils?”

² I like to think this means God made the transitory world lovely, but spoiled it for us by letting us think of eternity. Who can enjoy the warmth of the sun knowing its life is short? The Hebrew root עֹלָם means world, eternity, and hidden, so here is a literal translation: “Everything *God* made beautiful in its time; also/however the-world/eternity/hidden-mystery *God* granted in their hearts/minds, lest/more-than-without which not-may-find someone the thing-made which made *God* from top to end.” Well, Hebrew syntax is different from English, and we can interpret this verse as best we may.

³ “In them” referring to things God made, mentioned at the beginning of verse 11.

¹³ And anyone
who can eat, drink
and see *some* benefit for all his effort—
this is a gift from God.

¹⁴ I realized
that everything God makes
will last forever.
You can't add to *God's work*
nor subtract from *God's work*.¹
God made *it*
so *people* will learn respect in *God's* presence.

¹⁵ Whatever has been, existed earlier,
and whatever is to be, existed earlier,
and God will seek whatever is sought.²

¹⁶ Again, I saw under the sun
the court of justice—
injustice was there—
and the place of the innocent:
there *too* was the guilty *person*.³

¹⁷ I said to myself:
Innocent and guilty,
let God judge *them*.
There's a time for every thing,
and for every action taken there.

וְגַם כֹּל-הָאָדָם
שֵׁיאוֹכַל וְשָׂתָה
וְרָאָה טוֹב בְּכָל-עֲמָלוֹ
מֵתַת אֱלֹהִים הִיא

Vegam kol ha'adam

sheyochal veshatah

vera'ah tov bechol amalō—

matat Elohim hi.

יָדַעְתִּי
כִּי כֹל-אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה הָאֱלֹהִים
הוּא יִהְיֶה לְעוֹלָם
עָלָיו אֵין לְהוֹסִיף
וּמִמֶּנּוּ אֵין לִגְרֹעַ
וְהָאֱלֹהִים עֹשֶׂה
שֵׁיִרְאוּ מִלְּפָנָיו

Yadati

ki kol asher ya'aseh ha'Elohim,

hu yiheyeh le'olam.

Alav ein lehosif

umimenu ein ligro'ah,

veha'Elohim asah

sheyiru milfanav.

מִהַ שְׁחָיָהּ כָּבֵד הָיָה
וְאֲשֶׁר לִהְיוֹת כָּבֵד הָיָה
וְהָאֱלֹהִים יִבְקֹשׁ אֶת-נִרְדָּף
וְעוֹד רָאִיתִי תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ

Mah shehayah, k'var hu;

va'asher liheyot, k'var hu;

veha'Elohim yevakesh et nirdaf.

וְעוֹד רָאִיתִי תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ
מֶקוֹם הַמִּשְׁפָּט

Ve'od ra'iti tachat hashamesh

mekom hamishpat—

שָׁמָּה הָרֶשֶׁת

shamah hareshah—

וּמֶקוֹם הַצֶּדֶק

umekom hatzedek:

שָׁמָּה הָרֶשֶׁת

shamah harashah.

אָמַרְתִּי אֲנִי בִלְבִי

Amarti ani belibi:

אֶת-הַצַּדִּיק וְאֶת-הָרֶשֶׁת

Et hatzadik ve'et harashah

יִשְׁפֹּט הָאֱלֹהִים

yishpot ha'Elohim,

כִּי-עֵת לְכֹל-חֶפֶץ

ki et lechol chefetz,

וְעַל כֹּל-הַמַּעֲשֶׂה שָׁם

ve'al kol hama'aseh sham.

¹ “Upon it there is not to add, and from it there is not to subtract.”

² “And God will seek what is pursued/chased/sought.” The line is ripe for interpretation. Perhaps God will require of us whatever material possessions we pursue during our lives.

³ “The place of judgement. There was wickedness/injustice. And the place of the righteous/innocent/vindicated. There was the wicked/guilty one.” Perhaps the writer questions whether the justice system is effective.

¹⁸ I said to myself

about people suing each other:

It's God's way of making them see

that they treat each other like animals!¹

¹⁹ What happens to people

and what happens to animals,

they *all* get the same fate:

one's death is just like the other's,²

and they all have the same breath.

People are no better than animals,

and it's all pointless.

²⁰ Everything goes to the same place;

everything came from dust

and everything returns to dust.

²¹ Who knows about a person's spirit,

whether it goes up,

while an animal's spirit descends

down to the dirt?

²² I realized there's no better *way*

than for a person to find joy in his work,

which is his lot *in life*,

for who can bring him to see

into what will happen after he's gone?³

אֲמַרְתִּי אֲנִי בְלִבִּי

עַל־דִּבְרַת בְּנֵי הָאָדָם

לְבָרָם הָאֱלֹהִים וְלִרְאוֹת

שֶׁהֵם בִּהְמָה הֵמָּה לָהֶם

כִּי מִקְרֶה בְּנֵי־הָאָדָם

וּמִקְרֶה הַבְּהֵמָה

וּמִקְרֶה אֶחָד לָהֶם

כְּמוֹת זֶה כֵּן מוֹת זֶה

וְרוּחַ אֶחָד לָכֹל

וּמוֹתָר הָאָדָם מִן־הַבְּהֵמָה אֵין

כִּי הָכֹל הָבֵל

הָכֹל הוֹלֵךְ אֶל־מָקוֹם אֶחָד

הָכֹל הָיָה מִן־הָעֶפֶר

וְהָכֹל שָׁב אֶל־הָעֶפֶר

מִי יוֹדַע רוּחַ בְּנֵי הָאָדָם

הַעֹלָה הִיא לְמַעַלָּה

וְרוּחַ הַבְּהֵמָה הַיּוֹרֶדֶת הִיא

לְמַטָּה לָאָרֶץ

וְרָאִיתִי כִּי אֵין טוֹב

מֵאֲשֶׁר יַשְׁמַח הָאָדָם בְּמַעֲשָׁיו

כִּי־הוּא חֵלְקוֹ

כִּי מִי יָבִיאֵנוּ לִרְאוֹת

בְּמָה שִׁיְהִיָּה אַחֲרָיו

Amarti ani belibi

al divrat benei ha'adam:

levaram ha'Elohim velirot

shehem behemah hemah lahem!

Ki mikreh venei ha'adam

umikreh hab'hemah,

umikreh echad lahem.

Kemot zeh, ken mot zeh,

veru'ach echad lakol.

Umotar ha'adam min hab'hemah ayin

ki hkol havel.

Hakol holech el makom echad;

hakol hayah min he'afar

vehakol shav el he'afar.

Mi yode'ah ru'ach benei ha'adam,

ha'olah hi lemalah,

veru'ach hab'hemah hayoredet hi

lematah la'aretz?

Vera'iti ki ein tov

me'asher yismach ha'adam bema'asav,

ki hu chelko,

ki mi yevi'enu lirot

bemeh sheyiheyeh acharav?

¹ The root דבר means a word, a thing, a matter, and can refer to a legal suit. "Said I to my heart concerning the suit of the children of humanity, *it's in order* to clarify, *by the agency of* God, and to see that they are beast them to them."

² "Like the death of this, so is the death of this."

³ "Into what will be after him."

Chapter 4

¹ I went back to study
all the oppressed people
who suffer¹ under the sun.
There—the tears of the oppressed;
they get no relief.
Their oppressors have all the power,²
but *the oppressed* get no relief.

² I praise the dead
who are gone, more than the living
who are still alive.

³ Better than either
is one who has never existed,
who has not seen the evil deeds
that are done beneath the sun.

⁴ I studied all the toil,
all the decency of labor;
for this, one man envies another.
This too is pointless, a heartbreak.

⁵ The fool clasps his hands
and eats his meat.³

⁶ Better is a spoonful of serenity
than fistfuls of toil and heartbreak.

⁷ I went back and looked—
futility under the sun.

וְשָׁבְתִי אֲנִי וְאָרָאָה

אֶת־כָּל־הָעֲשֻׁקִים

אֲשֶׁר נֹעֲשִׂים תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ

וְהִנֵּה | דִּמַּת הָעֲשֻׁקִים

וְאֵין לָהֶם מִנַּחֵם

וּמִיָּד עֲשָׁקֵיהֶם כֹּחַ

וְאֵין לָהֶם מִנַּחֵם

וְשָׁבַח אֲנִי אֶת־הַמֵּתִים

שֶׁכְּבָר מֵתוֹ מִן־הַחַיִּים

אֲשֶׁר הֵמָּה חַיִּים עַדְנָה

וְטוֹב מִשְׁנֵיהֶם

אֶת אֲשֶׁר־עָדוֹן לֹא הָיָה

אֲשֶׁר לֹא־רָאָה אֶת־הַמַּעֲשֶׂה הָרָע

אֲשֶׁר נֹעֲשֶׂה תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ

וְרָאִיתִי אֲנִי אֶת־כָּל־עֲמָל

וְאֵת כָּל־פְּשָׁרוֹן הַמַּעֲשֶׂה

כִּי הִיא קִנְיַת־אִישׁ מִרַעְיוֹ

גַּם־זֶה הֶבֶל וְרַעְיוֹת רוּחַ

הַכָּסִיל חֹבֵק אֶת־יָדָיו

וְאָכַל אֶת־בִּשְׁרוֹ

טוֹב מֵלֶא כֶּף נָחַת

מִמְלֹא חוֹפְנָיִם עֲמָל וְרַעְיוֹת רוּחַ

וְשָׁבְתִי אֲנִי וְאָרָאָה

הֶבֶל תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ

Veshavti ani va'ereh

et kol ha'ashukim

asher na'asim tachat hashamesh,

vehineh dimat ha'ashukim;

ve'ein lahem menachem.

Umiyad oshkeihem ko'ach,

ve'ein lahem menachem.

Veshabe'ach ani et hametim

shek'var metu, min hachayim

asher hemah chayim adenah.

Vetov mishneihem

et asher aden lo hayah,

asher lo ra'ah et hama'aseh harah

asher na'asah tachat hashamesh.

Vera'iti ani et kol amal

ve'et kol kishron hama'aseh;

ki hi kinat ish mere'ehu.

gam zeh hevel ure'ut ru'ach.

Haksil chovek et yadav

ve'ochel et besaro.

Tov melo chaf nachat

mimlo chofnayim amal ure'ut ru'ach.

Veshavti ani va'ereh

hevel tachat hashamesh.

¹ "Are made."

² "And from the power/hand of their oppressors is power."

³ Perhaps the writer means it's a fool who sticks to his own concerns and ignores the needs of others.

⁸ There is one, and no other,
who has neither child nor brother,¹
with no end to his toil.
His eye is not satisfied with riches.
“For whom do I labor
and deprive myself of pleasure?”
This too is pointless; it’s a bad thing.

⁹ Two are better than one;
they get a fine reward
for their labor.

¹⁰ For if they fall down,
one can help his partner stand up,
but if the lone *worker* falls down
there’s no second to help him up.

¹¹ And if two go to bed,
they can get warm.
But how can a lone *sleeper* get warm?

¹² If one *attacker* can conquer a single *victim*,
two can withstand him;
and a triple cord
isn’t quickly snapped.

¹³ Better a child *who* is poor but smart
than a king old and foolish,
who no longer knows how to be prudent.

¹⁴ He rules by being irrelevant
and anyone born in his realm is poor.³

יֵשׁ אֶחָד וְאֵין שֵׁנִי, Yesh echad, ve’ein sheni,
גַּם בֶּן וְאָח אֵין-לּוֹ, gam ben va’ach ein lo,
וְאֵין קֵץ לְכָל-עֲמָלּוֹ. ve’ein ketz lechol amalō.
גַּם עֵינָיו לֹא-תִשְׂבַּע עֹשֶׁר, Gam eino lo tisbah osher.
וְלִמִּי אֲנִי עֹמֵל “Ulemi ani amel
וּמַחֲשֵׁר אֶת-נַפְשִׁי מִטּוֹבָה, umechaser et nafshi mitovah?”
גַּם זֶה הֶבֶל וְעִינָיו רָע הִוא, Gam zeh hevel, ve’inyan rah hu.
טוֹבִים הַשְׁנָיִם מִן-הָאֶחָד, Tovim hashnayim min ha’echad,
אֲשֶׁר יֵשׁ-לָהֶם שָׂכָר טוֹב asher yesh lahem sachar tov
בְּעֲמָלָם. ba’amalam.
כִּי אִם יִפְּלוּ, Ki im yipolu.
הָאֶחָד יָקִים אֶת-חֲבֵרוֹ, ha’echad yakim et chavero,
וְאִילוּ הָאֶחָד שֵׁיפֹל ve’ilu ha’echad sheyipol
וְאֵין שֵׁנִי לְהַקִּימוֹ. ve’ein sheni lahakimo.
גַּם אִם יִשְׁכְּבוּ שְׁנָיִם, Gam im yishkevu shnayim,
וְחָם לָהֶם vecham lahem;
וְלֹאֶחָד אֵיךְ יֵחָם ule’echad eich yecham?
וְאִם יִתְקַפּוּ הָאֶחָד, Ve’im yitkefo ha’echad,
הַשְׁנָיִם יַעֲמְדוּ נִגְדּוֹ, hashnayim ya’amdu negdo;
וְהַחֹטַם הַמְּשֻׁלָּשׁ vehachut hamshulash
לֹא בְמַהֲרָה יִנָּתֵק. lo vimherah yinatek.
טוֹב יָלֵד מִסֶּכֶן וְחָכָם Tov yeled misken vechacham
מִמֶּלֶךְ זָקֵן וְכִסִּיל, mimelech zaken uchesil,
אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדַע לְהִזָּהֵר עוֹד, asher lo yadah lehizaher od.
כִּי-מִבֵּית הַסּוּרִים יֵצֵא לִמְלֹךְ, Ki mibeit hasurim yatzah limloch,
כִּי גַם בְּמַלְכוּתוֹ נֹלַד רָשׁ. ki gam bermal’chuto nolad rash.

¹ I.e., there’s no-one like him.

² A manuscript has the spelling עֵינָיו (“his eyes” instead of “his eye”).

³ בֵּית הַסּוּרִים could be taken as בֵּית הָאֲסוּרִים, “the house of the ones who are bound/tied up,” a prison, or as “the house (source) of those who turn away/deviate,” avoiding the relevant topic. The verse can mean: “For from the house of the-bound/the-deviants has he come to rule, and also/even in his realm is born a poor person.”

¹⁵ I watched all the living
who walk around beneath the sun,
with the succeeding boy
who will take *the king's* place.¹

¹⁶ There's no limit to all the people,
to all those whom *the king* led.²
Later ones won't recall him with joy,
for this too is pointless, heartbreak.

¹⁷ Watch your step when you go
to God's house.

Staying close to listen is better
than fools offering sacrifices,
for they don't *even* know *how* to do bad!³

רָאִיתִי אֶת־כָּל־תַּחַיִּים

הַמְהַלְכִים תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ

עִם הַיָּלֵד הַשֵּׁנִי

אֲשֶׁר יַעֲמֹד תַּחְתָּיו

אֵין־קֶץ לְכָל־הָעָם

לְכָל אֲשֶׁר־הָיָה לִפְנֵיהֶם

גַּם הָאֲחֵרֹנִים לֹא יִשְׂמְחוּ־בּוֹ

כִּי־גַם־זֶה הֶבֶל וְרַעְיוֹן רוּחַ

שְׁמֹר רַגְלְךָ, כְּאֲשֶׁר תֵּלֵךְ

אֶל־בֵּית הָאֱלֹהִים

וְקִרְוֹב לְשֹׁמֵעַ

מִתַּת הַכְּסִילִים זָבַח

כִּי־אֵינָם יוֹדְעִים לַעֲשׂוֹת רָע

Ra'iti et kol hachayim
hamehal'chim tachat hashamesh,

im hayeled hasheni
asher ya'amod tachtav.

Ein kets lechol ha'am,
lechol asher hayah lifneihem.

Gam ha'acharonim lo yismechu vo
ki gam zeh hevel vera'yon ru'ach.

Shemor raglecha ka'asher telech
el beit ha'Elohim.

Vekarov lishmo'ah
mitet haksilim zavach,
ki einam yodim la'asot rah!

Chapter 5

¹ Don't talk impulsively,⁵
and don't rush to express speech⁶
in front of God.
For God is in the sky
while you are on the ground.
So don't say much.⁷

אַל־תַּבְּחֹל עַל־פִּיךָ

וְלִבְךָ אַל־יִמְהַר לְהוֹצִיא דָבָר

לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים

כִּי הָאֱלֹהִים בַּשָּׁמַיִם

וְאַתָּה עַל־הָאָרֶץ

עַל־כֵּן יִהְיוּ דְבָרֶיךָ מְעַטִּים

Al tevahel al picha,
velibcha al yemaher lehotzi davar
lifnei ha'Elohim,
ki ha'Elohim bashamayim
ve'atah al ha'aretz.
Al ken yiheyu devarecha me'atim.

¹ This could mean that the silly king's ("succeeding" is also the word for "second") son will inherit his throne ("stand in his stead"). Rashi quotes a midrash that the bad king represents the generation of the Flood who are replaced by Noah and his sons.

² "To all before whom he (the king?) was."

³ So if they do the right thing, it has no merit, since they can't tell good from bad. Alternatively, you can translate "they don't know that they do *something* bad." Many editors place this verse with the next chapter.

⁴ A manuscript has the spelling רגליך, which is plural, "your legs/feet."

⁵ The Hebrew בהלה can mean panic: "Don't get overexcited in respect of your mouth."

⁶ "And your heart/mind do not rush to express/bring-out word/matter."

⁷ "Therefore let your words be few."

² A dream brings many a worry
and a fool's talk many a care.¹

³ When you make a pledge to God
don't delay to pay it,
for there's no pleasure in fools;
what you pledge, pay up!

⁴ It's better not to pledge
than to pledge and not to pay.²

⁵ Let not your lips
bring your body to sin,
and don't tell the agent³
it was *just* a mistake;
why should God get angry
at what you say
and ruin what you're trying to do?⁴

⁶ For in *so* much dreaming and wasting time
and *so* many concerns *there is no point*;
but God *is the one* you must respect.

⁷ If oppression of the poor
and perversion of justice and right
are what you see in *your* country,
don't be surprised at the matter,
for *one* high *official* protects another
and there are higher officials protecting them.

כִּי בָּא הַחֲלוֹם בְּרֹב עִינָן
וְקוֹל כְּסִיל בְּרֹב דְּבָרִים
כַּאֲשֶׁר תִּדּוֹר נָדָר לֵאלֹהִים
אַל-תֵּאַחֵר לְשַׁלְּמוֹ
כִּי אֵין חֶפֶץ בַּכְּסִילִים
אֶת אֲשֶׁר-תִּדּוֹר שַׁלֵּם
טוֹב אֲשֶׁר לֹא-תִדּוֹר
מִשֶּׁתִּדּוֹר וְלֹא תִשָּׁלֵם
אַל-תִּתֵּן אֶת-פִּיךָ
לַחֲטִיא אֶת-בְּשָׁרְךָ
וְאַל-תֹּאמַר לִפְנֵי הַמַּלְאָךְ
כִּי שִׁגָּגָה הִיא
לָמָּה יִקְצֹף הָאֱלֹהִים
עַל-קוֹלְךָ
וְחִבֵּל אֶת-מַעֲשֵׂה יָדֶיךָ
כִּי בְּרֹב חֲלוֹמוֹת וְהֵבָלִים
וּדְבָרִים הַרְבֵּה
כִּי אֶת-הָאֱלֹהִים יִרָא
אִם-עֹשֶׂק רָשׁ
וְגִזֹּל מִשְׁפָּט וְצָדִיק
תִּרְאֶה בְּמִדִּינָה
אַל-תִּתְּמָה עַל-הַחֶפֶץ
כִּי גָבוֹה מֵעַל גָּבוֹה שֹׁמֵר
וּגְבוּהִים עֲלֵיהֶם

Ki bah hachalom berov inyan
vekol kesil berov devarim.
Ka'asher tidor neder l'Elohim,
al te'acher leshalmo,
ki ein chefets baksilim;
et asher tidor, shalem!
Tov asher lo tidor
mishetidor velo teshalem.
Al titen et picha
lachati et besarecha,
ve'al tomar lifnei hamalach
ki shegagah hi;
lamah yiktzof haElohim
al kolecha
vechibel et ma'aseh yadecha?
Ki verov chalomot vehavalim
udevarim harbeh ...
ki et haElohim yerah!
Im oshek rash
vegezel mishpat vatzedek
tireh vamdinah,
al titmah al hechefetz,
ki gavo'ah me'al gavo'ah shomer,
ugevohim aleihem.

¹ “For comes the dream with a lot of care and the voice of a fool with many a matter/concern/word/thing.”

² “Better you should not make a pledge than that you should make a pledge and not pay up.”

³ Or “messenger”; contracts can be sealed through an empowered agent. Some think מַלְאָךְ means angel, a messenger from or agent of God.

⁴ Or, “and ruin the work of your hands”?

⁸ But here's a bonus *for the country*:

a king who is served by *working* in the field.¹

⁹ Someone who loves money,

money will not satisfy,

and someone who loves lots of *stuff*

even a whole harvest will not satisfy.

This too is pointless.

¹⁰ With more good things

come more hungry mouths,

and what can the owners decently do

but watch them?³

¹¹ Sweet is the worker's sleep

whether he eats much or little,

but the rich man's plenty

never settles him down to sleep.

¹² There's a terrible sickness I've seen

under the sun:

riches hoarded for their owner's harm,

¹³ the wealth lost in a bad investment,

leaving a penniless child.⁵

¹⁴ As he came from his mother's womb,

naked he returns, to go as he came,

and for *all* his labor he can bring nothing

to take with him.⁶

וַיִּתְּרוֹן אֶרֶץ בְּכָל הָאָרֶץ

מֶלֶךְ לְשָׂדֶה נֶעָבַד

אֹהֵב כֶּסֶף

לֹא יִשְׂבַּח כֶּסֶף

וּמִי־אֹהֵב בְּהֶמָּוֶן

לֹא תִבְוָאָה

גַּם־זֶה הָבֵל

בִּרְבוֹת הַטּוֹבָה

רַבּוּ אוֹחְלֶהָ,

וּמִה־כִּשְׁרוֹן לִיב'אַלֶּהָ

כִּי אִם־רְאוּתִי עֵינָיו

מִתּוֹקֶת שְׁנַת הָעֵבֶד

אִם־מָעֹט וְאִם־הַרְבֵּה יֶאֱכֹל

וְהַשָּׂבַע לְעָשִׁיר

אֵינֶנּוּ מְנִיחַ לוֹ לִישׁוֹן

יֵשׁ רָעָה חוֹלָה רְאִיתִי

תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ

עֹשֶׁר שָׁמֹר לִבְעָלָיו לְרָעָתוֹ

וְאֶבֶד הָעֹשֶׁר הַהוּא בְּעֵינָיו רָע

וְהוֹלִיד בֶּן וְאִין בִּידוֹ מְאוּמָה

כְּאֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא מִבֶּטֶן אִמּוֹ

עָרוֹם יָשׁוּב לְלֶכֶת כְּשֶׁבֶה

וּמְאוּמָה לֹא יִשָּׂא בְעַמְלּוֹ

שִׁילָהּ בִּידוֹ

Veyitron eretz bakol hu:

melech lesadeh ne'evad.

Ohev kesef

lo yisbah kesef,

umi ohev behamon

lo tevu'ah.

Gam zeh havel.

Birvot hatovah

rabu ochleha,

umah kishron liv'aleha

ki im re'ut einav?

Metukah shenat ha'oved,

im me'at ve'im harbeh yochel;

vehasovah le'ashir

einenu mani'ach lo lishon.

Yesh ra'ah cholah ra'iti

tachat hashamesh:

osher shamur liv'alav lera'ato,

ve'avad ha'osher hahu be'inyan rah,

veholid ben, ve'ein beyado me'uma.

Ka'asher yatzah mibeten imo,

arom yashuv, lalechet keshebah,

ume'umah lo yisav va'amalo

sheyolech beyado.

¹ I.e., farmers are the source of a country's prosperity (especially in an agricultural society).

² A manuscript has the word היא, the feminine form of הוא; it's a pronoun referring to וַיִּתְּרוֹן; a masculine noun that takes the feminine plural (וַיִּתְּרוֹנוֹת). Confusing, eh? "And-a-bonus country in-all it."

³ "As the good *produce* increases, so increase those who eat it up. And what is the decent thing for the owners? Only watching with his eyes."

⁴ A manuscript has the spelling רִאִיתִי.

⁵ "And *the rich man* has given birth to a child, in whose hand is not a thing."

⁶ "That he can bring in his hand."

¹⁵ This too is painfully bad:

everything, just as it came, so must it go;
and what can *anyone* gain
who works against the wind?

¹⁶ All his days, he eats in the darkness
with great anger, pain and frustration.

¹⁷ Here's what I have seen:

it's good to eat and drink well,
to find good in all the labor
at which one toils beneath the sun

for the number of days of life

God has granted him,
for this is his lot.

¹⁸ And anyone

to whom God has given
wealth and possessions
and empowered him to enjoy them³
and take his portion
and find joy in his work—
this is a gift from God!

¹⁹ He won't much remember

the *painful* days of his life
while God
overwhelms him with inner joy.⁴

וְגַם־זֶה רָעָה חֹלָה

כָּל־עֲמַתּוֹ שְׂבָא כֵן יֵלֶךְ

וּמִה־יִתְּרוֹן לֹא

שֵׁי־עָמַל לָרוּחַ

גַּם כָּל־יָמָיו בַּחֹשֶׁךְ יֹאכֵל

וְכַעַס הַרְבֵּה וּחֲלִין וְקִצְצָה

הִנֵּה אֲשֶׁר־רָאִיתִי אֲנִי

טוֹב אֲשֶׁר־יָפֵה לֶאֱכֹל־וְלִשְׁתּוֹת

וּלְרֵאוֹת טוֹבָה בְּכָל־עֲמָלוֹ

שֵׁי־עָמַל תַּחַת־הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ

מִסְפָּר יְמֵי־חַיָּיו

אֲשֶׁר־נָתַן־לּוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים

כִּי־הוּא חֶלְקוֹ

גַּם כָּל־הָאָדָם

אֲשֶׁר נָתַן־לּוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים

עוֹשֶׁר וְנִכְסִים

וְהִשְׁלִיטוֹ לֶאֱכֹל מִמֶּנּוּ

וּלְשַׂאת אֶת־חֶלְקוֹ

וּלְשִׂמְחָה בְּעֲמָלוֹ

זֶה מַתַּת אֱלֹהִים הִיא

כִּי לֹא הַרְבֵּה יִזְכֹּר

אֶת־יְמֵי חַיָּיו

כִּי הָאֱלֹהִים

מַעֲנֶה בְּשִׂמְחַת לִבּוֹ

Vegam zo ra'ah cholah:

kol umat shebah, ken yelech;

umah yitron lo

sheya'amol laru'ach?

Gam kol yamav bachoshech yochel

vecha'as harbeh vecholyo vakatzef.

Hineh asher ra'iti, ani:

tov asher yafeh le'echol velishtot

velirot tovah bechol amalo

sheya'amol tachat hashemesh

mispar yemei chayav

asher natan lo ha'Elohim,

ki hu chelko.

Gam kol ha'adam

asher natan lo ha'Elohim

osher unechasim

vehishlito le'echol mimenu

velaset et chelko

velismo'ach ba'alamo:

zoh matat Elohim hi!

Ki lo harbeh yizkor

et yemei chayav,

ki ha'Elohim

ma'aneh besimchah libo.

¹ Gordis (*Koheleth: The Man and His World*, 253) suggests the reading כְּלָעַמַת; this is more familiar Hebrew but doesn't change the sense.

² A manuscript has the spelling חיו

³ "Eat of it."

⁴ "Joy of his heart."

Chapter 6

¹ There's a problem I've seen
under the sun,
and it's widespread among people:

² someone to whom God grants
wealth, possessions and prestige—
he lacks nothing
he could wish for—
but God doesn't empower him
to enjoy them¹

for a foreigner enjoys them *instead*.
This is pointless; it's a severe pain.

³ If someone has a hundred *children*
and lives many years,
a long, long life,²
but he's not content with these good things
(and he has no *proper* burial!),

I'd say a stillborn child is better off than he,

⁴ a *child* who arrives in futility
and leaves in obscurity,
whose name is shrouded in darkness,

⁵ who has never even seen the sun
or known *of it*:

there's more repose

for this *stillborn person* than for that *long-lived person*.

יֵשׁ רָעָה אֲשֶׁר רָאִיתִי
תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ
וְרַבָּה הִיא עַל-הָאָדָם
אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִתֶּן לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים
עֹשֶׁר וְנִכְסִים וְכָבוֹד
וְאֵינֶנּוּ חֹסֵר לְנַפְשׁוֹ
מִכֹּל אֲשֶׁר-יִתְּאֶוֶה
וְלֹא-יִשְׁלִיטֵנּוּ הָאֱלֹהִים
לְאֶחֱל מִמֶּנּוּ
כִּי אִישׁ נֹכְרִי יֹאכֻלֵּנּוּ
זֶה הֶבֶל וְחֹלִי רַע הוּא
אִם-יֹלִיד אִישׁ מֵאָה
וְשָׁנִים רַבּוֹת יִחְיֶה
וְרַב שְׁיֵהֶיּוּ יֵמֵי-שָׁנָיו
וְנַפְשׁוֹ לֹא-תִשְׁבַּע מִן-הַטּוֹבָה
וְנִם-קְבִירָה לֹא-הָיְתָה לוֹ
אֲמַרְתִּי טוֹב מִמֶּנּוּ הַנֶּפֶל
כִּי-בֶהֱבֵל בָּא
וּבְחֹשֶׁךְ יֵלֵךְ
וּבְחֹשֶׁךְ שְׁמוֹ יִכָּסֶה
גַּם-שֶׁמֶשׁ לֹא-רָאָה
וְלֹא יָדַע
נַחַת
לָזֶה מִזֶּה

Yesh ra'ah asher ra'iti
tachat hashamesh,
verabah hi al ha'adam:
ish asher yiten lo ha'Elohim
osher unechasim vechavod—
ve'einenu chaser lenafsho
mikol asher yitaveh—
velo yashlitenu ha'Elohim
le'echol mimenu
ki ish nochri yochalenu.
Zeh hevel, vecholi rah hu.
Im yolid ish me'ah
veshanim rabot yich'yeh,
verav sheyiheyu yemei shanav,
venafsho lo tisbah min hatovah
(vegam kevrurah lo haytah lo),
amarti tov mimenu hanafel,
ki vahevel bah
uvachoshech yelech
uvachoshech shemo yechuseh,
gam shemesh lo ra'ah
velo yadah:
nachat
lazeh mizeh.

¹ “To eat of it.”

² “And many, which are the days of his years.”

⁶ If he lived a thousand years
twice over

and didn't see good, *well*,
doesn't it all end up in one place?

⁷ All a person's toil is to *feed* his mouth,
but he's never fully satisfied.¹

⁸ How does the wise person top the fool?
What does the pauper *really* have
by knowing *how* to live among the living?²

⁹ *Prizing* what you see is better than
a restless spirit.³

But even this is pointless, heartbreak.

¹⁰ What's in the past already has a name;
it's *well* known that you call this a "person,"
and a *person* can't win
against someone stronger than himself.

¹¹ When there's lots of talk
there's lots of pointlessness;
what else is there for human beings?⁵

¹² Who knows what is good for a person
while living out his pointless days⁶
and making them like a *passing* shadow?

Who can tell a person what will happen,
when he's gone, under the sun?

וְאֵלֶּי חַיָּה אֶלֶף שָׁנִים
פַּעַמַּיִם

וְשׁוֹבָה לֹא רָאָה
הֲלֹא אֶל־מָקוֹם אֶחָד הַכֹּל הוֹלֵךְ

כָּל־עֵמֶל הָאָדָם לִפְיָהּ
וְגַם־הַנֶּפֶשׁ לֹא תִמְלָא

כִּי מִהַיּוֹתֵר לַחֲכָם מִן־הַכָּסִיל
מִהַלְעָנִי

יֹדֵעַ לַהֲלֹךְ נֶגֶד הַחַיִּים
טוֹב מֵרֹאֶה עֵינָיִם

מִהַלְלֵךְ נַפֶּשׁ

גַּם־זֶה הֶבֶל וְרֵעוּת רוּחַ
מִהַשְׁהַיָּה כְּבָר נִקְרָא שְׁמוֹ

וְנוֹדַע אֲשֶׁר־הוּא אָדָם
וְלֹא־יִכָּל לָדִין

עַם שֶׁתַּקִּיף מִמֶּנּוּ
כִּי יֵשֶׁד בָּרִים תִּרְבֶּה

מִרְבִּים הֶבֶל
מִהַיּוֹתֵר לָאָדָם

כִּי מִי־יֹדֵעַ מִהַטוֹב לָאָדָם
בַּחַיִּים מִסָּפֵר יְמֵי־חַיָּי הֶבֶלֹ

וַיַּעֲשֶׂם כְּצֶלַ
אֲשֶׁר מִי־יַגִּיד לָאָדָם מִהַיְהִיָּה

אֲחֵרָיו תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ

Ve'ilu chayah elef shanim
pa'amayim,

vetovah lo ra'ah,
halo el makom echad hakol holech!

Kol amal ha'adam lefihu,
vegam hanefesh lo timaleh.

Ki mah yoter lechacham min haksil?
Mah le'ani

yode'ah lahaloch neged hachayim?

Tov mareh einayim
mehalach nafesh.

Gam zeh hevel ure'ut ru'ach.

Mah shehayah, k'var nikrah shemo
venodah asher hu "adam,"

velo yuchal ladin
im shetakif mimenu.

Ki yesh devarim harbeh
marbim havel;

mah yoter la'adam?

Ki mi yode'ah mah tov la'adam
bachayim mispar yemei chayei hevlo
veya'asem katzel?

Asher mi yagid la'adam mah yiheyeh
acharav, tachat hashamesh?

¹ "And also the personality is not filled."

² "Knowing *how* to walk/go/conduct-oneself in-face-of/against the living."

³ "Better the seeing of the eyes than walking of spirit"; this may well mean that it's better to enjoy what is in sight, in one's grasp, than to keep wandering off after something else.

⁴ A manuscript has the odd spelling שֶׁתַּקִּיף.

⁵ I.e., people are all talk.

⁶ "During the living of the number of the days of the life of his pointlessness."

Chapter 7

¹ A *good* reputation is better than fine lotion
and a deathday better than a birthday.

² Better to visit a house in mourning
than go to a party-house
since *death* is everyone's end.

Let the living take note!

³ Anger is better than joy
because you can rejoice in *others'* frowns.¹

⁴ Wise people think of a house of mourning,
while fools think of a party.²

⁵ Better to listen to a rebuke from the wise
than listen to a chorus of fools:³

⁶ like a *fire* of thorns crackling under a pot
is a fool's clowning—it's just pointless—⁴

⁷ for compulsion upsets the wise
and destroys the intention of a gift.⁵

⁸ The end of a matter is better than its start,
and patience is better than arrogance.

⁹ Don't be quick to get angry
for it's a fool who nurses anger!⁶

טוב שם מִשְׁמֵן טוֹב
וַיּוֹם הַמָּוֶת מִיּוֹם הַיּוֹלָדוֹ
טוֹב לָלֶכֶת אֶל-בֵּית-אֵל
מִלָּכֶת אֶל-בֵּית מִשְׁתֶּה
בְּאֲשֶׁר הוּא סוֹף כָּל-הָאָדָם
וְהָיִי יָתֵן אֶל-לִבּוֹ

טוב כַּעַס מִשְׂחֹק
כִּי-וְרֹעַ פָּנִים יִיטֵב לֵב
לֵב חֲכָמִים בְּבֵית אֵל
וְלֵב כְּסִילִים בְּבֵית שִׂמְחָה
טוֹב לִשְׁמָע נֶעֱרַת חָכָם
מֵאִישׁ שֹׁמֵעַ שִׁיר כְּסִילִים

כִּי כְקוֹל הַסִּירִים תַּחַת הַפִּיר
כֵּן שְׂחֹק הַכְּסִיל וְנִסְ-זֶה הָבֵל
כִּי הָעֵשֶׂק יְהוֹלֵל חָכָם
וַיַּאֲבֵד אֶת-לֵב מַתָּנָה

טוב אַחֲרִית דָּבָר מֵרֵאשִׁיתוֹ
טוב עֲרֵךְ רוּחַ מִגְּבוּהַ רוּחַ
אֶל-תְּבַהֵל בְּרוּיָהָ לִכְעוֹס
כִּי כַּעַס בְּחִיק כְּסִילִים יָנוּחַ

Tov shem mishemen tov
veyom hamavet miyom hivaldo.

Tov lalechet el beit avel
milechet el beit mishteh
ba'asher hu sof kol ha'adam.

Vehachai yiten el libo!

Tov ka'as mis'chok
ki vero'ah panim yitav lev.

Lev chachamim beveit avel,
velev kesilim beveit simchah.

Tov lishmo'ah ga'arat chacham
me'ish shome'ah shir kesilim.

ki chekol hasirim tachat hasir,
ken sechok haksil, vegam zeh havel.

ki ha'oshek yeholel chacham
vi'abed et lev matanah.

Tov acharit davar mereshito;
tov erech ru'ach migvah ru'ach.

Al tevahel beruchacha lichos
ki cha'as becheik kesilim yanu'ach.

¹ “For in evil of the face shall-find-good the-heart.” This could mean that a period of dissatisfaction leads to a period of contentment in the same person, and it could also mean that the misery of others brings joy.

² “The heart of the wise *is* at the house of mourning and the heart of fools is at the house of celebration.”

³ “Than *to be* someone who listens to the song of fools.”

⁴ “Like the noise of *burning* thorns under the pot, so is the joking of the fool; this too is pointless.” Hebrew uses the same word for pot and for thorn/bramble, סִיר.

⁵ Most translators agree that the root הלל, which often means praise, here means upset or confuse; however, most assume that the second part of the verse means “a bribe/gift destroys/corrupts the heart.”

⁶ “For anger in the bosom of fools comes to rest.”

¹⁰ Don't say,

“How is it that the *good* old days
were better than these?”

It isn't smart to ask about this.

¹¹ Wisdom is better with an inheritance,
even more so for anyone on earth.¹

¹² *For being* sheltered by wisdom
is like being sheltered by money,
but the benefit of knowing wisdom
refreshes those who possess it.²

¹³ Look at the works of God:
who can fix what *God* has twisted?

¹⁴ On a good day, be in good *spirits*,
and on a bad day,
know that this *bad* day to offset that *good* day
God made
so that no-one can find
any trace of it afterwards.³

¹⁵ I've seen it all in my pointless days:
there's a good man lost in his goodness;
there's an evil man sustained in his evil.

אֶל-תֹּאמַר

מַה הָיָה שֶׁהַיָּמִים הָרָשִׁים

הָיוּ טוֹבִים מֵאֵלֶּה

כִּי לֹא מֵחֹכְמָה שְׁאֵלַת עַל-זֶה

טוֹבָה חֹכְמָה עִם-נַחֲלָה

וַיֹּתֵר לְרֹאֵי הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ

כִּי בִצֵּל הַחֹכְמָה

בִּצֵּל הַכֶּסֶף

וַיִּתְּרוֹן דַּעַת הַחֹכְמָה

תַּחְיֶיהָ בְּעָלֶיהָ

רְאֵה אֶת-מַעֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים

כִּי מִי יוּכַל לְתַקֵּן אֶת אֲשֶׁר עָוְתָו

בְּיוֹם טוֹבָה הֵיחָא כְּטוֹב

וּבְיוֹם רָעָה

רְאֵה גַם אֶת-זֶה לְעִמּוּת-זֶה

עֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים

עַל-דִּבְרֵת שְׁלֹא יִמְצָא הָאָדָם

אֲחֵרָיו מֵאֻמָּה

אֶת-הַכֹּל רְאִיתִי בִּימֵי הֶבְלִי

יֵשׁ צַדִּיק אֶבֶד בְּצִדְקוֹ

וַיֵּשׁ רָשָׁע מְאֹרֶךְ בְּרָעוּתוֹ

Al tomar,

“Meh hayah shehayamim harishonim
hayu tovim me’eleh?”

Ki lo mechochmah sha’alta al zeh.

Tovah chochmah im nachalah,
veyoter lero’ei hashamesh.

ki betzel hachochmah

betzel hakasaf,

veyitron da’at hachochmah

techayeh ve’aleha.

Re’eh et ma’aseh ha’Elohim:

ki mi yuchal letaken et asher ivto?

Beyom tovah, heyeh vetov,
uveyom ra’ah,

re’eh gam et zeh le’umat zeh

asah Elohim

al divrat shelo yimtzah ha’adam
acharav me’umah.

Et hakol ra’iti bimeiv hevli:

yesh tzadik oved betzidko;

yesh rashah ma’arich bero’oto.

¹ “Good is wisdom with inheritance and more for those who see the sun.” There are different ways to interpret this, and perhaps it’s rather meaningless. However, it reminds me of a piece of wisdom I’ve heard from my neighbor Eddie: “Rich or poor, it’s good to have money.”

² “For in the shade/shadow/shelter of wisdom *is* in the shade/shadow/shelter of money, and the extra benefit of knowledge of wisdom brings alive its masters.” Perhaps the poet means that both wisdom and money offer some protection, and wisdom offers a bit of an advantage.

³ “On a day of good, be in the goodness; and on a day of bad, see that also this *bad day* offsetting that *good day* did God make, so that (lit., *upon the matter*) a-human-being won’t find after-it anything (i.e., so that both types of day disappear without a trace).”

¹⁶ Don't be especially good
and don't make yourself extra smart;
why make yourself crazy?

¹⁷ Don't be especially bad,
and don't be an idiot;
why die when it's not your time?¹

¹⁸ It's good that you should hold on to this,
not grasp on to something else,
for someone who respects God
will come out of the crowd.²

¹⁹ Wisdom makes the wise stronger
than ten commanders in the town.

²⁰ No-one on earth is so virtuous
as to do *only* good and never lapse.

²¹ Also, all the things people say,
don't give them your attention,
so you won't hear
what nasty things your servant says about you!

²² Since many a time you well know³
you've said nasty things about others.

²³ I tested all this through wisdom:
I said *to myself*, "I'll get wise,
even if it's a stretch for me."⁵

²⁴ Whatever is far off and very deep,
who can find it?

אַל־תְּהִי צַדִּיק הַרְבֵּה

וְאַל־תַּתְּחַכֵּם יוֹתֵר

לָמָּה תִּשְׁוֹמֶם?

אַל־תִּרְשָׁע הַרְבֵּה

וְאַל־תִּהְיֶה סָכָל

לָמָּה תָּמוּת בִּלְאֵ עֵתָּה

טוֹב אֲשֶׁר תִּעְחֹז בָּזֶה

וְגַם־מִזֶּה אַל־תִּנָּח אֶת־יָדְךָ

כִּי־יֵרֶחַ אֱלֹהִים

יֵצֵא אֶת־כָּלָם

הַחֲכָמָה תִּעֹז לַחֲכָם

מֵעֲשָׂרָה שְׁלִישִׁים אֲשֶׁר חַיֵּי בָּעִיר

כִּי אָדָם אֵין צַדִּיק בָּאָרֶץ

אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה־טוֹב וְלֹא יִחָטָא

גַּם לְכָל־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר יִדְבְּרוּ

אַל־תִּתֵּן לִבְךָ

אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תִשְׁמַח

אֶת־עַבְדְּךָ מִקָּלֶלְךָ

כִּי גַם־פְּעָמִים רַבּוֹת יִדַּע לִבְךָ

אֲשֶׁר גַּם־אַתָּה קָלַלְתָּ אַחֲרֵיהֶם

כָּל־זֶה נִסִּיתִי בַּחֲכָמָה

אֲמַרְתִּי אַחֲכָמָה

וְהִיא רְחוּקָה מִמֶּנִּי

רְחוּק מֵהַשְׁהָיָה וְעָמוֹק אֶעְמוֹק

מִי יִמְצָאֵנִי

Al tehi tzadik harbeh,

ve'al tit'chakam yoter;

lamah tishomem?

Al tirshah harbeh

ve'al tehi sachal;

lamah tamut belo itecha?

Tov asher te'echoz bazeh

vegam mizeh al tanach et yadecha

ki yereh Elohim

yetzeh et kulam.

Hachochmah ta'oz lechacham

me'asarah shalitim asher hayu ba'ir.

Ki adam ein tzadik ba'aretz

asher ya'aseh tov velo yechetah.

Gam lechol hadvarim asher yedaberu

al titen libecha,

asher lo tishmah

et avdecha mekalelecha!

Ki gam pe'amim rabot yadah libecha

asher gam atah kilalta acherim.

Kol zeh nasiti vachochmah.

Amarti, "Echkamah,

vehi rechokah mimeni."

Rachok mah shehaya ve'amok amok,

mi yimtza'enu?

¹ Perhaps the writer knew the fate of Darwin Award winners.

² "Good that you will seize on this and also away from this do not rest your hand for one who respects God will come out of them all."

³ "For also many times has your heart/brain acknowledged ..."

⁴ A manuscript has the word **את** instead of **אתה**.

⁵ Or, "All this I tried/tested/proved through wisdom. I said, 'I shall be wise.' And it (wisdom) is far from me."

²⁵ I thought *it* over, to find out,¹

to rove and seek wisdom and reckoning,

to understand the evil of folly,

and the foolishness *of crazy ideas*.

²⁶ I find more bitter than death the woman

whose mind is vetoes and restrictions,²

her hands tied *from anything* good;³

before God, let *a good man* escape from her

and let a sinner be conquered by her.

²⁷ See, this is what I found, said Speaker,⁴

counting one by one to find the answer.

²⁸ I kept seeking but couldn't find *it*:

men—I found one in a thousand;

women—I found not one among them all.

²⁹ Only, look at this that I found:

that God made

humans⁵ right,

but they have looked for lots of problems.

סבֹּתִי אֲנִי וּלְבִי לַדַּעַת

וְלִתּוֹר וּבִקֵּשׁ חֲכָמָה וַחֲשֹׁבֹן

וְלַדַּעַת רָשָׁע כָּסֹל

וְהַסְכִּילוֹת הוֹלִלוֹת

וּמוֹצֵזָה אֲנִי מֵר מִמָּוֶת אֶת־הָאִשָּׁה

אֲשֶׁר־הִיא מִצְדִּים וְחֶרְמִים לְבָהּ

אֲסוּרִים יְדֶיהָ טוֹב

לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים יִמְלֹט מִמֶּנָּה

וְחוֹטֵא יִלְכָּד בָּהּ

רֵאָה זֶה מָצָאתִי אִמְרָה קֹהֶלֶת

אֶחָת לְאֶחָת לִמְצֹא חֶשְׁבֹן

אֲשֶׁר עוֹד־בִּקְשָׁה נַפְשִׁי וְלֹא מָצָאתִי

אָדָם אֶחָד מֵאֶלֶף מִצָּאתִי

וְאִשָּׁה בְּכָל־אֶלֶף לֹא מָצָאתִי

לְבַד רֵאָה־זֶה מָצָאתִי

אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה הָאֱלֹהִים

אֶת־הָאָדָם יָשָׁר

וְהֵמָּה בִקְשׁוּ חֲשִׁבֹנוֹת רַבִּים

Saboti ani velibi lada'tat

velatur uvakesh chochma vecheshbon

velada'at resha kesel

vehasichlut holelot.

Umotzeh ani mar mimavet et ha'isha

asher hi metzodim vecharamim libah,

asurim yadeha tov;

lifnei ha'Elohim yimalet mimenah,

vechoteh yilached bah.

Re'eh zeh matzati, amrah Kohelet,

achat le'achat limtzo cheshbon.

Asher od bikshah nafshi velo matzati:

adam—echad me'elef matzati;

ve'ishah, vechol eleh lo matzati.

Levad re'eh zeh matzati

asher asah ha'Elohim

et ha'adam yashar,

vehemah vikshu chishvonot rabim.

¹ “I went around, I and my mind/heart, to know and to wander and *to* seek wisdom and reckoning.” The Hebrew would be easier if it were to read בְּלִבִּי (in/with my mind/heart) instead of וּלְבִי (and my mind/heart) and וּבִקֵּשׁ (the standard infinitive form, to seek) instead of בִּקֵּשׁ.

² “Defensive bulwarks and prohibitions.” The Hebrew words can connote traps and nets, and Biblical interpreters often think that Biblical writers suspected women of entrapment, but that's not necessarily the writer's implication since the next phrase implies that she's restricted from any enjoyment of what's good. Some people are so devoted to their own failings that neither they nor anyone around them can enjoy the good things in life.

³ “Restricted/bound/tied her hands/power *from what* is good.”

⁴ Speaker (קֹהֶלֶת) is a feminine noun from the root for congregation. In 1:2 and 1:12 the word is used with masculine forms; here it's used with a feminine form. This may simply be an instance where Biblical grammar isn't as fixed about gender as modern grammar.

⁵ “The human being/earthling.”

Chapter 8

¹ Who is like a wise person?

Who knows how to understand something?

Human wisdom illuminates one's appearance
and changes one's personal authority.¹

² As for me, I watch the king's temper

because of God's promise *to aid the king*.²

³ Don't get flustered at his presence. Move on;
don't stand by when there's trouble.

He can do anything he wants

⁴ because the king's word is law,

and who can ask him, "What are you doing?"

⁵ Keep the rules, stay out of trouble;

the wise know when and how *to risk trouble*.³

⁶ For any wish, there's a time and a way,
when a person's trouble is severe.⁴

⁷ For a person can't know what will be—
when it's coming, who can tell him?

מִי כִהְיָחָחֶם

וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ פֶּשֶׁר דָּבָר

חֹכְמַת אָדָם תְּאִיר פָּנָיו

וְעַז פָּנָיו יִשְׁנֶה

אֲנִי פִי מֶלֶךְ שֶׁמֹּר

וְעַל דְּבַר־תְּשׁוּבָת אֱלֹהִים

אַל-תִּבְהֶל מִפְּנֵי תִלְךְ

אַל-תִּעַמֹּד בְּדַבַּר רָע

כִּי כָל-אֲשֶׁר יַחְפֹּץ יַעֲשֶׂה

בְּאֲשֶׁר דְּבַר-מֶלֶךְ שְׁלֹטוֹן

וּמִי יֹאמַר-לוֹ מַה-תַּעֲשֶׂה

שׁוֹמֵר מִצְוָה לֹא יֵדַע דְּבַר רָע

וְעֵת וּמִשְׁפָּט יֵדַע לֵב חָכָם

כִּי לְכָל-חֹפֶץ יֵשׁ עֵת וּמִשְׁפָּט

כִּי-רָעַת הָאָדָם רַבָּה עָלָיו

כִּי-אֵינְנוּ יוֹדֵעַ מַה-שְּׂיֵהֶיָּהּ

כִּי כֹאֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה מִי יַגִּיד לוֹ

Mi kehechacham?

Umi yode'ah pesh'er davar?

Chochmat adam ta'ir panav,
ve'oz panav yeshuneh.

Ani pi melech shemor

ve'al divrat shevu'at Elohim.

Al tibahel mipanav. Telech;
al ta'amod bedavar rah.

Ki kol asher yachpotz ya'aseh

ba'asher devar melech shilton,

umi yomar lo, "Mah ta'aseh?"

Shomer mitzvah lo yedah devar rah,

ve'et umishpat yedah lev chacham.

Ki lechol chefetz yesh et umishpat,

ki ra'at ha'adam rabah alav.

Ki einenu yode'ah ma sheyiheyeh—

ki ka'asher yiheyeh, mi yagid lo?

¹ "And the power (hence 'influence' or 'authority') of one's face/appearance/presence will change."

² Literally, "I. King's mouth guard. And upon the matter (i.e., because) of the oath of God." When kings think they rule by divine right and promptly punish *lèse majesté* (offending the sovereign's dignity), subjects must watch their ruler's every mood.

³ "One who observes the commandment will not know/experience a bad thing, and time/season and judgement/custom/manner will know the heart of the wise person," i.e., if you stick to the rules you'll stay out of trouble, and it's a wise person who can calculate when (the time) and the legal niceties (how) by which to skirt trouble.

⁴ "For/when the trouble of a human being *is* great upon him."

⁸ No one with the power to breathe
can stop the breathing,¹

or have control over one's day of death;
there's no release from *that kind of* battle,
and evil can't save those who possess it.

⁹ I have seen all this and paid attention
to all work that is done
under the sun.

Sometimes one person controls another
to his *own* detriment.

¹⁰ So too, I saw bad people buried—
they used to come and go from the Temple²
but were forgotten in the city
where they did this.
This too is pointless.

¹¹ But the sentence isn't executed—
the sentence for an evil action—quickly.

That's why people's minds are filled
with doing evil.

¹² A sinner can do a hundred wrongs
yet live *a long life*,³
still, I know
that those who respect God will do well
since they show respect in *God's* presence.

אִין אָדָם שְׁלִיט בְּרוּיִחַ
לְכַלּוֹא אֶת־הָרוּחַ

וְאִין שְׁלִטוֹן בְּיוֹם הַמָּוֶת
וְאִין מִשְׁלַחַת בַּמִּלְחָמָה
וְלֹא־יִמָּלֵט רֶשֶׁה אֶת־בְּעָלָיו

אֶת־כָּל־זֶה רָאִיתִי וְנָתַן אֶת־לִבִּי
לְכָל־מַעֲשֵׂה אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשֵׂה
תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ

עַתָּה אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַט הָאָדָם בָּאָדָם
לְרַע לוֹ

וּבְכֹן רָאִיתִי רְשָׁעִים קִבְּרִים
וּבָאוּ וּמִמְקוֹם קָדוֹשׁ יִהְיוּ לְכוֹ
וַיִּשְׁתַּכְּחוּ בְעִיר
אֲשֶׁר כִּן־עָשׂוּ
גַם־זֶה הַבֵּל

אֲשֶׁר אֵין־נִעֲשֶׂה פִּתְגָם
מַעֲשֵׂה הָרָעָה מֵהֶרָה

עַל־כֵּן מָלֵא לֵב בְּנֵי־הָאָדָם בָּהֶם
לַעֲשׂוֹת רָע

אֲשֶׁר חָטָא עֹשֶׂה רָע מָאֵת
וּמֵאֲרִיִּךְ לוֹ

כִּי גַם־יֹדַע אָנִי

אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה־טוֹב לִירְאֵי הָאֱלֹהִים
אֲשֶׁר יִירָאוּ מִלִּפְנֵי

Ein adam shalit baruach

lichloh et haru'ach,

ve'ein shilton beyom hamavet

ve'ein mishlachat bamil'chamah

velo yemalet reshah et be'alav.

Et kol zeh ra'iti, venaton et libi

lechol ma'aseh asher na'asah

tachat hashamesh.

Et asher shalat ha'adam be'adam

lerah lo.

Uvechen ra'iti resha'im kevurim—

vava'u, umimkom kadosh yehalechu

veyishtak'chu va'ir

asher ken asu.

Gam zeh havel.

Asher ein na'asah fitgam

ma'aseh hara'ah meherah.

Al ken maleh lev benei ha'adam bahem

la'asot rah.

Asher choteh oseh rah me'at

uma'arich lo,

ki gam yode'ah ani

asher yiheyeh tov leyirei ha'Elohim

asher yiru milfanav.

¹ Or, "There is no man *who* has control over the spirit to stop the spirit." I think "breathing" makes more sense than "spirit" in this case, to say that even if you have impressive breath control, eventually you have to take a breath.

² "A holy site."

³ "And it is prolonged for him."

¹³ The evil person will not do well
nor live long—like a *passing* shadow—
since he doesn't show respect for God.

¹⁴ There's pointless activity on earth:
there are good people
who suffer
from the deeds of the bad
and bad people
who benefit
from the deeds of the good.¹

I'd say this too is pointless.

¹⁵ So I praised cheerfulness
since there's no good for anyone
under the sun
except to eat, drink and be happy:
this can stay with him in his toil
all the days
God has granted him
under the sun.

¹⁶ When I devoted my attention
to knowing wisdom
and to seeing the anxiety
that is dealt with on earth—
oh, neither by day nor by night
does *a person* find sleep for the eyes!

וְטוֹב לֹא־יִהְיֶה לָרָשָׁע
וְלֹא־יָאָרִיךְ יָמִים כְּצֶלֶל
אֲשֶׁר אֵינְנוּ יָרֵא מִלִּפְנֵי אֱלֹהִים
יֵשׁ הֶעָלָם אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשֶׂה עַל־הָאָרֶץ
אֲשֶׁר יֵשׁ צַדִּיקִים
אֲשֶׁר מַגִּיעַ אֲלֵהֶם
כְּמַעֲשֵׂה הָרָשָׁעִים
וְיֵשׁ רָשָׁעִים
שֶׁמַּגִּיעַ אֲלֵהֶם
כְּמַעֲשֵׂה הַצַּדִּיקִים
אֲמַרְתִּי שֶׁגַּם־זֶה הָעָלָם
וְשִׁבַּחְתִּי אֲנִי אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיְמָה
אֲשֶׁר אֵין טוֹב לָאָדָם
תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַשׁ
כִּי אִם לֶאֱכֹל וְלִשְׁתּוֹת וְלִשְׂמֹחַ
וְהוּא יִלְוֶנוּ בְּעִמְלֹנוֹ
יְמֵי חַיָּיו
אֲשֶׁר־נָתַן לּוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים
תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַשׁ
כֹּאֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי אֶת־לִבִּי
לְדַעַת חִכְמָה
וְלִרְאוֹת אֶת־הָעֲנָוִן
אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשֶׂה עַל־הָאָרֶץ
כִּי גַם בַּיּוֹם וּבַלַּיְלָה
שֶׁנָּה בְּעֵינָיו אֵינְנוּ רוֹעֵה

Vetov lo yiheyeh larashah
velo ya'arich yamim—ketzel—
asher einenu yareh milifnei Elohim.
Yesh hevel asher na'asah al ha'aretz,
asher yesh tzadikim
asher magi'ah alehem
kema'aseh harsha'im
veyesh resha'im
shemagi'ah alehem
kema'aseh hatzadikim.
Amarti shegam zeh havel.
Veshibachti ani et hasimchah
asher ein tov la'adam
tachat hashemesh
ki im le'echol velishtot velismo'ach,
vehu yilvenu va'amalo
yemei chayav
asher natan lo ha'Elohim
tachat hashamesh.
Ka'asher natati et libi
lada'at chochmah
velirot et ha'inyan
asher na'asah al ha'aretz—
ki gam bayom uvalaylah
shenah be'einav einenu ro'eh.

¹ “There’s pointless activity on earth, in that there are righteous people who it-touches/affects to-them like-the-activity-of the-bad-people and-there-are bad-people who-it-touches/affects to-them like-the-activity-of the-good-people,” i.e., good people are affected by the bad, and vice versa.

¹⁷ I saw all God's work,
but nobody can
discover the activity
performed under the sun—
though a person work hard to seek *it*,
he cannot find *it*—
and though a wise person claims to know *it*,
he too cannot find *it*.

וְרָאִיתִי אֶת־כָּל־מַעֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים
כִּי לֹא יוּכַל הָאָדָם
לִמְצוֹא אֶת־הַמַּעֲשֵׂה
אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשֶׂה תַּחַת־הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ
בְּשֶׁל אֲשֶׁר יַעֲמֹל הָאָדָם לְבַקֵּשׁ
וְלֹא יִמְצָא
וְגַם אִם־יֹאמַר הֶחָכֶם לְדַעַת
לֹא יוּכַל לִמְצָא

Vera'iti et kol ma'aseh ha'Elohim,
ki lo yuchal ha'adam
limtzo et hama'aseh
asher na'asah tachat hashemesh—
beshel asher ya'amol ha'adam levakesh
velo yimtza—
vegam im yomar hechacham lada'at,
lo yuchal limtzo.

Chapter 9

¹ I gave my attention to all this,
to probe all of it—
the good and the wise,
and their labors,
are in God's hands;
as for both love and hate,
no-one knows everything before them.¹
² The same fate awaits everything:²
for the good person and the bad person,
for the good and pure as well as the impure,
for one who brings sacrifices
and for one who doesn't bring sacrifices,
for the good person as for the sinner,
for the oath-taker as for one who avoids³ oaths.

כִּי אֶת־כָּל־זֶה נָתַתִּי אֶל־לִבִּי
וּלְבֹר אֶת־כָּל־זֶה
אֲשֶׁר הַצַּדִּיקִים וְהַחֲכָמִים
וְעִבְדֵיהֶם
בְּיַד הָאֱלֹהִים
גַּם־אַהֲבָה גַּם־שִׂנְאָה
אֵין יוֹדֵעַ הָאָדָם הַכֹּל לִפְנֵיהֶם
הַכֹּל כַּאֲשֶׁר לִכְל מִקְרֶה אֶחָד
לַצַּדִּיק וְלָרָשָׁע
לַטוֹב וְלַטָּהוֹר וְלַטָּמֵא
וְלִזְבֵּחַ
וְלָאֲשֶׁר אֵינֶנּוּ זִבְחַת
כַּטוֹב כַּחֲטָא
הַנִּשְׁבָּע כַּאֲשֶׁר שֶׁבוּעָה יָרָא

Ki et kol zeh natati el libi
velavur et kol zeh—
asher hatzadikim vehachachamim
va'avadeihem
beyad ha'Elohim;
gam ahavah gam sinah,
ein yode'ah ha'adam hakol lifneiham.
Hakol ka'asher lakol mikreh echad:
latzadik velarashah,
latov velatahor velatameh,
velazove'ach
vela'asher einenu zove'ach,
katov kachoteh,
hanishbah ka'asher shevu'ah yareh.

¹ Perhaps this means that nobody knows the sources of love and hate.

² “For everything, like everything, *there is* one thing that happens.”

³ “Has respect for,” i.e., one who considers an oath a very serious matter and therefore avoids them.

³ This is *what's* bad in all that's done
under the sun,

for the same thing happens to them all.

What's more, people's minds are full of evil
and folly is in their minds while they live,
and after that *they go* to the dead.

⁴ Anyone linked with all the living
can feel self-assured.¹

When it comes to a live dog,
it's better off than a dead lion.

⁵ The living know they will die,
and the dead don't know anything—
they get no more pay
since they're no longer remembered.³

⁶ Their love and their hate
and their passion *are* already gone,
they have no portion left forever
in anything that's done under the sun.

⁷ Go on, eat your food with joy
and drink your wine with good cheer
because God has already accepted
what you have done.

⁸ Always make sure your clothes are clean,
and don't be stingy with the shampoo.⁴

זֶה רָע בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר-נַעֲשֶׂה

תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ

כִּי-מִקְרֶה עֶחָד לַכֹּל

וְגַם לֵב בְּנֵי-הָאָדָם מְלֵא-רָע

וְהוֹלָלוֹת בְּלִבָּבָם בְּחַיֵּיהֶם

וְאַחֲרָיו אֶל-הַמֵּתִים

כִּי-מִי אֲשֶׁר יַחְבֹּר: אֵל כָּל-הַחַיִּים

יֵשׁ בִּטְחוֹן

כִּי-לֶכֶלֶב חַי

הוּא טוֹב מִן-הָאַרְיֵה הַמֵּת

כִּי הַחַיִּים יוֹדְעִים שְׁמִימָתוֹ

וְהַמֵּתִים אֵינָם יוֹדְעִים מְאוּמָה

וְאֵין-עוֹד לָהֶם שָׂכָר

כִּי נִשְׁכַּח זִכְרָם

גַּם אַהֲבָתָם גַּם שִׂנְאָתָם

גַּם-קִנְאָתָם כִּבְר אַבְדָּה

וְחֵלֶק אֵין-לָהֶם עוֹד לְעוֹלָם

בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר-נַעֲשֶׂה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ

לֵךְ אֲכַל בְּשִׂמְחָה לַחֲמֶמֶה

וּשְׁתֵּה בְּלֵב-טוֹב יִינֶה

כִּי כִבְר רָצָה הָאֱלֹהִים

אֶת-מַעֲשֶׂיךָ

בְּכָל-עֵת יְהִי בְּנִדְיָךְ לְבָנִים

וּשְׁמֶן עַל-רֹאשְׁךָ אֶל-יַחֲסָר

Zeh rah bechol asher na'asah
tachat hashemesh

ki mikreh echad lakol,

vegam lev benei ha'adam maleh rah,

veholelot bilvavam bechayeihem

ve'acharav el hametim.

Ki mi asher yechubar el kol hachayim

yesh bitachon,

ki lechelev chai

hu tov min ha'aryeh hamet.

Ki hachayim yodim sheyamutu,

vehametim einam yodim me'umah

ve'ein od lahem sachar

ki nishkach zichram.

Gam ahavatam, gam sinatam,

gam kinatam kevar avadah,

vechelek ein lahem od le'olam

bechol asher na'asah tachat hashamesh.

Lech, echol besimchah lachmecha

ushateh velev tov yeinecha

ki chevar ratzah ha'Elohim

et ma'asecha.

Bechol et yiheyu vegadecha levanim

veshemen al rosh'cha al yechsar.

¹ "For such a person there is assurance."

² A manuscript has יבחר with the two middle letters transposed. The accepted reading (יחבר) is from the root for joining together; the rejected reading (יבחר) would be from the root for choosing.

³ "And not any more for them *is there* reward/pay/wages, for forgotten is their memory."

⁴ "At any time let your clothes be white, and oil on your head don't hold back." I presume that "white" clothes means clean clothes since "raw" undyed fabric would be greyish—but you should wash off the mud so you look tidy. Brylcreem and other hair unguents have lost popularity, and what we put in our hair most often is scented shampoo.

⁹ See this: the life with the wife
whom you have loved
all your pointless life
that *God* has granted you under the sun,
all your pointless days—
this is your lot in life
and in the toil at which you labor
under the sun.

¹⁰ Everything you can manage
to do in your strength, do it;
for there's no doing or figuring,
knowledge or wisdom in the Unknown,¹
and that's where you're going!

¹¹ I returned to see under the sun
that the race² *does* not *go* to the swift
nor the war to the mighty
nor even food to the wise
nor wealth to the shrewd
nor goodwill to the skilled;³
but time and chance come to them all.

רָאֵה חַיִּים עִם-אִשָּׁה
אֲשֶׁר-אָהַבְתָּ
כָּל-יְמֵי חַיֵּי הַבְּלָא
אֲשֶׁר נָתַן-לְךָ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ
כָּל יְמֵי הַבְּלָא
כִּי הוּא חֶלְקֶךָ בַּחַיִּים
וּבְעִמְלֹךְ אֲשֶׁר-אַתָּה עֹמֵל
תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ
כֹּל אֲשֶׁר תִּמְצָא יָדְךָ
לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּכֹחַךְ עֲשֵׂה
כִּי אֵין מַעֲשֵׂה וְחֶשְׁבֹּן
וְדַעַת וְחִכְמָה בִּשְׂאוֹל
אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה הוֹלֵךְ שָׁמָּה
ס
שָׁבְתִי וְרָאֵה תַּחַת-הַשָּׁמֶשׁ
כִּי לֹא לַקְּלִים הַמְּרוֹץ
וְלֹא לַגְּבוּרִים הַמְּלַחֲמָה
וְגַם לֹא לַחֲכָמִים לֶחֶם
וְגַם לֹא לַנְּבוֹנִים עֹשֶׁר
וְגַם לַיֹּדְעִים חֵן
כִּי עֵת וָפֶגַע יִקְרֶה אֶת-כָּלֵם

Re'eh chayim im ishah
asher ahavta
kol yemei chayei hevlecha
asher natan lecha tachat hashemesh,
kol yemei hevlecha—
ki hu chelkecha bachayim
uva'amal'cha asher atah amel
tachat hashamesh.
Kol asher timtzah yadcha
la'asot bechochacha, aseh;
ki ein ma'aseh vecheshbon
veda'at vechochmah biShe'ol
asher atah holech shamah.
Shavti vera'oh tachat hashemesh
ki lo lakalim hamerotz
velo lagiborim hamil'chamah
vegam lo lachachamim lechem
vegam lo lanvonim osher
vegam lo layodim chen;
ki et vafegah yikreh et kulam.

¹ שְׂאוֹל is where people go after death. I like to think it's related to the root שאל, which gives us words like “ask” and “question.” As Hamlet said, it's “the undiscovered country” (3.1.80) or the great unknown.

² The word for race is from the root for run.

³ Presumably, you can be a top-quality carpenter, but some clients will still complain.

¹² A person doesn't know his time—
like fish caught
in a bad net
or birds taken in a snare—
people are trapped *just* like them
at a bad time,
when it comes upon them suddenly.

¹³ This too I saw *as* wisdom
under the sun;
and it was *a great thing* for me.

¹⁴ *There was* a small town, few people in it;
a great king came and besieged it,
building great siegeworks against it;

¹⁵ *until someone* found there
a poor *but* wise man,
and he saved the city with his wisdom;
and nobody remembered
that poor man.

¹⁶ I used to say
that wisdom is better than power,
but the poor man's wisdom is wasted
and his words are never heard;

¹⁷ *and that* wise men's words
are heard in peacetime
more than the shouting of a ruler among fools.

¹⁸ *But the story of the poor, wise man shows that*
wisdom is better than weapons,²
while one sinner can destroy much good.

כִּי גַם לֹא יָדָע הָאָדָם אֶת־עֵתוֹ
כְּדָגִים שֶׁנֶּאֱחָזִים

בַּמִּצְדָּה רָעָה
וְכַצִּיפּוֹרִים הָאֲחֻזּוֹת בָּפֶחַ
כָּהֶם יוּקְשִׁים בְּנֵי הָאָדָם
לְעֵת רָעָה

כֶּשֶׁת־פּוֹל עֲלֵיהֶם פִּתּוֹם.
גַּם זֶה רָאִיתִי חֹכְמָה
תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ
וְגִדּוּלָהּ הִיא אֵלַי

עִיר קְטַנָּה וְאֲנָשִׁים בָּהּ מְעַט;
וּבֶאֱלֹהֶי מֶלֶךְ גָּדוֹל וְסָבַב אֹתָהּ
וּבָנָה עָלֶיהָ מִצְדוֹת גְּדוֹלִים
וּמָצָא בָּהּ

אִישׁ מִסְכֵּן חָכָם
וּמִלֹּט־הוּא אֶת־הָעִיר בְּחִכְמָתוֹ
וְאָדָם לֹא זָכַר
אֶת־הָאִישׁ הַמִּסְכֵּן הַהוּא¹

וְאָמַרְתִּי אֲנִי
טוֹבָה חֹכְמָה מִגְּבוּרָה
וְחִכְמַת הַמִּסְכֵּן בְּזוּיָה
וּדְבָרָיו אֵינָם נִשְׁמָעִים

דִּבְרֵי חֲכָמִים
בְּנַחַת נִשְׁמָעִים
מִזַּקַּת מוֹשֵׁל בְּכִסְיָלִים

טוֹבָה חֹכְמָה מִכְּלֵי קֶרֶב
וְחֹמָא אֶחָד יֵאָבֵד טוֹבָה הַרְבֵּה

Ki gam lo yedah ha'adam et ito—
kedagim shene'echazim
bimtzodah ra'ah
vechatziporim ha'achuzot bapach—
kahem yukshim benei ha'adam
le'et ra'ah,
keshetipol aleihem pitom.
Gam zoh ra'iti chochmah
tachat hashamesh,
ugedolah hi elai.

Ir ketanah, va'anashim bah me'at;
uvah eleha melech gadol vesavav otah
uvanah aleha metzodim gedolim;
umatzah vah
ish miskan chacham,
umalat hu et ha'ir bechochmato;
ve'adam lo zachar
et ha'ish hamisken hahu.

Ve'amarti ani,
tovah chochmah migvurah,
vechochmat hamisken bezuyah
udevarav einam nishma'im;
divrei chachamim
benachat nishma'im
miza'akat moshel baksilim.

Tovah chochmah miklei kerav
vechoteh echad ye'abed tovah harbeh.

¹ The dagesh (dot) in the letter ך is unusual in standard grammar, and some editors omit it here.

² “Implements of the *battlefront*.”

Chapter 10

¹ Flies on a dead *body* stink

so that even the perfumer's *embalming* oil reeks;¹

someone valued for wisdom and honor

is made just as disgusting by a little folly.

² A wise person's mind² leans to the right;

a fool's mind leans to the left.

³ When a fool goes out walking

his brain² is missing

so anyone can tell he's a fool.³

⁴ If the boss gets angry with you

don't stick to your position⁵

for giving in⁶ can placate grave errors.

⁵ There's something bad I've seen

under the sun,

an error that proceeds

from the chief:

⁶ setting the fool in very high position

while the wealthy stay on the bottom.

⁷ I've seen servants on horseback

while leaders walk like servants

on the ground.

זְבוּוּעֵי מוֹת יִבְאִישׁ

יָבִיעַ שֶׁמֶן רוֹקַח

יָקָר מֵחֹכְמָה מִכְבוֹד

סִכְלוֹת מֵעַט

לֵב חָכָם לִימִינוֹ

וְלֵב פֶּסִיל לְשִׁמְאֹלוֹ

וְגַם בַּדֶּרֶךְ פֶּשַׁעְכָּל הוֹלֵךְ⁴

לִבּוֹ חָסֵר

וְאָמַר לְכָל סָכָל הוּא

אִם־רוֹחַ הַמוֹשֵׁל תַּעֲלֶה עָלֶיךָ

מִקוֹמָךְ אַל־תִּנָּח

כִּי מִרְפָּא יֵנִיחַ חַטָּאִים גְּדוֹלִים

יֵשׁ רָעָה רְאִיתִי

תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ

כִּישְׁגָּגָה שֵׁיּוֹתֶזֶח

מִלִּפְנֵי הַשְּׁלִיט

נִתָּן הַסָּכָל בַּמְרוֹמִים רַבִּים

וְעֹשִׂירִים בַּשְּׁפָל יֵשְׁבוּ

רְאִיתִי אַוָּדִים עַל־סוּסִים

וְשָׂרִים הוֹלְכִים עַבְדֵּי

עַל־הָאָרֶץ

Zevuvei mavet yavish

yabi'ah shemen roke'ach;

yakar mechochmah, mikavod

sichlut me'at.

Lev chacham limino

velev kesil lismolo.

Vegam baderech keshesachal holech

libo chaser

ve'amar lakol sachal hu.

Im ru'ach hamoshel ta'aleh alecha,

mekomcha al tanach

ki marpeh yani'ach chata'im gedolim.

Yesh ra'ah ra'iti

tachat hashamesh

kishgagah sheyotzeh

milifnei hashalit:

nitan hasechel bamromim rabim,

va'ashirim bashefel yeshevu.

Ra'iti avadim al susim,

vesarim hol'chim ka'avadim

al ha'aretz.

¹ “Flies of death (the flies buzzing on a decomposing body) make a stench, make the cosmetician's lotion stink.” Once we're dead we all stink the same, however much deodorant we used in our lives or however liberally the mortuary professionals apply perfumed embalming oil.

² The Hebrew word לֵב means “heart” but it's just as metaphorical as the “heart” in English. (A “heart” on the left is not a reliable sign of stupidity.) The Hebrew word refers to a person's thinking organ, the mind or brain.

³ “And he says to everyone that he is a fool.”

⁴ A manuscript uses the word כִּשְׁגָּגָה.

⁵ Most translators understand this as “your-place/position do-not-leave” or don't quit your job. Leave can mean “depart from” or “leave unchanged.” If you're willing to change your (metaphorical) position, you can give in to your boss's point.

⁶ The Hebrew root רָפָא may imply both healing and weakness (giving in).

⁸ Someone who digs a pit will fall in;
someone who breaches a fence,
a snake will bit him.

⁹ Someone who picks up rocks
will be hurt by them;
someone who chops wood
will be in danger because of them.

¹⁰ If the steel is blunt
and he doesn't sharpen the edge,
he'll have to press harder,
but common sense makes it work better.¹

¹¹ If the snake bites without muttering
a person with a tongue has no advantage.³

¹² Words from a wise person's lips are welcome
a fool's *own* lips will swallow him!

¹³ His speech begins with folly,⁴
and it ends with terrible craziness.

¹⁴ A fool has lots of words;
nobody knows what will be;
and what will be after him,
who can tell him?

¹⁵ The toil of the foolish tires them out
since they don't even know
how to get to *the* town.

חֹפֶר גִּמְצָן בּוֹ יִפּוֹל
וּפֹרֵץ גָּדֵר
יִשְׁכְּנוּ נָחָשׁ.
מָסִיעַ אַבָּנִים
יַעֲזֹב בָּהֶם;
בּוֹקֵעַ עֵצִים
יִסָּכֵן בָּם.
אִם־קִהָה הַבֶּרֶזֶל
וְהוּא לֹא־פָנִים קִלְקַל
וַחֲיָלִים יַגְבִּיר
וַיִּתְרוֹן הַכֹּשֶׁר.²

Chofer gumatz bo yipol

uforetz gader

yishchenu nachash.

Masi'ah avanim

ye'atzev bahem;

boke'ah etzim

yisachen bam.

Im kehah habarzel

vehu lo fanim kilkal,

vachayalim yegaber,

veyitron hachsher chochmah.

אִם־יִשְׁךְ הַנָּחָשׁ בְּלֹא־לֶחֶשׁ
וְאֵין יִתְרוֹן לְבֹעַל הַלָּשׁוֹן

Im yishoch hanachash belo lachash

ve'ein yitron leva'al halashon.

דִּבְרֵי פִי־חָכָם חֵן

Divrei fi chacham chen

וּשְׂפִתוֹת כֶּסֶל תִּבְלָעֵנּוּ

vesifot kesil tevalenu.

תְּחִלַּת דִּבְרֵי־פִיהוּ סִכְלֹת

Tehilat divrei fihu sichlut

וְאַחֲרֵית פִּיהוּ הוֹלָלוֹת רָעָה

ve'acharit pihu holelut ra'ah.

וְהַסִּכַּל יִרְבֶּה דְּבָרִים

Vehasachal yarbeh devarim;

לֹא־יָדַע הָאָדָם מַה־שִּׁיְהֶיָּה

lo yedah ha'adam mah sheyiheyeh;

וְאֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה מֵאַחֲרָיו

va'asher yiheyeh me'acharav,

מִי יַגִּיד לוֹ

mi yagid lo?

עֲמַל הַכְּסִילִים תִּינָעֵנּוּ

Amal haksilim teyagenu,

אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדַע

asher lo yadah

לֵלֶכֶת אֶל־עִיר

lalechet el ir.

¹ “And-extra working-okay wisdom.” I think the writer means that if you’re sharp (pun alert!) you’ll sharpen the blade instead of leaving it blunt.

² A manuscript has the spelling הכשיר.

³ I think this means that the snake accomplishes its work without language, so we can try to do the same.

⁴ “The-beginning-of-the-words-of-his-mouth *are* folly, and-the-end-of his-mouth *is* craziness bad.”

¹⁶ Alas for you, country with a child for a king
and princes who eat in the morning.¹

אֵי-לָךְ אֶרֶץ שְׂמַלְכֶךָ נָעַר
וְשָׂרֶיךָ בִּבְכֹר יֹאכְלוּ

Iy lach, eretz shemalkech na'ar
vesarayich baboker yochelu.

¹⁷ Happy are you, country
whose king is descended from free people
and whose princes eat at the *proper* time,
for strength and not for drunkenness.

אַשְׁרֵיךְ אֶרֶץ
שְׂמַלְכֶךָ בְּנֵי-חֹרִים
וְשָׂרֶיךָ בָּעֵת יֹאכְלוּ
בִּגְבוּרָה וְלֹא בִשְׂתִי

Ashrech, eretz
shemalkech ben chorim
vesarayich ba'et yochelu,
bigvurah velo vashti.

¹⁸ From laziness the building collapses,
and from idle hands² the house leaks.

בַּעֲצָלָתִים יִפֹּף הַמִּקְרָה
וּבִשְׁפָלוּת יָדַיִם יִדְלֹף הַבַּיִת

Ba'atzaltayim yimach hamkareh
uveshiflut yadayim yidlof habayit.

¹⁹ Food is made for enjoyment,
wine brings pleasure to life,
and money answers every *need*.

לֶשְׂחֹק עֲשִׂים לֶחֶם
וַיַּיֵּן יִשְׂמַח חַיִּים

Lis'chok osim lechem,
veyayin yesamach chayim,
vehakesef ya'aneh et hakol.

²⁰ Don't even think of criticizing a king
nor even in private³
criticize the rich

גַּם בְּמַדְעָךְ מֶלֶךְ אַל-תִּקְלַל
וּבְחֲדָרַי מִשְׁכָּבְךָ
אַל-תִּקְלַל עֲשִׁיר

Gam bemada'acha melech al tekalet
uvechadrei mishkav'cha
al tekalet ashir

for a bird in the sky can carry *your* voice
and a winged creature relate *your* words.

כִּי עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם יוֹלִיד אֶת-הַקּוֹל
וּבַעַל כְּנָפַיִם יַגִּיד דָּבָר

ki off hashamayim yolich et hakol
uva'al kenafayim yaged davar.

Chapter 11

¹ Throw your food on the water,
for in several days you'll find it.⁵

שְׁלַח לַחֲמֶכָּה עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם
כִּי-בְרֶב הַיָּמִים תִּמְצָאֶנּוּ

Shalach lachmecha al penei hamayim,
ki verov hayamim timtza'enu.

² Give a portion to seven *people*,
even eight,
for you don't know what evil will be
on the earth.

תֵּן-חֶלֶק לְשִׁבְעָה
וְגַם לְשִׁמוֹנָה
כִּי לֹא תֵדָע מַה-יִּהְיֶה רָעָה
עַל-הָאָרֶץ

Ten lechem leshivah
vegam lishmonah
ki lo tedah mah yiheyeh ra'ah
al ha'aretz.

¹ Perhaps this means that people should not eat until they've accomplished something for the day.

² ^{וּבִשְׁפָלוּת יָדַיִם}—“and through lowering of hands”; i.e., people standing round with hands in pockets!

³ “And in the chambers of your lying/sleeping.”

⁴ A manuscript has the word ^{הַכְנָפִים}, “the wings” instead of “wings.”

⁵ Perhaps this means that if you discard your treasures, you'll be able to possess them all the more securely; the next verse may encourage generosity.

³ If the clouds fill *with* rain,
they empty *themselves* on the ground;
and whether a tree falls in the south
or in the north,
where the tree falls, there shall it lie.¹

⁴ A wind-watcher will not sow seed,
and a cloud-viewer will not harvest.²

⁵ Just as you don't know
by what path the *fetus'* spirit *travels*,
or how its bones *form* in the full womb,
so *too* you don't know
the work of God
who does everything.

⁶ In the morning, sow your seed,
and at evening, don't leave your hands idle,
since you don't know
which *way* will work out well,
whether this one or that one,
or even if they're both equally good.

⁷ Light is sweet:
it's good for the eyes to see the sun.

⁸ If someone lives many years,
let him enjoy them all
but remember the days of darkness
(for there will be *so* many!);
everything that comes is pointless.

אִם-יִמְלֵאוּ הָעָבִים גֶּשֶׁם
עַל-הָאָרֶץ יָרִיקוּ
וְאִם-יִפֹּל עֵץ בַּדְּרוֹם
וְאִם בַּצָּפוֹן
מְקוֹם שְׁיִפֹּל הָעֵץ שָׁם יִהְיֶה
שׁוֹמֵר רוּחַ לֹא יִזְרָח
וְרֹאֶה בְּעֵבִים לֹא יִקְצֹר
כַּאֲשֶׁר אֵינָהּ יוֹדֵעַ
מַה-דֶּרֶךְ הָרוּחַ
כַּעֲצָמִים בְּבֶטֶן הַמֶּלֶאכָה
כִּכָּה לֹא תִדַּע
אֶת-מַעֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים
אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה אֶת-הַכֹּל
בַּבֹּקֶר זָרַע אֶת-זֶרְעָהּ
וּלְעֶרֶב אַל-תִּנַּח יָדָהּ
כִּי אֵינָהּ יוֹדֵעַ
אִי זֶה יִיכָשָׁר
הַזֶּה אוֹהֶה
וְאִם-שְׁנֵיהֶם כְּאֶחָד טוֹבִים
וּמָתוֹק הָאוֹר
וְטוֹב לְעֵינַיִם לִרְאוֹת אֶת-הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ
כִּי אִם-שָׁנִים הַרְבֵּה יִחְיֶה הָאָדָם
בְּכָל־יָמָיו
וְיִזְכֹּר אֶת-יָמֵי הַחֹשֶׁךְ
כִּי-הַרְבֵּה יִהְיֶה
כֹּל-שֶׁבַח הָבֵל
Im yimalu he'avim geshem,
al ha'aretz yariku;
ve'im yipol etz badarom
ve'im batzafon,
mekom sheyipol ha'etz, sham yehu.
Shomer ru'ach lo yizrah,
vero'eh be'avim lo yiktzor.
Ka'asher eincha yode'ah
mah derech haru'ach,
ka'atzamim beveten hamle'ah,
kacha lo tedah
et ma'aseh ha'Elohim
asher ya'aseh et hakol.
Baboker zerah et zarecha,
vela'erev al tanach yadecha,
ki eincha yode'ah
ei zeh yichshar,
hazeh oh zeh,
ve'im shneiham ke'echad tovim.
Umatok ha'or;
vetov la'einayim lirot et hashamesh.
Ki im shanim harbeh yichyeh ha'adam,
bechulam yismach
veyizkor et yemei hachoshech
(ki harbeh yiheyu);
kol shebah havel.

¹ “*In-the-place* where-shall-fall the-tree, there shall-it-be.”

² If you keep looking for a good time to sow seed (so the wind won't blow it around), you'll never get around to sowing; and if you keep looking at the clouds so you're absolutely sure no rain is coming, you'll never get around to harvesting. In short, if you wait for the perfect moment, you'll never do what you want to do.

³ One would expect this word to be spelled יודע, not יודע.

⁹ Young man, celebrate your youth;
be cheerful when you're young;
follow your heart
and your eyes¹
and know that for all these things
God brings you to judgement.

¹⁰ Keep anger from your mind,
and keep evil off your body,
for childhood and youth² are pointless.

שִׂמַח בְּחוּר בְּיָלְדוּתֶיךָ
וְיִטִּיבָה לִבְךָ בִּיְמֵי בְחוּרוֹתֶיךָ
וְהִלַּךְ בְּדַרְכֵי לִבְךָ
וּבְמַרְאֵי עֵינֶיךָ
וְדַע כִּי עַל-כָּל-אֵלֶּה
יְבִיאֲךָ הָאֱלֹהִים בַּמִּשְׁפָּט
וְהִסֵּר כְּעֵס מִלִּבְךָ
וְהִעֲבֵר רָעָה מִבְּשָׁרֶךָ
כִּי-חַיְלָדוּת וְהַשְׁחָרוּת הֵבֵל

Semach bachur beyaldutecha,
vitivcha lib'cha bimei vechurotecha,
vehalech bedar'chei lib'cha
uvemarei einecha,
vedah ki al kol eleh
yevi'acha ha'Elohim bamishpat.
Vehaser ka'as milibecha,
veha'aver ra'ah mibsarecha,
ki hayaldut vehashacharut havel.

Chapter 12

¹ Remember your creator
as in the days of your youth—
as long as the bad days don't come,
when those years arrive in which you say,
“I find no pleasure in them

² as long as the sun never darkens,
nor the light nor the moon nor the stars,
and the clouds return after the rain.”³

³ On the day when the house guards tremble,
the heroes bow *in fear*,
the molars have fallen out and are useless⁴
and women who peer through windows go dark,

וְזָכַר אֶת-בּוֹרְאֶיךָ
בִּיְמֵי בְחוּרֶיךָ
עַד אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָבֹאוּ יְמֵי הָרָעָה
וְהִנֵּיעוּ שָׁנִים אֲשֶׁר תֹּאמַר
אֵין-לִי בָהֶם חֶפֶץ
עַד אֲשֶׁר לֹא-תִחַשֵּׁחַ הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ
וְהָאֹר וְהַיָּרֵחַ וְהַכּוֹכָבִים
וְשָׁבוּ הָעָבִים אַחַר הַגֶּשֶׁם
בַּיּוֹם שֶׁיִּזְעוּ שֹׁמְרֵי הַבָּיִת
וְהִתְעוּתוֹ אֲנָשֵׁי הַחֵיָל
וּבְטָלוּ הַטְּחָנוֹת כִּי מְעֻטּוֹ
וְחָשְׁכוּ הָרְאוֹת בְּאֲרֻבוֹת

Uzechor et borecha
bimei bechurotecha
ad asher lo yavo'u yemei hara'ah
vehigi'u shanim asher tomar,
“Ein li vahem chefetz
ad asher lo techshach hashemesh,
veha'or vehayare'ach vehakochavim
veshavu he'avim achar hagashem.”
Bayom sheyazu'u shomrei habayit,
vehitavtu anshei hechayil
uvatlu hatochanot ki mi'etu
vechashchu haro'ot ba'arubot.

¹ “Go in the paths of your heart/mind and in the lookings of your eyes.”

² שְׁחָרוּת is related to the Hebrew root שחר, which gives us “dawn” and “black”; here it refers to the early part of life, the dawn or the time before black hair turns grey.

³ Perhaps these verses mean that all pleasure passes—the rain comes and goes, but it always comes again—but the sense of these verses seems difficult. The Talmud (BT Shabbat 151b et. seq.) interprets this section as a description of human decrepitude.

⁴ “And-they-have-become-insignificant the-millers/grinders/molars for they-have-become-few/little.” Grinders could refer to people who use a mortar and pestle, cosmeticians or apothecaries, but Rashi says הַשִּׁנִּים, which might mean the teeth; שִׁנִּים טוחנות (grinding teeth) means molars.

⁴ and the market gates are closed
as the noise of the mill¹ fades away;
then one rises to the rooster's crowing²
and all the song-girls are depressed.³

⁵ They'll be afraid from a height,
fearing terrors along the path;
the almond has blossomed
the grasshopper grown heavy⁴
and appetite has failed,
as the person goes to his eternal place.

But mourners⁵ roam in the market

⁶ as long as the silver cord is not frayed,
nor the golden bowl broken
nor the pitcher broken at the fountain
nor the cover⁶ cracked at the cistern

⁷ nor dust returned to the earth
as it used to be
nor the spirit returned to God
who gave it.⁸

וּסְגֵרוּ דִלְתַיִם בַּשּׁוּק
בִּשְׁפַל קוֹל הַטְחָנָה
וַיָּקִימוּ לְקוֹל הַצִּפּוֹר
וַיִּשְׁחֻוּ כָּל־בְּנוֹת הַשִּׁיר
גַּם מִגָּבוֹהַ יִרְאוּ
וַחֲתָחִיתִים בַּדֶּרֶךְ
וַיִּנְאֹץ הַשֶּׁקֶר
וַיִּסְתַּבֵּל הַחֲגָב
וַתִּפֹּר הָאֲבִיוֹנָה
כִּי־הֹלֵךְ הָאָדָם אֶל־בֵּית עוֹלָמוֹ
וְסִבְבוּ בַּשּׁוּק הַסּוֹפְדִים
עַד אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִרְתְּקִי חֶבֶל הַכֶּסֶף
וַתִּרְץ גִּלְתָּ הַזָּהָב
וַתִּשְׁכַּר כֹּד עַל־הַמַּבְוֵעַ
וַנֶּרֶץ הַנִּלְגַּל אֶל־הַבּוֹר
וַיֵּשֶׁב הָעָפָר עַל־הָאָרֶץ
כִּשְׁהָיָה
וַהֲרִיחַ תִּשְׁבּוּב אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים
אֲשֶׁר נִתְּנָה
Vesugru delatayim bashuk
bishfal kol hatachanah,
veyakum lekol hatzipor
veyishachu kol benot hashir.
Gam migavo'ah yira'u
vechat'chatim baderech,
veyanetz hashaked
veyistabel hechagav
vetafer ha'aviyonah,
ki holech ha'adam el beit olamo.
Vesavevu vashuk hasofdim.
ad asher lo yeratek chevel hakesef
vetarutz gulat hazahav
vetishaver kad al hamabu'ah
venarotz hagalgel el habor
veyashov he'afar al ha'aretz
keshehayah
veharu'ach tashuv el ha'Elohim
asher netanah.

¹ Or, “the sound of chewing (of the molars) fades away”; I think this is how Rashi understands the phrase but I find it hard to know what the writer intends.

² “And-he-will-rise for-the-sound/voice-of the-bird.” It’s a widespread myth that the rooster crows to begin the day, but in my experience they can crow all night, tantalizing the insomniac with false promises of dawn.

³ “And-they-bow-down all-the-daughters/girls-of the-song/singing.” If we were to read the last word of the verse as העיר instead of השיר we could translate “the town girls” or “the suburbs” instead of “the song-girls.”

⁴ T. S. Eliot in *The Waste Land* interprets differently: “And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief.” He didn’t get that translation from the King James, Vulgate or Septuagint versions, so I wonder where he got it.

⁵ Or “eulogizers,” perhaps professionals who deliver funeral orations.

⁶ גלגל often means wheel but in this case I suspect the writer is thinking of a round cover for a cistern or well. If it’s a wheel, perhaps it’s part of a pulley assembly to draw up a water bucket.

⁷ A manuscript version has the word ירחק.

⁸ In verses 6 and 7 it’s hard to know when the negatives stop, from the silver cord down to the spirit returning. I understand that the (professional?) mourners of verse 5 roam the market because business is slow since the bowls are not breaking.

⁸ Pointless, pointless, said Speaker,¹
it's all pointless.

⁹ And more, since Speaker was wise
he kept teaching knowledge to the people;
he listened and probed
and prepared many proverbs.

¹⁰ Speaker sought to find
acceptable words—
honest writing, words of truth.

¹¹ The words of the wise are like goads,
like spikes pounded in *to stir the audience*,²
such orators are people who manage crowds,
provided by a single leader.³

¹² More than these, child, beware:
of making many books there is no end
and much study will tire out *your* body.

¹³ Finally, we can hear all *there is to say*:
respect God
and keep *God's* rules;
this is *for* every person.

¹⁴ For every action
God will bring to judgement
with everything that's secret,
whether good or bad.

הַבֵּל הַבָּלִים אָמַר הַקּוֹהֵלֶת
הַכֹּל הַבֵּל

וַיֹּתֵר שֶׁהָיָה קֹהֵלֶת חָכָם
עוֹד לְמַד־דַּעַת אֶת־הָעָם

וַאֲזַן וַחֲקֹךְ
תִּקֵּן מִשְׁלִים הַרְבֵּה

בִּקֵּשׁ קֹהֵלֶת לְמִצָּא
דִּבְרֵי־חֶפֶץ

וּכְתוּב יוֹשֵׁר דִּבְרֵי אֱמֶת

דִּבְרֵי חֲכָמִים כְּדָרְבָנוֹת
וּכְמַשְׁמֵרוֹת נְטוּעִים

בְּעֵלֵי אֲסוּפוֹת

נִתְּנוּ מִרְעָה אֶחָד

וַיֹּתֵר מִהֶמָּה בְּנֵי הַזֶּהָר

עֲשׂוֹת סִפְרִים הַרְבֵּה אֵין קֵץ
וְלַהֲגֹ הַרְבֵּה יוֹגֵעַת בָּשָׂר

סוֹף דָּבָר הַכֹּל נִשְׁמָח

אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים יִרָא

וְאֶת־מִצְוֹתָיו שְׁמוֹר

כִּי־זֶה כֹל הָאָדָם

כִּי אֶת־כָּל־מַעֲשֵׂה

הָאֱלֹהִים יָבֵא בְּמִשְׁפָּט

עַל כָּל־נֶעְלָם

אִם־טוֹב וְאִם־רָע

Havel havalim, amar haKohelet,
hakol havel.

Veyoter, shehayah Kohelet chacham
od limad da'at et ha'am

ve'izen vechiker,
tiken meshalim harbeh.

Bikesh Kohelet limtzo
divrei chefetz—

vechatuv yosher, divrei emet.

Divrei chachamim kadarvonot
uchemasmerot netu'im

ba'alei asufot
nitnu mer'oeh echad.

Veyoter mehemah beni, hizaher:

asot sefarim harbeh ein ketz
velahag harbeh yegi'at basar.

Sof davar, hakol nishmah:
et ha'Elohim yerah

ve'et mitzvotav shemor;
ki zeh kol ha'adam.

Ki et kol ma'aseh
ha'Elohim yavi vemishpat

al kol nehlam,
im tov ve'im rah.

¹ The word for Speaker looks grammatically feminine but uses masculine verbs and adjectives.

² For those of us unfamiliar with a goad (דרבן), it's something you sharpen with a file (1 Samuel 13:21), and then you poke your animal to get it moving. מסמר or משמר (the ש sounds like ס) is often translated nail, but I presume it could be like a tent spike, "planted" (נטועים) or pounded into the ground. No doubt ancient orators brought their audiences to tears, one way or another. Ouch!

³ Crowds could be harvests (gatherings of one kind or another); leader could be shepherd, but it could refer to God—these orators are like the prophets, admonishing the people with a holy message of repentance.

SPS Draft

The Book of Ester

אֶסְתֵּר

The Book of Ester • אֶסְתֵּר • Ester

This jolly tale recounts the near destruction of the Jewish communities spread among the towns and provinces of King Achashverosh, with the death of 75,811 non-Jews (800 in Shushan, over two days, 75,000 in the provinces, Haman's ten sons and Haman). God is not mentioned in the book, so some people like to say that even when we are not aware of divine guidance, it's there; they may go on to say that God's behind-the-scenes work at Purim is contrasted with the public display of divine power commemorated a month later at Pesach; and if the seasons cooperate, they can go on to say that the springtime revivication of nature is barely noticeable at Purim time but in full swing by Pesach, as those who suffer from seasonal allergies can attest.

The story is well constructed by modern standards, with the irony of Haman's greatest triumph just before his fall, though instances of repetition and ellipsis roughen the otherwise smooth surface of the story. The story is told so well that some doubt its accuracy and consider it semi-historical fiction; such people are often disappointed by the literary principles of ancient sacred literature.

This translation does not translate names; standard translations in English often use names derived from the early Greek and Latin translations, so I think you might as well just transliterate the source. However, the people and places in the story are usually associated as follows:

- **Achashverosh** is usually translated as Ahasuerus and identified (for those who don't think the world was created just a moment ago, with all its fossils, and humans with all their memories) as the historical figure Artaxerxes or Xerxes. His name in Hebrew begins with a Persian (I presume) prefix denoting royalty, for the same prefix is used in the words for provincial premiers (3:12, 8:9, 9:3) and royal stables (8:10, 9:14). His rule extended from **Hodu** (usually India) to **Kush** (usually Ethiopia), a pretty extensive realm. He seemed to have an efficient system of communication involving riders on horseback to deliver decrees to all his provinces.
- **Haman** is a descendant of **Agag**, the Amalekite king whom Saul failed to kill in I Samuel 15. Some people trace the ancestry of many enemies of the Jews back to the Biblical Amalekites, while others cite the Talmud (Berachot 28a) to argue that such nations can no longer be identified, to which others rejoin that Amalekitism is no longer a genetic but a spiritual ailment
- **Ester** (usually Esther with a silent h. You want a silent h? Hherhe yhou ahre; enjhoy.) is an orphan girl raised by her uncle **Mordochai** (usually Mordechai). Some writers associate them with Ishtar and Marduk, ancient deities with characteristics rather different from those of Ester and Mordochai. Ester is also called Hadassah, a Hebrew word for myrtle, rather a nice name in my opinion. In Hebrew scripture, Mordochai was exiled with Zerubbavel (Ezra 2:2, Nechemiah 7:7), and in the Mishnah (Shekalim 5:1) he was in charge of taking donations for bird sacrifices in the Second Temple. Isn't it nice to think that he was able to return to Israel and witness the Temple sacrifices reinstituted?
- **Shushan** (usually Susa) is mentioned in Hebrew scripture in Nechemiah and Daniel, but if it's historical it's an ancient town mentioned in Sumerian, Greek and other sources, and today its site is the Iranian town of Shush.
- **Faras** or **Paras** and **Madai**, usually translated as Persia and Media, ancient empires in today's Iran. Faras and Paras are the same; in ancient languages such as Hebrew and Greek, our letters F and P are closely related. You can feel this if you say F using your lips and not your teeth; it's like a P without letting the lips touch.

The Talmud and Mishna add background to the text.

- Before his rise to power, Haman was once a barber (Megillah, 16a), and Ahasuerus was of low birth (Megillah 12b) but married royalty—Vashti was the granddaughter of Nebuchadnezzar (Megillah 10b). Aware of their humble beginnings, both men were sensitive to insults.
- Ahasuerus praised Vashti's lineage and beauty to his drinking partners. “Wanna see?” he asked them, “Sure,” they said, “but without her fine clothes and jewelry. Bring her in stark naked” (Megillah 12b). That was his request, and it's easy to see why Nebuchadnezzar's granddaughter would refuse!
- King Oshiah once consulted the prophetess Huldah (II Kings 22:14) instead of Jeremiah, who had gone on a successful mission to rescue the Ten Lost Tribes (Megillah 14b). Perhaps this explains why Mordochai and Esther were authorized to decree laws for the Jewish people (Esther 9:29).
- The Mishnah tells us an image of Shushan was over the Eastern gate of the Temple (Middot 1:3)—perhaps to thank the rulers who allowed us to rebuild the Temple, perhaps to warn us that wherever we feel successful and accepted, our fortunes can change suddenly if a Haman appears.

Chapter 1

¹ This happened in the time of Achashverosh,
the Achashverosh who ruled
all the way from Hodu to Kush,
one hundred and twenty-seven provinces.

² In those days,
when King Achashverosh sat
on his royal throne,
which was in the city¹ of Shushan,
³ in the third year of his reign
he held a drinking binge
for all his officials and servants,
the army of Faras and Madai,
with the leaders and provincial chiefs
in his presence,²

וַיְהִי בַיָּמֵי אַחַשְׁוֶרוֹשׁ
הוּא אַחַשְׁוֶרוֹשׁ הַמֶּלֶךְ
מִחוּדוֹ וְעַד-כּוּשׁ
שֶׁבַע וְעֶשְׂרִים וּמֵאָה מְדִינָה
בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם
כְּשֶׁבֶת הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֶרוֹשׁ
עַל כִּסֵּא מַלְכוּתוֹ
אֲשֶׁר בְּשׁוּשָׁן הַבִּירָה
בִּשְׁנַת שְׁלוֹשׁ לְמָלְכוֹ
עָשָׂה מִשְׁתֶּה
לְכָל-שָׂרָיו וְעַבְדָּיו
חֵיל פָּרָס וּמָדַי
הַפָּרְתִּימִים וְשָׂרֵי הַמְּדִינֹת
לִפְנָיו
Vayehi bimei Achashverosh,
hu Achashverosh hamolech
meHodu ve'ad Kush,
sheva ve'esrim ume'ah medinah.
Bayamim hahem,
keshevet hameleh Achashverosh
al kiseh mal'chuto
asher beShushan habirah,
bishnat shalosh lemol'cho
asah mishteh
lechol sarav va'avadav,
cheil Paras uMadai,
hapartemim vesarei hamedinot,
lefanav.

¹ Some translate the word בִּירָה as palace, fortress or castle, a bit like a modern gated community.

² Rule 1 for a king in ancient times: exterminate threats to your throne, such as family members or high-ranking officials with children. Rule 2: keep powerful people close by, where you can watch them (Louis XIV practiced this wisdom).

⁴ while he displayed the opulence
of his royal glory
and the treasure of his splendid greatness
for many days,
180 days,

⁵ and when these days were completed
the king held (for all the residents
of the city of Shushan,
from eminent to inconsequential)
a seven-day drinking binge,
outside, in the king's palace garden.

⁶ On display were white, green and blue hangings
fastened with cords of fine linen and purple
on rings of silver,
and alabaster pillars,
couches of gold and silver,
on a floor of red and white
and pearl marble,¹

⁷ with drinking in golden goblets
and fresh cups,²
and lots of top-quality wine
as the king could afford.

בְּהַרְאוֹתָו אֶת-עֹשֶׁר
כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ
וְאֶת-יִקָּר תִּפְאֶרֶת גְּדוּלָּתוֹ
יָמִים רַבִּים
שְׁמוֹנִים וּמֵאָת יוֹם
וּבְמִלּוֹאֵת הַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה
עָשָׂה הַמֶּלֶךְ לְכָל-הָעָם
הַנִּמְצָאִים בְּשׁוּשָׁן הַבִּירָה
לְמִגְדוֹל וְעַד-קָטָן
מִשְׁתֵּה שִׁבַּת יָמִים
בַּחֲצָר גִּינַת בֵּיתֵן הַמֶּלֶךְ
חֹר | בְּרֶפֶס וּתְכֵלֶת
אֲחוּז בַּחֲבָלֵי-בּוּץ וְאַדְמָן
עַל-גִּלְיֵי כֶסֶף
וְעַמּוּדֵי שֵׁשׁ
מִטּוֹת | זָהָב וְכֶסֶף
עַל רִצְפַת בַּהֲט־וֹשֵׁשׁ
וְדָר וְסֻחָרֶת
וְהַשְׁקוֹת בְּכֵלֵי זָהָב
וּכְלִים מִכְלִים שׁוֹנִים
וַיֵּין מַלְכוּת רָב
כְּיָד הַמֶּלֶךְ
Beharoto et osher
kevod mal'chuto
ve'et yekar tiferet gedulato
yamim rabim,
shmonim ume'at yom,
uvimlot hayamim ha'eleh
asah hamelech (lechol ha'am
hanimtze'im beShushan habirah,
lemigadol ve'ad katan)
mishteh shivat yamim
bachatzar ginat bitan hamelech.
Chur, karpas utechelet
achuz bechavlei vutz ve'argaman
al gelilei chesef,
ve'amudei shesh,
mitot zahav vachesef,
al ritz'fat bahat vashesh
vedar vesocharet,
vehashkot bichlei zahav
vechelim mikelim shonim,
veyein mal'chut rav
keyad hamelech.

¹ Colors are always hard to translate; those who think the ancients had no word for blue sometimes suggest the ancients used words of texture and substance rather than color, so pearl or marble could be white (or any other marble color). The floor could be inlaid with color, or a mosaic, or made of tiles. It was supposed to impress.

² “And utensils from different utensils.” This may mean that the goblets were unusual or that drinkers got a fresh goblet for each toast (“Long live the king” [drink; toss gold goblet over shoulder]; “Long live the queen!” [drink, etc.]; “Nice fabrics!” [drink, etc.]; “Super floor, wow!” [drink]; and so on).

⁸ The drinking was under control;
there was no pressure *to drink*
for the king had instituted *a rule*
for all his numerous household,
to let each man do as he wished.¹

⁹ Vashti, the queen, also held
a ladies' drinking binge,
in the royal residence
which belonged to King Achashverosh.

¹⁰ On the seventh day,
when the king was merry with wine,
he told Mehuman, Bizta, Charbona,
Bigta and Avagta, Zeter and Charkas,
the seven eunuchs²
who served the presence
of King Achashverosh

¹¹ to bring Queen Vashti
before the king with *her* royal crown,
in order to show the people and chiefs
her beauty, for she was a lovely sight.

והשתייה כדת
אין אנס
כי־כן יסד המלך
על כל־רב ביתו
לעשות כרצון איש־נאיש
גם נשתי המלכה
עשתה משתה נשים
בית המלכות
אשר למלך אחשורוש

Vehashtiyah chadat;
ein oness,
ki chen yisad hamelech
al kol rav beito,
la'asot kirtzon ish va'ish.
Gam Vashti hamalkah
astah mishteh nashim
beit hamal'chut
asher lamelech Achashverosh.

ס
ביום השביעי
כטוב לב־המלך ביין
אמר למהומן ביזתא חרבונא
בגתא ואבגתא זתר וכרפס
שבטת הסריסים
המשרתים את־פני
המלך אחשורוש
להביא את־נשתי המלכה
לפני המלך בכתר מלכות
להראות העמים והשרים
את־יפיה כי־טובת מראה היא

Bayom hashvi'i,
ketov lev hamelech bayayin,
amar liMehuman, Bizta, Charbona,
Bigta va'Avagta, Zeter veCharkas,
shivat hasarisim
ham'shartim et penei
hamelech Achashverosh
lehavi et Vashti hamalkah
lifnei hamelech becheter mal'chut,
leharot ha'amim vehasarim
et yofyah, ki tovat mareh hi.

¹ At ancient banquets the diners, it seems, felt obliged to keep up with the drinking. Some believe Tycho Brahe died of a bladder obstruction; at a royal banquet, he needed to relieve himself but feared to break protocol by leaving the royal presence. In an earlier time, the cannon would roar approval when the King of Denmark drained his goblet, a custom “more honored in the breach than the observance” (*Hamlet* 1.4.16).

² A king could rarely trust family members or anyone with a family, so eunuchs might hold positions of trust such as supervising the harem or being attendants to the king's bedchamber and other very personal needs, not to mention trusted advisors in other matters of state. Since eunuchs might rise to positions of power, the Hebrew סרים may refer to a high official, not necessarily a castrated man. This practice of ancient times seems shocking today, but neutering and spaying animals is routine for pet owners, and many a modern person chooses to become infertile.

¹² Queen Vashti refused to come
at the king's command,
conveyed by the eunuchs,
so the king got very angry,
and his anger smoldered within him.

¹³ The king spoke to the experts
who could predict the future¹—
for such was the king's practice
toward all who knew learning and law—

¹⁴ while near him *were*
Karshena, Shetar, Admata, Tarshish,
Meres, Marsena, *and* Memuchan
the seven chiefs of Faras and Madai
who were admitted to the king's presence²
and were placed first in the kingdom,
¹⁵ “Legally, what can be done
with this Queen Vashti,
since she didn't carry out
the command of King Achashverosh
conveyed by the eunuchs?”

וַתִּמָּאֵן הַמַּלְכָּה וַשְׁתִּי לְבוֹא

בְּדִבְרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ

אֲשֶׁר בְּיַד הַסָּרִיסִים

וַיִּקְצֹף הַמֶּלֶךְ מְאֹד

וַחֲמָתוֹ בָּעָרָה בּוֹ

וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לַחֲכָמִים

יְדֵעֵי הָעֵתִים

כִּי־כֵן דִּבֶּר הַמֶּלֶךְ לִפְנֵי

כָּל־יְדֵעֵי דַת וָדִין

וַהֲקָרַב אֵלָיו

כַּרְשֵׁנָּה שֶׁטָר אַדְמַתָּא תַרְשִׁישׁ

מֶרֶס מַרְסָנָא מְמוּחָן

שִׁבְעַת שָׂרֵי אֶפְרַס וּמַדַּי

רֹאֵי פְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ

הַיּוֹשִׁימִים רִישׁוֹנָה בַּמַּלְכוּת

כְּדַת מַה־לַּעֲשׂוֹת

בַּמַּלְכָּה וַשְׁתִּי

עַל אֲשֶׁר לֹא־עָשְׂתָה

אֶת־מֵאֲמַר הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֶרֶשׁ

בְּיַד הַסָּרִיסִים

ס

Vatma'en hamalkah Vashti lavo

bidvar hamelech

asher beyad hasarisim,

vayiktzof hamelech me'od,

vachamato ba'arah vo.

Vayomer hamelech lachachamim

yodei ha'itim—

ki chen devar hamelech lifnei

kol yodei dat vadin—

vehakarov elav

Karshena, Shetar, Admata, Tarshish,

Meres, Marsena, Memuchan,

shivat sarei Paras uMadai

ro'ei penei hamelech,

hayoshvim rishonah bamal'chut,

“Kedat, mah la'asot

bamalkah Vashti

al asher lo astah

et ma'amar hamelech Achashverosh

beyad hasarisim?”

¹ “Who knew the times/seasons”; maybe they were royal weather forecasters.

² You couldn't just show up to see the king without an invitation, as Ester points out later.

¹⁶ Memuchan said

to the king and chiefs,
“Not only against the king
has Vashti transgressed,
but against all the chiefs
and all the people
who are in all the provinces
of King Achashverosh.

¹⁷ For the queen’s action will get
to all women, *encouraging them*
to view their men with scorn
and tell them,
‘King Achashverosh ordered
Queen Vashti brought to him,
and she didn’t come.’

¹⁸ When that happens,² they’ll talk *the same way*—
the chief ladies of Paras and Madai
who have heard of the queen’s action—
to all the king’s chiefs,
causing disrespect and anger.

¹⁹ If the king approves,
let a royal proclamation be made³
and written in the laws of Faras and Madai
in perpetuity,
that Vashti can never come
before King Achashverosh,
and let the king bestow her royalty
on someone else, better than she!

וַיֹּאמֶר מְמוּחָן¹ Vayomer Memuchan
לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַשָּׂרִים lifnei hamelech vehasarim,
לֹא עַל-הַמֶּלֶךְ לְבַדּוֹ “Lo al hamelech levado
עֲוֹתָהּ וְשָׂתִי הַמַּלְכָּה avtah Vashti hamalkah,
כִּי עַל-כָּל-הַשָּׂרִים ki al kol hasarim
וְעַל-כָּל-הָעַמִּים ve’al kol ha’amim
אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל-מְדִינֹת asher bechol medinot
הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֶרֶשׁ hamelech Achashverosh.

כִּי יֵצֵא דְבַר-הַמַּלְכָּה Ki yetzeh devar hamalkah
עַל-כָּל-הַנָּשִׁים al kol hanashim,
לְהַצֹּזֹת בְּעֲלֵיהֶן בְּעֵינֵיהֶן, lehavzot ba’aleihen be’eineihen,
בְּאָמְרָם, be’omram,

הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֶרֶשׁ אָמַר ‘Hamelech Achashverosh amar
לְהָבִיא אֶת-וַשְׁתִּי הַמַּלְכָּה לִפְנָיו lehavi et Vashti hamalkah lefanav,
וְלֹא-בָאָהּ velo va’ah.’

וְהַיּוֹם הַזֶּה תֹּאמַרְנָה Vehayom hazeh tomarnah
שָׂרוֹת פָּרָס וּמַדַּי sarot Paras uMadai
אֲשֶׁר שָׁמְעוּ אֶת-דְּבַר הַמַּלְכָּה asher shamu et devar hamalkah
לְכֹל שָׂרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ lechol sarei hamelech,
וְכַדֵּי בִזְיוֹן וַקָּצֵף uchedai bizayon vakatzef.

אִם-עַל-הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב Im al hamelech tov,
יֵצֵא דְבַר-מַלְכוּת מִלְּפָנָיו yetzeh devar mal’chut milfanav
וְיִכְתֹּב בְּדַתִּי פָּרָס וּמַדַּי veyikatev bedatei Faras uMadai,
וְלֹא יֵעָבֹר ve’lo ya’avor,
אֲשֶׁר לֹא-תָבֹא וַשְׁתִּי asher lo tavo Vashti
לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֶרֶשׁ lifnei hamelech Achashverosh,
וּמַלְכוּתָהּ יִתֵּן הַמֶּלֶךְ umal’chutah yiten hamelech
לְרֵעִיתָהּ הַטּוֹבָה מִמֶּנָּה lir’utah hatovah mimenah.

¹ A manuscript would read מוּמָחָן.

² “And that day.”

³ “If for the king *it seems* good, let-there-go-out word-of-kingdom (i.e., a royal decree) from his presence”

²⁰ This will be heard—the king’s decree
that he will make for all his kingdom,
which is very extensive—
and all the women
will show respect for their men,
from eminent to inconsequential.”¹

²¹ This seemed a good plan
to the king and the chiefs,
and the king did what Memuchan said.

²² He² sent letters
to all the king’s provinces
in each province’s script,
and in each people’s language,
that every man should be
master of his house—
proclaiming *this* in the local language.³

וְנִשְׁמַע פִּתְגָם הַמֶּלֶךְ
אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה בְּכָל-מַלְכוּתוֹ
כִּי רַבָּה הִיא
וְכָל-הַנָּשִׁים
יִתְּנוּ יֶקֶר לַבְּעֻלֵיהֶן
לִמְגִדוֹל וְעַד-קָטָן
וַיִּיטֵב הַדָּבָר
בְּעֵינֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַשָּׂרִים
וַיַּעַשׂ הַמֶּלֶךְ כְּדִבְרֵי מְמוּחָן
וַיִּשְׁלַח סְפָרִים
אֶל-כָּל-מְדִינֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ
אֶל-מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה כִּכְתָּבָהּ
וְאֶל-עַם וְעַם כְּלִשְׁוֹנוֹ
לִהְיוֹת כָּל-אִישׁ
שֹׂרֵר בְּבֵיתוֹ
וּמְדַבֵּר כְּלִשְׁוֹן עַמּוֹ
פ

Venishmah pitgam hamelech
asher ya’aseh bechol mal’chuto,
ki rabah hi,
vechol hanashim
yitnu yekar leva’aleihen,
lemigadol ve’ad katan.”
Vayitav hadavar
be’einei hamelech vehasarim,
vaya’as hamelech kidvar Memuchan.
Vayishlach sefarim
el kol medinot hamelech,
el medinah umedinah kichtavah
ve’el am va’am kilshono,
liheyot kol ish
soror beveito,
umedaber kilshon amo.

Chapter 2

¹ After all this,
when the anger subsided
(*the anger of King Achashverosh*),
he thought of Vashti
and what she had done
and what had been decided about her.

אַחַר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה
כְּשֶׁחַמַּת
הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ
זָכַר אֶת-וַשְׁתִּי
וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂתָה
וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר-נִגְזַר עָלֶיהָ

Achar hadvarim ha’eleh,
keshoch chamat
hamelech Achashverosh,
zachar et Vashti
ve’et asher asatah
ve’et asher nigzar aleha.

¹ Memuchan has a long speech, and it’s a shame he can’t give more practical advice.

² In my opinion, this probably refers to Memuchan, but it could refer to the king.

³ “In the language of its people” (the local language) or “in the language of his people” (his own language).

² Then said the king's page-boys,¹

his personal servants,

"Somebody get the king

some pretty girls;²

³ let the king appoint officers

in all the provinces of his kingdom

to collect every girl

who is pretty

and bring her to the city of Shushan,

to the harem, in charge of Hegeh,

the king's eunuch, supervisor of the women,

and give each one her cosmetics;³

⁴ and the girl who suits

the king's fancy,⁴

let her rule instead of Vashti."

This plan pleased the king,

so that's what he did.

וַיֹּאמְרוּ נַעֲרֵי-הַמֶּלֶךְ

מִשְׁחָתָיו

יִבְקֹשׁוּ לַמֶּלֶךְ

נַעֲרוֹת בְּתוּלוֹת טוֹבוֹת מַרְאֶה

וַיִּפְקֹד הַמֶּלֶךְ פְּקִידִים

בְּכָל-מְדִינֹת מַלְכוּתוֹ

וַיִּקְבְּצוּ אֶת-כָּל-נַעֲרֵה-בְּתוּלָה

טוֹבַת מַרְאֶה

אֶל-שׁוּשָׁן הַבִּירָה

אֶל-בֵּית הַנָּשִׁים אֶל-יַד הֶגֶה

סֵרִיס הַמֶּלֶךְ שֹׁמֵר הַנָּשִׁים

וַנָּתֹן תַּמְרוּקֵיהֶן

וְהַנַּעֲרָה אֲשֶׁר תִּיטֵב

בְּעֵינֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ

תִּמְלֹךְ תַּחַת וַשְׁתִּי

וַיִּיטֵב הַדָּבָר בְּעֵינֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ

וַיַּעַשׂ כֵּן

ס

Vayomru na'arei hamelech,

meshartav,

"Yevakshu lamelech

ne'arot betulot tovtot mareh,

veyafked hamelech pekidim

bechol medinot mal'chuto

veyikbetzu et kol na'arah vetulah

tovtot mareh

el Shushan habirah,

el beit hanashim el yad Hegeh

seris hamelech, shomer hanashim,

venaton tamrukeihen,

vehana'arah asher titav

be'einei hamelech

timloch tachat Vashti."

vayitav hadavar be'einei hamelech,

vaya'as ken.

¹ The Hebrew root נָעַר usually means something like lad or young man, but in this context it may well refer to servants or court-appointed pages or page boys. I'd guess that they were probably thought too young to interfere with the women. Such trappings of royalty retain seductive appeal even for leaders in a democratic republic, so the U.S. has its Congressional Page Program, and the first Senate page was a nine-year-old boy named Grafton Hanson. Another servant in a royal household was a groom; this too might be a young male servant. In the time of Henry VIII, the Groom of the Stool had menial tasks but immense influence since he was with his majesty at the most private times (to pooh-pooh the proposals of rival courtiers).

² Or "pretty virgins," probably unmarried girls (assuming the king would not steal someone's wife).

³ This may have been something to scrub with in the bathhouse, soap or a brush.

⁴ "The girl who is good in the eyes of the king."

⁵ There was a Jewish man in the city of Shushan; his name was Mordochai, son of Ya'ir, son of Shimi, son of Kish, a man of integrity,	אִישׁ יְהוּדִי הָיָה בְּשׁוּשָׁן הַבִּירָה וּשְׁמוֹ מֹרְדֳּכָי בֶּן יָאִיר בֶּן שִׁמִּי בֶּן-קִישׁ אִישׁ יְמִינִי ¹	Ish Yehudi hayah beShushan habirah, ushemo Mordochai, ben Ya'ir ben Shimi ben Kish, ish yemini,
⁶ who was exiled from Jerusalem with the exile driven out with Yechonyah king of Judah ² whom Nevuchadnetzar exiled, king of Babylon.	אֲשֶׁר הִגְלָה מִיְּרוּשָׁלַיִם עַם-הַגּוֹלָה אֲשֶׁר הִגְלָתָהּ עַם יְכֹנְיָה מֶלֶךְ-יְהוּדָה אֲשֶׁר הִגְלָה נְבוּכַדְנֶצַּר מֶלֶךְ בָּבֶל	Asher hoglah mIrushalayim im hagolah asher hogletah im Yechoniyah melech Yehudah, asher heglah Nevuchadnetzar, melech Bavel.
⁷ He was Hadasah's guardian— that's Ester, his uncle's daughter— for she had no mother or father, and this girl had a lovely figure and <i>was pretty too</i> . When her father and mother died, Mordochai had taken her as his <i>own</i> daughter.	וַיְהִי אִמֶּן אֶת-הַדָּסָה הִיא אֶסְתֵּר בַּת-דָּדוֹ כִּי אֵין לָהּ אָב וְאֵם וַהֲנַעְרָה יָפַת-תֶּאֱרָא וְשׁוֹבֶת מַרְאֶה וּבְמוֹת אָבִיהָ וְאִמָּהּ לָקַחָהּ מֹרְדֳּכָי לֹא לְבַת	Vaychi omen et Hadasah, hi Ester, bat dodo, ki ein lah av va'em, vehana'arah yefat to'ar vetovat mar'eh. Uvemot aviha ve'imah lekachah Mordochai lo levat.
⁸ When the news got around of the king's proclamation and commandment, ³ when lots of girls were collected to the city of Shushan in charge of Hegai, ⁴ Ester was taken to the king's quarters in charge of Hegai, who supervised the women.	וַיְהִי בְּהִשְׁמָע דְּבַר-הַמֶּלֶךְ וְדָתוֹ וּבְהִקְבֹּץ נְעָרוֹת רַבּוֹת אֶל-שׁוּשָׁן הַבִּירָה אֶל-יַד הֶגַּי וַתִּלְקַח אֶסְתֵּר אֶל-בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל-יַד הֶגַּי שׁוֹמֵר הַנָּשִׁים	Vaychi behishamah devar hamelech vedato, uvehikavetz ne'arot rabot el Shushan habirah el yad Hegai, vatilakach Ester el beit hamelech, el yad Hegai, shomer hanashim.

¹ The congregation says this verse, and the leader repeats it.

² Or Yehoyachin, exiled to Babylon in 597 BCE.

³ “And it came to pass when there was heard the matter of the king and his commandment ...”

⁴ In verse 3 it's Hegeh, either a different eunuch with almost the same name, or the same person with a slightly different name, like Jim and Jimbo.

⁹ *Hegai* favored this girl,¹ *Ester*,
and she earned his kindness;²
right away, her cosmetics
and *other* supplies he gave her,³
along with the seven suitable *servant* girls
to be assigned to her⁴
from the king's quarters;
he singled out⁵ her and her maids
for the best *treatment* in the harem.
¹⁰ Ester didn't mention
her people and her lineage
since Mordochai had instructed her
not to say anything *about it*.
¹¹ Every day,
Mordochai would stroll
in front of the harem's plaza⁶
to find out how Ester was,
and what was happening to her.

וַתִּיטַב הַנַּעֲרָה בְּעֵינָיו
וַתַּשָּׂא חֶסֶד לִפְנֵי
וַיַּבְהֵל אֶת־תַּמְרוּקֶיהָ
וְאֶת־מְנוּחָהּ לַתֵּת לָהּ
וְאֵת־שִׁבְעַת הַנַּעֲרוֹת הָרְאוּיֹת
לַתֵּת־לָהּ
מִבֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ
וַיִּשְׁנֶה וְאֶת־נַעֲרוֹתֶיהָ
לְטוֹב בֵּית הַנָּשִׁים
לֹא־הִגִּידָה אֶסְתֵּר
אֶת־עַמָּהּ וְאֶת־מֹלַדְתָּהּ
כִּי מֹרְדֹכַי צִוָּה עָלֶיהָ
אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תִגִּיד
וּבְכָל־יּוֹם וַיּוֹם
מֹרְדֹכַי מִתְּהַלֵּךְ
לִפְנֵי חֲצַר בֵּית־הַנָּשִׁים
לִדְעוֹת אֶת־שְׁלוֹם אֶסְתֵּר
וּמַה־יַּעֲשֶׂה בָּהּ
Vatitav hana'arah be'einav,
vatisah chesed lefanav;
vayevahel et tamrukeha
ve'et manoteha latet lah,
ve'et sheva hane'arot hare'uyot
latet lah
mibeit hamelech;
vayeshaneha ve'et na'aroteha
letov beit hanashim.
Lo higidah Ester
et amah ve'et molad'tah,
ki Mordochai tzivah aleha
asher lo tagid.
Uvechol yom vayom,
Mordochai mit'halech
lifnei chatzar beit hanashim
lada'at et shelom Ester
umah ye'aseh bah.

¹ “And the girl was good in his eyes”; i.e., he liked her.

² “And she carried grace in his presence.”

³ “And he hurried, her cosmetics and portions to give her.” For other girls, he might drag his feet.

⁴ “To give to her”; presumably each of the candidate girls was given an entourage of seven maids from the harem. The number of women in the harem must have been huge, so I hope we're all impressed by the king's wealth, though not by his treatment of women.

⁵ “He gave her different treatment.”

⁶ חֲצַר can mean a courtyard or open space, so it might have been a courtyard inside the harem gate or a plaza outside the gate.

¹² As each girl got her turn¹
to visit King Achashverosh—
after she had (by women’s custom)
twelve months *to prepare*—
this is how *they* completed
their period of cosmetic *preparations*:
six months with myrrh oil
and six months of spices
and women’s cosmetics,²
¹³ and with this *outfit* would the girl
come to the king—
with anything she specified;
it would be given to accompany her
from the harem to the king’s quarters.³
¹⁴ At evening she would come
and in the morning she would return
to the second harem
supervised by Sha’ashgaz
the king’s eunuch,
supervisor of the *king’s* mistresses.⁴
She would never come to the king again
unless the king wanted her
and she was mentioned by name.

וּבִהְיֵה תּוֹר נַעֲרָה וְנַעֲרָה
לָבֹא אֶל-הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֵרֹשׁ
מִקֵּץ הַיּוֹת לָהּ כְּדַת הַנָּשִׁים
שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר חֹדֶשׁ
כִּי כֵן יִמְלְאוּ
יָמֵי מְרוּקֵיהֶן
שִׁשִּׁיחַ חֳדָשִׁים בִּשְׁמֵן הַמּוֹר
וְשִׁשִּׁיחַ חֳדָשִׁים בַּבִּשְׁמִים
וּבִתְמֻרֹקֵי הַנָּשִׁים
וּבַזֶּה הַנַּעֲרָה
בָּאָה אֶל-הַמֶּלֶךְ
אֶת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר תֹּאמַר
יִנָּתֵן לָהּ לָבֹא עִמָּהּ
מִבֵּית הַנָּשִׁים עַד-בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ
בְּעֶרֶב הִיא בָּאָה
וּבִבְקֹר הִיא שָׁבָה
אֶל-בֵּית הַנָּשִׁים שְׁנֵי
אֶל-יָד שַׁעֲשָׁנָז
סֶרִיס הַמֶּלֶךְ
שֹׁמֵר הַפִּילָגְשִׁים
לֹא תָבוֹא עוֹד אֶל-הַמֶּלֶךְ
כִּי אִם-חָפֵץ בָּהּ הַמֶּלֶךְ
וְנִקְרָאָה בְּשֵׁם

Uvehagi’ah tor na’arah vena’arah
lavo el hamelech Achashverosh
(miketz heyot lah, kedat hanashim,
shneim asar chodesh),
ki ken yimle’u
yemei merukeihen:
shishah chodashim beshemen hamor
veshishah chodashim bab’samim
uvetamrukei hanashim,
uvazeh hana’arah
ba’ah el hamelech—
et kol asher tomar
yinatén lah lavo imah
mibeit hanashim ad beit hamelech.
Ba’erev hi va’ah
uvaboker hi shavah
el beit hanashim sheni
el yad Sha’ashgaz
seris hamelech,
shomer hapilagshim.
Lo tavo od el hamelech
ki im chafetz bah hamelech
venikre’ah veshem.

¹ “And when it arrived, the turn of *one* girl and *another* girl.”

² Imagine how some of these pretty country girls smelled when they arrived, if it took a year to spice them up!

³ Each candidate could ask for any fancy outfit or jewelry or cosmetics for her interview with the king.

⁴ Presumably a mistress (or concubine, from con+cubare, “lie with”) was a woman reserved for the king, not a wife but not free to marry anyone else. He kept virgins in one harem and maintained a separate harem for the deflowered. One can admire his wealth if not his humanity (perhaps he’s better than Shahryar of the Arabian Nights, who executed each virgin after his night with her).

¹⁵ When the time came for Ester

(the daughter of Avichayil, Mordochai's uncle,
whom he had taken as his daughter)

to visit the king,

she asked for nothing

except whatever Hegai advised

(the king's eunuch, women's supervisor);

but Ester carried the goodwill

of all who saw her.¹

¹⁶ Ester was brought

to king Achashverosh,

to his royal quarters,

in the tenth month,

the month of Tevet,

in the seventh year of his reign.²

¹⁷ The king loved Ester

more than all the *other* women;

she enjoyed his grace and kindness,

more than any of the *other* girls;

he placed the royal crown on her head

and made her queen instead of Vashti.

¹⁸ The king arranged a huge drinking binge

for all his chiefs and servants—

Ester's Drinking Binge;

he declared a holiday in the provinces

and distributed gifts as *only* the king could.³

וּבְהִיגִ' אֶת־אֶסְתֵּר

בַּת־אֲבִיחַיִל דּוֹד מֹרְדֳּכַי

אֲשֶׁר לָקַח־לוֹ לְבַת

לָאֵל־הַמֶּלֶךְ

לֹא בִקֶּשָׁה דָּבָר

כִּי אִם אֶת־אֲשֶׁר יֹאמֵר הֶגַּי

סֵרִיס־הַמֶּלֶךְ שֹׁמֵר הַנָּשִׁים

וַתְּהִי אֶסְתֵּר נֹשֶׁת חַן

בְּעֵינֵי כָל־רֹאִיָּה

וַתִּלְקַח אֶסְתֵּר

אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֶרֶשׁ

אֶל־בֵּית מַלְכוּתוֹ

בַּחֹדֶשׁ הָעֲשִׂירִי

הוֹאֲחֶדֶשׁ טֵבֶת

בִּשְׁנַת־שֶׁבַע לְמַלְכוּתוֹ

וַיֵּאָהֵב הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת־אֶסְתֵּר

מִכָּל־הַנָּשִׁים

וַתִּשָּׂא־חַן וַחֲסֵד לְפָנָיו

מִכָּל־הַבְּתוּלוֹת

וַיָּאֶסֶם כֶּתֶר־מַלְכוּת בְּרֹאשָׁהּ

וַיַּמְלִיכֶהָ תַּחַת וַשְׁתִּי

וַיַּעַשׂ הַמֶּלֶךְ מִשְׁתֶּה גָדוֹל

לְכָל־שָׂרָיו וְעַבְדָּיו

אֶת מִשְׁתֵּה אֶסְתֵּר

וַהֲנַחֲהָ לַמְּדִינוֹת עֹשֶׂה

וַיִּתֵּן מַשָּׂאת כֶּיֶד הַמֶּלֶךְ

Uvehigi'ah tor Ester

bat Avichayil dod Mordochai

asher lakach lo levat

lavo el hamelech,

lo vikshah davar

ki im et asher yomar Hegai,

seris hamelech, shomer hanashim,

vat'hi Ester noset chen

be'enei kol ro'cha.

Vatilakach Ester

el hamelech Achashverosh

el beit mal'chuto

bachodesh ha'asiri,

hu chodesh Tevet,

bshnat sheva lemal'chuto.

Vaye'chav hamelech et Ester

mikol hanashim;

vatisah chen vachessed lefanav

mikol habtulot;

vayasem keter mal'chut beroshah

vayamlicheha tachat Vashti.

Vaya'as hamelech mishteh gadol

lechol sarav va'avadav,

et Mishteh Ester,

vahanachah lamdinot asah,

vayitem maset keyad hamelech.

¹ "And Ester was carrying grace in the eyes of all who saw her."

² The banquet at which Vashti fell from grace was in the king's third year (1:3).

³ משאת, something to carry, perhaps like a goody bag; כִּיד הַמֶּלֶךְ "according to the power of the king."

¹⁹ When the girls were assembled again¹

and Mordochai was in position

by the palace gate,²

²⁰ *even then* Ester didn't declare

her lineage or her people

as Mordochai instructed her,

and Ester acted on Mordochai's advice

just as when he was her guardian.³

וּבְהִקְבֹּץ בְּתוּלוֹת שְׁנִית

וּמֶרְדֳּכַי יוֹשֵׁב

בְּשַׁעַר-הַמֶּלֶךְ

אֵין אֶסְתֵּר מְגִידַת

מִלְדָּתָהּ וְאֶת-עַמָּהּ

כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה עָלֶיהָ מֶרְדֳּכַי

וְאֶת-מֵאֵמַר מֶרְדֳּכַי אֶסְתֵּר עֹשָׂה

כְּאֲשֶׁר הָיְתָה בְּאֻמְנָה אִתּוֹ

ס

Uvehikavetz betulot shenit

uMordochai yoshev

besha'ar hamelech,

ein Ester magedet

moladtah ve'et amah,

ka'asher tzivah aleha Mordochai,

ve'et ma'amar Mordochai Ester osah

ka'asher haytah ve'omnah ito.

²¹ At that time,

Mordochai would stay

by the palace gate;

Bigtan⁴ and Teresh got angry,

two of the king's eunuchs,

entrance guards;

they wanted to lay a hand

on King Achashverosh, *to kill him*.

בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם

וּמֶרְדֳּכַי יוֹשֵׁב

בְּשַׁעַר-הַמֶּלֶךְ

קָצַף בִּגְתָן וְתֶרֶשׁ

שְׁנֵי-סָרִיסֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ

מִשְׁמֹרֵי הַסָּף

וַיִּבְקֹשׁוּ לִשְׁלַח יָד

בַּמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֶרֶשׁ

Bayamim hahem,

uMordochai yoshev

besha'ar hamelech,

katzaf Bigtan vaTeresh,

shenei sarisei hamelech

mishomrei hasaf;

vayevakshu lishlo'ach yad

bamelech Achashverosh.

²² The plot became known to Mordochai,

who told Ester the queen,

and Queen Ester told the king,

giving credit to Mordochai.⁵

וַיִּוָּדַע הַדָּבָר לְמֶרְדֳּכַי

וַיַּגִּד לְאֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה

וְתֹאמַר אֶסְתֵּר לְמֶלֶךְ

בִּשְׁם מֶרְדֳּכַי

Vayivadah hadavar leMordochai,

vayaged le'Ester hamalkah,

vatomer Ester lamelech

beshem Mordochai.

²³ The matter was investigated and discovered,

the two of them hanged on a wood *gallows*,⁶

and the incident recorded in the chronicle book

in the king's presence.

וַיִּבְקֹשׁ הַדָּבָר וַיִּמָּצֵא

וַיִּתְּלוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם עַל-עֵץ

וַיִּכְתֹּב בְּסֵפֶר דִּבְרֵי הַיָּמִים

לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ

Vayevukash hadavar vayimatzeh,

vayitalu shneihem al etz,

vayikatev besefer divrei hayamim

lifnei hamelech.

פ

¹ Why were the girls gathered a second time? Maybe to tell them that Ester was the winner.

² "The king's gate," presumably outside the entrance to the king's quarters.

³ "As when she was in guardianship with him," before she left his household to try out for the queen's job.

⁴ Maybe this is the Bigta of 1:10, a prominent leader.

⁵ "In the name of Mordochai."

⁶ Some translators think people were impaled on a spike rather than hanged on a gallows as punishment.

Chapter 3

¹ After all this

King Achashverosh raised

Haman¹ son of Hamdata the Agagite,²

promoted him, and placed his rank

above all the *provincial* chiefs

who had *governed* with him.³

² All the king's subjects

at the palace gate

would bow and prostrate themselves

before Haman,

for so had the king commanded *them*;

but Mordochai would neither bow

nor prostrate himself.

³ The king's servants said

(*the servants* at the palace gate)

to Mordochai,

“Why do you flout

the king's command?”

⁴ As they spoke to him day after day

but he didn't listen to them,

they told Haman *about Mordochai*;

they wanted to see

if Mordochai's position would last.

He had told them he was Jewish.⁴

אָחַר הָדָוָרִים הָאֵלֶּה

גִּדָּל הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֶרוֹשׁ

אֶת־הָמָן בֶּן־הַמְּדָתָא הָאַגִּי

וַיַּנְשֵׂאֵהוּ וַיַּסֵּם אֶת־כִּסֵּאוֹ

מֵעַל כָּל־הַשָּׂרִים

אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ

וְכָל־עַבְדֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ

אֲשֶׁר־בְּשַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ

כֹּרְעִים וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוִים

לְהָמָן

כִּי־כֵן צִוָּה־לּוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ

וּמֹרְדֹכַי לֹא יִכְרַע

וְלֹא יִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה

וַיֹּאמְרוּ עַבְדֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ

אֲשֶׁר־בְּשַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ

לְמֹרְדֹכַי

מִדּוּעַ אַתָּה עוֹבֵר

אֶת מִצְוַת הַמֶּלֶךְ

וַיְהִי כִּאֲמָרָם אֵלָיו יוֹם

וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֲלֵיהֶם

וַיַּגִּידוּ לְהָמָן

לִרְאוֹת

הַיַּעֲמֻדִי דִבְרֵי מֹרְדֹכַי

כִּי־הִגִּיד לָהֶם אֲשֶׁר־הוּא יְהוּדִי

Achar hadvarim ha'eleh

gidal hamelech Achashverosh

et Haman ben Hamdata ha'Agagi,

vayenasehu, vayasem et kiso

me'al kol hasarim

asher ito.

Vechol avdei hamelech

asher besha'ar hamelech

kor'im umishtachavim

leHaman,

ki chen tzivah lo hamelech;

uMordochai lo yichrah

velo yishtachaveh.

Vayomru avdei hamelech

asher besha'ar hamelech

leMordochai,

“Madu'ah atah over

et mitzvat hamelech.”

Vayehi ke'omram elav yom vayom

velo shamah aleihem,

vayagidu leHaman

lir'ot

haya'amdu divrei Mordochai

ki hu higid lahem asher hu Yehudi.

¹ Haman's not mentioned as one of the king's close advisors in 1:10. We'll find out that he has a family, which should have disqualified him from any position of royal trust; see Rule 1 on page 2.

² Presumably descended from Agag, the Amalekite king. Saul failed to kill him, so Samuel did it (1 Samuel 15).

³ “Lifted/supported him and set his seat/throne/rank above all the chiefs that had been with him.”

⁴ Since he was Jewish, it seems, they knew he couldn't assume a position of worship before a human.

⁵ A manuscript has באמרם; the difference in meaning is too subtle for me.

⁵ Haman realized that Mordochai would not bow nor prostrate himself before him, and Haman became filled with fury.

⁶ He scorned to strike

Mordochai alone:

since he'd been told Mordochai's people,

Haman sought to destroy

all the Jews

anywhere in Achasverosh's realm,

Mordochai's *entire* people.

⁷ In the first month,

the month of Nisan,

in the twelfth year

of King Achashverosh's *reign*,

a “Pur” was cast (that's a *kind of die*)²

before Haman

to check day after day

and month after month, *until they settled on*

month twelve, the month of Adar.

וַיַּרְא הָמָן כִּי־אֵין מֶרְדֳּכָי

כֹּרַע וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לּוֹ

וַיִּמָּלֵא הָמָן חֲמָה

וַיִּבֹּז בְּעֵינָיו לְשַׁלַּח יָד

בְּמֶרְדֳּכָי לְבַדּוֹ

כִּי־הִגִּידוּ לוֹ אֶת־עַם מֶרְדֳּכָי

וַיִּבְקֶשׁ הָמָן לְהַשְׁמִיד

אֶת־כָּל־הַיְּהוּדִים

אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל־מְלָכוֹת אַחַשְׁוֶרוֹשׁ

עַם מֶרְדֳּכָי

בַּחֹדֶשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן

הוּא־חֹדֶשׁ נִסָּן

בִּשְׁנַת שְׁתַּיִם עֶשְׂרֵה

לְמֶלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֶרוֹשׁ

הַפִּיל פּוּר הוּא הַגּוֹרָל

לִפְנֵי הָמָן

מִיּוֹם לְיוֹם

וּמִחֹדֶשׁ לְחֹדֶשׁ

שְׁנַיִם־עָשָׂר הוּא־חֹדֶשׁ אָדָר

ס

Vayar Haman ki ein Mordochai

kore'ah umishtachaveh lo,

vayimaleh Haman chemah.

Vayivez be'einav lishloch yad

beMordochai levado

ki higidu lo et am Mordochai,

vayevakesh Haman lehashmid

et kol haYehudim

asher bechol mal'chut Achasverosh,

am Mordochai.

Bachodesh harishon,

hu chodesh Nisan,

bishnat shteim esreh

lamelech Achashverosh,

hipil Pur (hu hagoral)

lifnei Haman

miyom leyom

umechodesh lechodesh,

shneim asar, hu chodesh Adar.

¹ לְשַׁלַּח looks like it should be לְשַׁלַּח, but the Leningrad Codex copyist wrote לְשַׁלַּח.

² Presumably “Pur” is a Persian term for divination by throwing down (casting) some special object (such as a die), and this is the method Haman used to determine an auspicious day for his plan. I assume that Jews would be familiar with gambling equipment such as dice but would never admit familiarity with divination equipment.

⁸ Haman told

King Achasverosh,

“There is one people

scattered and dispersed

among the peoples

in all the provinces of your realm

with different laws than all other people.

They don’t follow the king’s laws,

so it’s not right for the king

to leave them *in peace*.¹

⁹ If the king approves,

let it be in writing: *a decree* to destroy them.

And ten thousand talents² of silver

I’ll weigh out

for the administrative officers³

to bring to the king’s treasuries.

¹⁰ The king took his ring off his hand

and gave it to Haman, son of Hamdata

the Agagite, the Jews’ enemy.

¹¹ The king said to Haman,

“The silver is yours, and that people,

to do with them as you see fit.”⁴

וַיֹּאמֶר הָמָן

לַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֶרֶשׁ

יֵשְׁנֹו אֶם-אֶחָד

מִפֶּזֶר וּמִפָּרָד

בֵּין הָעַמִּים

בְּכָל מְדִינֹת מַלְכוּתְךָ

וְדַתֵּיהֶם שְׁנוֹת מִכָּל-עַם

וְאַתְּ דַּתִּי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֵינָם עֹשִׂים

וְלַמֶּלֶךְ אֵין-שׁוּבָה

לְהַנִּיחָם

אִם-עַל-הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב

יִכְתֹּב לְאַבְדָם

וַעֲשֶׂרֶת אֲלָפִים כֶּסֶף-כָּסֶף

אֶשְׁקֹל

עַל-יְדֵי עֹשֵׂי הַמְּלָאכָה

לְהָבִיא אֶל-גִּנְזֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ

וַיִּסֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת-טַבַּעְתּוֹ מֵעַל יָדוֹ

וַיִּתְּנָהּ לְהָמָן בֶּן-הַמְּדַתָּא

הָאֲגָגִי צֶרֶר הַיְּהוּדִים

וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְהָמָן

הַכֶּסֶף נָתַן לְךָ וְהָעָם

לַעֲשׂוֹת בּוֹ כַּטּוֹב בְּעֵינֶיךָ

Vayomer Haman

lamelech Achashverosh,

“Yeshno am echad

mefuzar umeforad

bein ha’amim

bechol medinot mal’chutecha,

vedateihem shonot mikol am,

ve’et datei hamelech einam osim,

velamelech ein shoveh

lehanicham.

Im al hamelech tov

yikatev le’abdam,

va’aseret alafim kikar kesef

eshkol

al yedei osei hamlachah

lehavi el ginzei hamelech.

Vayasar hamelech et tabato me’al yado

vayitnah leHaman ben Hamdata

ha’Agagi, tzorer haYehudim.

Vayomer hamelech leHaman,

“Hakesef natun lach vecha’am,

la’asot bo katov be’einecha.”

¹ “And for the king it’s not doing the level thing to leave them *in peace*.”

² A talent of silver is variously valued at nine man-years of skilled work; the weight of a person; enough to pay a trireme crew of 200 men for a month, or about 30 kilograms. That’s a lot of precious metal.

³ “Over the hands of those who perform the creative activity”; into the charge of those who do the actual work (of weighing out all that silver), or into the charge of those who do any kind of work for the state.

⁴ “The silver is given to you (i.e., don’t put the silver in my treasuries but use it as you see fit), and the *Jewish* people, to do with it as *is* good in your eyes.”

¹² The king's scribes were summoned
in the first month,
on its thirteenth day,
and all Haman's instructions were written
to the king's premiers
and governors¹

who administered every province,
to the chiefs of all the peoples,
to every province in its *local* script
and every people in their language,
in the name of King Achashverosh,
written and sealed with the king's ring.

¹³ Letters were sent by courier²
to all the king's provinces *with instructions*
to destroy, murder and annihilate
every Jew,
young and old, babies and women,
on a single day, the thirteenth *day*
of the twelfth month—
that's the month of Adar—
and to ransack *their homes*³ for plunder.

¹⁴ A copy of the written *decree*
was to be presented as law
in every province,
publicized to everybody,⁴
so they would be ready for the day.

וַיִּקְרְאוּ סוֹפְרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ
בַּחֹדֶשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן
בְּשִׁלּוֹשָׁה עָשָׂר יוֹם בּוֹ
וַיִּכְתֹּב כָּכָל־אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּה הָמָן
אֶל־אֲחַשְׁדָּרְפֶּנֶי הַמֶּלֶךְ
וְאֶל־הַפָּחוֹת
אֲשֶׁר ׀ עַל־מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה
וְאֶל־שָׂרֵי עַם וְעַם
מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה כִּי־תַבָּה
וְעַם וְעַם כָּל־שׁוֹנוֹ
בְּשֵׁם הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֶרֶשׁ
נִכְתָּב וְנִחְתָּם בְּטַבַּעַת הַמֶּלֶךְ
וַיִּשְׁלֹחַ סְפָרִים בְּיַד הָרָצִים
אֶל־כָּל־מְדִינֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ
לְהַשְׁמִיד לַהֲרֹג וּלְאַבֵּד
אֶת־כָּל־הַיְּהוּדִים
מִנָּעַר וְעַד־זָקֵן טָף וְנָשִׁים
בְּיוֹם אֶחָד בְּשִׁלּוֹשָׁה עָשָׂר
לְחֹדֶשׁ שְׁנֵים־עָשָׂר
הוּא־חֹדֶשׁ אָדָר
וּשְׁלָלָם לָבוֹז
פַּתְשֶׁגֶן הַכֶּתֶב
לְהִנָּתֵן דָּת
בְּכָל־מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה
גָּלוּי לְכָל־הָעַמִּים
לְהִיּוֹת אֲתִידִים לַיּוֹם הַזֶּה

Vayikaru sofrei hamelech
bachodesh harishon,
bishloshah asar yom bo,
vayikatev kechol asher tzivah Haman
el achashdarpenei hamelech
ve'el hapachot
asher al medinah umedinah,
ve'el sarei am va'am,
medinah umedinah kichtavah
ve'am va'am kilshono,
beshem hamelech Achashverosh,
nichtav venechtam betaba'at hamelech.
Venishlo'ach sefarim beyad haratzim
el kol medinot hamelech
lehashmid, laharog ule'abed
et kol haYehudim,
mina'ar ve'ad zaken, taf venashim,
beyom echad, bishloshah asar
lechodesh shneim asar,
hu chodesh Adar,
ushlalam lavoz.
Patshegen haketav
lehinaten dat
bechol medinah umedinah,
galui lechol ha'amim,
liheyot atidim layom hazeh.

¹ The word for premier isn't Hebrew; it's related to satrap (see the SH-D-R-P?), a Persian provincial leader. The word for governor might be Persian too, meaning a lesser leader than the premier. (In modern Hebrew this word means "less," though this may simply be a linguistic coincidence.)

² "runners"

³ "to ransack them"; i.e., everyone had permission to kill the Jews and take all their stuff.

⁴ "to all the peoples."

¹⁵ The couriers were hurried away¹
on the king's business;
the *new* law was presented
in the city of Shushan,
while Haman and the king set to drinking,
but the city of Shushan was at a loss.²

הָרָצִים יָצְאוּ דְחוּפִים
בְּדַבַּר הַמֶּלֶךְ
וְהַדָּת נִתְּנָה
בְּשׁוּשָׁן הַבִּירָה
וְהַמֶּלֶךְ וְהָמָן יָשְׁבוּ לִשְׂתוֹת
וְהָעִיר שׁוּשָׁן נְבֹחָה.

פ

Chapter 4

¹ Mordochai knew
all that was happening;
Mordochai tore his clothes *in mourning*
and put on sack cloth and ashes;
he went into the center of the city
and cried out with a great and bitter cry.

² He reached the palace gate,
though nobody was *allowed* to come
to the palace gate dressed in sack cloth.³

³ In every province,
any place where
the king's mission and rule could reach,
the Jews were plunged into mourning,⁴
fasting, weeping and wailing;⁵
sackcloth and ashes were laid out for all.

וּמֹרְדֳּכַי יָדַע
אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר נֶעֱשֶׂה
וַיִּקְרַע מֹרְדֳּכַי אֶת־בְּגָדָיו
וַיִּלְבַּשׁ שָׂק וָאֶפֶר
וַיֵּצֵא בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר
וַיִּזְעַק וַיַּעֲקֹה גְדֹלָה וּמָרָה
וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶד לִפְנֵי שַׁעַר־הַמֶּלֶךְ
כִּי אֵין לָבֹא
אֶל־שַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ בִּלְבוּשׁ שָׂק
וּבְכָל־מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה
מִקוֹם אֲשֶׁר
דֵּבַר־הַמֶּלֶךְ וְדָתוֹ מֵנִיחַ
אֶבֶל גָּדוֹל לַיהוּדִים
וּצְוֹם וּבְכִי וּמִסָּפֵד
שָׂק וָאֶפֶר יֻצַּע לָרַבִּים.

¹ They left on this mission “pressed/דְחוּפִים/dechufim”

² The word נְבֹחָה isn't common. Its root is used in Ex 14:3, where the Egyptians are tricked into thinking the Hebrews are “lost” in the desert. It's in the title of Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed* (Moreh Nevuchim).

³ Officially, everyone was supposed to be happy and prosperous so the king could congratulate himself on his wise and beneficent method of ruling.

⁴ “There was great mourning for the Jews.”

⁵ Today, the word מִסָּפֵד is associated with funeral eulogies, so it can mean lamentation and wailing.

⁴ Ester’s maidservants came,
with her eunuchs, and they told her *the news*¹.
The queen was shaken, horrified,²
and sent garments
to clothe Mordochai
and get his sack cloth off him,
but he didn’t accept it.⁴

⁵ So Ester called for Hatach,
one of the king’s eunuchs
whom he had assigned to *serve* her
and instructed him regarding Mordochai
to find out, “What is this, why is this?”

⁶ Hatach went out to Mordochai,
to the town square
in front of the palace gate.

⁷ Mordochai told him
all that had happened to him
and the whole story⁵ of the silver
that Haman had promised
to deposit into the king’s treasuries
for destroying the Jews.⁶

וַתְּבוֹאִינָהּ נְעֻרוֹת אֶסְתֵּר
וְסָרִיסֶיהָ וַיַּגִּידוּ לָהּ
וַתִּתְחַלְחַל הַמַּלְכָּה מְאֹד
וַתִּשְׁלַח בְּגָדִים
לְהַלְבִּישׁ אֶת־מֶרְדֳּכָי
וּלְהַסִּיר שָׁקוֹ מֵעָלָיו
וְלֹא קִבֵּל
וַתִּקְרָא אֶסְתֵּר לַהַתָּךְ
מִסָּרִיסֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ
אֲשֶׁר הָעֵמִיד לִפְנֶיהָ
וַתְּצַוֶּהוּ עַל־מֶרְדֳּכָי
לִדַּעַת מַה־זֶּה וְעַל־מַה־זֶּה
וַיֵּצֵא הַתָּךְ אֶל־מֶרְדֳּכָי
אֶל־רֶחֳב הָעִיר
אֲשֶׁר לִפְנֵי שַׁעַר־הַמֶּלֶךְ
וַיַּגֵּד־לוֹ מֶרְדֳּכָי
אֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר קָרָהוּ
וְאֵת אִפְרָשַׁת הַכֶּסֶף
אֲשֶׁר אָמַר הָמָן
לְשָׁקוֹל עַל־גִּנְזֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ
בַּיְהוּדִים⁷ לְאַבְדָּם

Vatavonah na’arot Ester
vesariseha, vayagidu lah.
vatit’chalchal hamalkah me’od
vatishlach begadim
lehalbish et Mordochai
ulehasir sako me’alav,
vela kibel.
Vatikrah Ester laHatach
misarisei hamelech,
asher he’emid lefaneha,
vat’tzavehu al Mordochai
lada’at, “Mah zeh, ve’al mah zeh?”
Vayetze Hatach el Mordochai
el rechoh ha’ir
asher lifnei sha’ar hamelech.
Vayaged lo Mordochai
et kol asher karahu,
ve’et parashat hakesef
asher amar Haman
lishkol al ginzei hamelech
baYehudim, le’abdam.

¹ They probably said, “Guess what, your majesty: that fellow Mordochai is out there in sack cloth. Boy, is he going to be in trouble!” They might not bother to mention that all the Jews were to be killed, because they had no reason to think this regulation would affect her.

² וַתִּתְחַלְחַל—the root is חל, meaning tremble, and it’s doubled for intensity, and reflexive to suggest that it’s an internal, emotional reaction: “The queen shuddered-shuddered-herself very much.”

³ The word is spelled with an extra letter י, וַתְּבוֹאִינָהּ.

⁴ She thinks Mordochai needs clothes and doesn’t realize why he’s chosen to wear mourning.

⁵ Or “the exact amount” or “the explanation.”

⁶ “Regarding the Jews, to destroy them.”

⁷ A manuscript would spell this word in an unusual manner, בַּיְהוּדִים

⁸ The copy of the legal decree
to destroy them, proclaimed in Shushan,
Mordochai gave *Hatach*
to show Ester,
so *Hatach* could tell her—direct her—
to go to the king to beg him for mercy
and plead with him for her people.

⁹ *Hatach* went and told Ester
what *Mordochai* said.

¹⁰ Ester spoke to *Hatach*
and directed him *to explain* to *Mordochai*:

¹¹ “All the king’s servants
and people in the king’s provinces
know that any man or woman
who wants to come to the king,
to the inner courtyard,
and has not been summoned
is liable to the sentence of death¹
unless the king extends to him
the golden scepter: then he can live.
I haven’t been summoned
to visit the king
for the last thirty days.”

¹² *Mordochai* was told
what Ester had said.

וְאֶת־פִּתְשֵׁגֶן כְּתָב־הַדָּת
אֲשֶׁר־נָתַן בְּשׁוּשָׁן לְהַשְׁמִידָם
נָתַן לוֹ
לְהַרְאוֹת אֶת־אֶסְתֵּר
וּלְהַגִּיד לָהּ וּלְצַוֹת אֵלֶיהָ
לָבוֹא אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ לְהִתְחַנֵּן־לּוֹ
וּלְבַקֵּשׁ מִלְּפָנָיו עַל־עַמָּהּ
וַיָּבֹא הָתָד וַיַּגִּד לְאֶסְתֵּר
אֶת דְּבַר־יְמָרְדֳּכָי
וַתֹּאמֶר אֶסְתֵּר לְהָתָד
וַתְּצַוֶּהוּ אֶל־יְמָרְדֳּכָי
כָּל־עַבְדֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ
וְעַם־מְדִינֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ
יֹדְעִים אֲשֶׁר כָּל־אִישׁ וְאִשָּׁה
אֲשֶׁר יָבֹא־אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ
אֶל־הַחֲצֵר הַפְּנִימִית
אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִקְרָא
אֲחַת דָּתוֹ לְהָמִית
לְבַד מֵאֲשֶׁר יוֹשִׁיט־לוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ
אֶת־שַׁרְבִיט הַזָּהָב וְחַיָּהּ
וְאָנִי לֹא נִקְרָאתִי
לָבוֹא אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ
זֶה שְׁלוֹשִׁים יוֹם
וַיַּגִּידוּ לְיְמָרְדֳּכָי
אֶת דְּבַר־יְאֶסְתֵּר

פ

¹ “One is his law, to put *him/her* to death.”

¹³ Mordochai told *Hatach*
to answer Ester,
“Don’t imagine *you alone*
can escape in the palace,
you alone of all the Jews.”

¹⁴ “If you keep quiet
right now,
relief and rescue
will arise for the Jews
from another quarter,
while you and your father’s line will perish.
And who knows?
Maybe it’s just for the sake of this *threat*
that you came to *your position of royalty*.”

¹⁵ Ester said to answer Mordochai:

¹⁶ “Go, assemble all the Jews
that live in Shushan
so they can fast with me.
Let them neither eat nor drink
for three days, night and day.
I and my maids will fast too,
and so I’ll go to the king
despite the regulations,
and if I’m done for, I’m done for.”

¹⁷ So Mordochai went and did
exactly as Ester instructed him.

וַיֹּמֶר מֶרְדֳּכָי Vayomer Mordochai
לְהַשִּׁיב אֶל-אֶסְתֵּר lehashiv el Ester,
אֶל-תְּדָמִי בִנְפֹשֶׁךְ “Al tedami venafshech
לְהִמָּלֵט בֵּית-הַמֶּלֶךְ lehimalet beit hamelech
מִכָּל-הַיְּהוּדִים mikol haYehudim.”
כִּי אִם-חָחָרֶשׁ תַּחֲרִישִׁי “Ki im hacharesh tacharishi
בַּעַת הַזֹּאת ba’et hazot,
רֵנַח וְהִצָּלָה revach vehatzalah
יֵעָמֹד לַיְּהוּדִים ya’amod laYehudim
מִמָּקוֹם אֲחֵר mimakom acher,
וְאַתָּה וּבֵית-אָבִיךָ תֵּוָּדוּ ve’at uveit avich tovedo.
וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ Umi yode’ah
אִם-לָעֵת כָּזֹאת im le’et kazot
הִגַּעְתָּ לַמָּלְכוּתִי higat lamal’chuti.”
וַתֹּמֶר אֶסְתֵּר לְהַשִּׁיב אֶל-מֶרְדֳּכָי Vatomer Ester lehashiv el Mordochai:
לֵךְ כְּנוֹס אֶת-כָּל-הַיְּהוּדִים Lech, kenos et kol haYehudim
הַנִּמְצְאִים בְּשׁוּשָׁן hanimtze’im be Shushan,
וְצִוּמוּ עָלַי vetzumu alai.
וְאֶל-תֹּחְלוּ וְאֶל-תִּשְׁתּוּ Ve’al tochlu ve’al tishtu
שְׁלוֹשֶׁת יָמִים לַיְלָה וַיּוֹם shloshet yamim, laila vayom;
גַּם-אֲנִי וְנַעֲרֹתַי אֲצִיּוֹם gam ani vena’arotai atzum ken,
וּבִכְן אָבוֹא אֶל-הַמֶּלֶךְ uvechen avo el hamelech
אֲשֶׁר לֹא-כֶדֶת asher lo chedat,
וְכֹאֲשֶׁר אָבִדְתִּי אָבִדְתִּי vecha’asher avadti, avadti.
וַיַּעֲבֹר מֶרְדֳּכָי וַיֵּעַשׂ Vaya’avor Mordochai vaya’as
כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר-צִוְּתָהּ עָלָיו אֶסְתֵּר kechol asher tzivtah alav Ester.

ס

Chapter 5

¹ On the third day

Ester donned her royal regalia and waited
in the inner palace courtyard
across from the king's apartments,
while the king was enthroned
on his royal throne
in the palace,
across from the palace gate.

² When the king saw

Queen Ester
waiting in the courtyard,
he was pleased to see her¹
and the king offered to Ester
the gold scepter in his hand.
Ester approached
and touched the tip of the scepter.

³ The king asked her,

“How are you, Queen Ester,
and what is your request?
Up to half the kingdom, and it's yours!

⁴ Ester said,

“If your majesty approves,
let the king and Haman come today
to a drinking binge I've prepared for him.” לוֹ

וַיְהִי אֶבְיָוִם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי

וַתִּלְבַּשׁ אֶסְתֵּר מַלְכוּת וַתַּעֲמֹד

בַּחֲצַר בֵּית-הַמֶּלֶךְ הַפְּנִימִית

נֹכַח בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ

וְהַמֶּלֶךְ יוֹשֵׁב

עַל-כִּסֵּא מַלְכוּתוֹ

בְּבֵית הַמַּלְכוּת

נֹכַח פֶּתַח הַבַּיִת

וַיְהִי כִרְאוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ

אֶת-אֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה

עֹמֶדֶת בַּחֲצַר

נִשְׂאָה חֵן בְּעֵינָיו

וַיֹּשֶׁט הַמֶּלֶךְ לְאֶסְתֵּר

אֶת-שַׁרְבִּיט הַזָּהָב אֲשֶׁר בְּיָדוֹ

וַתִּקְרַב אֶסְתֵּר

וַתִּגַּע בְּרֹאשׁ הַשַּׁרְבִּיט

ס

וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ הַמֶּלֶךְ

מַה-לָּךְ אֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה

וּמַה-בְּקִשְׁתְּךָ

עַד-חֲצִי הַמַּלְכוּת וַיַּנִּיתָן לָךְ

וַתֹּאמֶר אֶסְתֵּר

אִם-עַל-הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב

יָבוֹא הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהָמָן הַיּוֹם

אֶל-הַמִּשְׁתֶּה אֲשֶׁר-עָשִׂיתִי לוֹ

Vayehi bayom hashlishi

vatilbash Ester mal'chut vata'amod

bachatzar beit hamelech hapnimit,

nochach beit hamelech,

vehamelech yoshev

al kiseh mal'chuto

beveit hamal'chut,

nochach petach habayit.

Vayehi chirot hamelech

et Ester hamalkah

omedet bechatzer

nasah chen be'einav,

vayoshet hamelech le'Ester

et sharvit hazahav asher beyado,

vatikrav Ester

vatigah berosh hasharvit.

Vayomer lah hamelech,

“Mah lach, Ester hamalkah,

umah vakashatech?

Ad chatzi hamalchut veyinaten lach.”

Vatomer Ester,

“Im al hamelech tov,

yavo hamelech veHaman hayom

el hamishte ashher asiti lo.”

¹ “She bore grace in his eyes”; he thought she looked nice.

⁵ The king said,
 “Make Haman hurry up
 to comply with Ester’s proposal.”

So the king came with Haman
 to the drinking binge
 that Ester prepared.

⁶ The king said to Ester
 at the wine party,
 “Ask for something, and it’s yours.
 What would you like?
 Up to half the kingdom? Done!”

⁷ In reply, Ester said,
 “Here’s what I want, my request:

⁸ If the king grants me a favor
 and if the king approves
 to grant my wish
 and accede to my request,
 let the king come with Haman
 to the drinking binge I’ll make for them,
 and tomorrow I’ll do as the king says.”¹

⁹ That day, Haman left
 happy and content,
 but when Haman saw Mordochai
 at the palace gate,
 not standing up or moving out of his way,
 Haman was filled
 with hatred of Mordochai.

וַיֹּמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ Vayomer hamelech,
 מַהֲרֵנוּ אֶת־הַמֶּן “Maharu et Haman
 לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־דְּבַר אֶסְתֵּר. la’asot et devar Ester.”
 וַיָּבֹא הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַמֶּן Vayavo hamelech veHaman
 אֶל־הַמִּשְׁתֶּה el hamishteh
 אֲשֶׁר־עֲשָׂתָה אֶסְתֵּר. asher astah Ester.
 וַיֹּמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְאֶסְתֵּר Vayomer hamelech le’Ester
 בְּמִשְׁתֵּה הַיַּיִן bemishteh hayayin,
 מִה־שְּׂאֵלָתְךָ וַיַּנִּיתֵן לָךְ “Mah she’elatech veyinaten lach,
 וּמִה־בִקְשָׁתְךָ umah bakashatech?
 עַד־חֲצִי הַמַּלְכוּת וְהַעֲשֵׂ Ad chatzi hamal’chut vete’as!”
 וְתֵעַן אֶסְתֵּר וַתֹּאמֶר Vata’an Ester vatomar,
 שְׂאֵלָתִי וּבִקְשָׁתִי “She’elati uvakashati:
 אִם־מַצָּאתִי חַן בְּעֵינֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ Im matzati chen be’einei hamelech
 וְאִם־עַל־הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב ve’im al hamelech tov
 לָתֵת אֶת־שְׂאֵלָתִי latet et she’elati
 וּלַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־בִקְשָׁתִי vela’asot et bakashati,
 יָבֹא הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַמֶּן yavo hamelech veHaman
 אֶל־הַמִּשְׁתֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֶעֱשֶׂה לָּהֶם el hamishteh asher e’eseh lahem,
 וּמָחָר אֶעֱשֶׂה כְּדִבַּר הַמֶּלֶךְ. umachar e’eseh kidvar hamelech.”
 וַיֵּצֵא הַמֶּן בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא Vayetze Haman bayom hahu
 שִׂמְחָה וְטוֹב לֵב same’ach vetov lev;
 וּכְרָאוֹת הַמֶּן אֶת־מֶרְדֳּכָי vechirot Haman et Mordochai
 בְּשַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ besha’ar hamelech,
 וְלֹא־קָם וְלֹא־זָע מִמֶּנּוּ velo kam velo zah mimenu,
 וַיִּמָּלֵא הַמֶּן vayimaleh Haman
 עַל־מֶרְדֳּכָי חֲמָה al Mordochai chemah.

¹ Presumably she means that at tomorrow’s binge she’ll reveal her real request.

¹⁰ Haman mastered his rage and got home;
he sent *servants* to bring his friends
and Zeresh, his wife;

¹¹ Haman reported to them
the glory of his wealth and number of his sons,
all about how the king had promoted him
and raised him above *other* chiefs
and royal servants.

¹² And Haman said,
“But Queen Ester didn’t invite *anyone*
with the king to the drinking binge
she made, except only me.
Tomorrow, too, I’m invited to visit her
with the king.

¹³ But none of this means anything to me¹
whenever I see
that Jew Mordochai
stationed at the palace gate.”

¹⁴ His wife Zeresh said to him
(and so did all his friends),
“Get a gallows made, 50 cubits high,
and tomorrow morning talk to the king
to have Mordochai hanged on it.²
Go to the drinking binge with the king
cheerfully.”

Haman thought this was a good idea
so he made the gallows.

וַיִּתְאַפֵּק הָמָן וַיָּבֹא אֶל-בֵּיתוֹ
וַיִּשְׁלַח וַיָּבֵא אֶת-אֲהֻבָּיו
וְאֶת-זֶרֶשׁ אִשְׁתּוֹ
וַיְסַפֵּר לָהֶם הָמָן
אֶת-כְּבוֹד עֲשָׂרוֹ וְרַב בָּנָיו
וְאֵת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר גִּדְּלוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ
וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר נִשְׂאוֹ עַל-הַשָּׂרִים
וְעַבְדֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ

וַיֹּאמֶר הָמָן
אֲפִי לֹא-הִבִּיֵּא אֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה
עִם-הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל-הַמִּשְׁתֶּה
אֲשֶׁר-עָשְׂתָה כִּי אִם-אִתִּי
וְגַם לִמָּחָר אֲנִי קָרוּא-לָהּ
עִם-הַמֶּלֶךְ

וְכָל-זֶה אֵינֶנּוּ שׁוֹהֵה לִּי
בְּכָל-עֵת אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי רֹאֶה
אֶת-מֶרְדֳּכָי הַיְּהוּדִי
יּוֹשֵׁב בִּשְׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ
וַתֹּאמֶר לוֹ זֶרֶשׁ אִשְׁתּוֹ
וְכָל-אֲהֻבָּיו
יַעֲשׂוּ-עֵץ גָּבוֹה חֲמִישִׁים אַמָּה
וּבִבְקֹר אֶמְרָה לַמֶּלֶךְ
וַיִּתְּלוּ אֶת-מֶרְדֳּכָי עָלָיו
וּבֹא-עִם-הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל הַמִּשְׁתֶּה
שְׂמֵחַ

וַיִּטֵּב הַדָּבָר לִפְנֵי הָמָן
וַיַּעַשׂ הָעֵץ

Vayit'apek Haman vayavo el beito;
vayishlach, vayaveh et ohavav
ve'et Zeresh ishto,
vayesaper lahem Haman
et kevod oshro verov banav,
ve'et kol asher gidlo hamelech
ve'et asher niso al hasarim
ve'avdei hamelech.

Vayomer Haman,
“Af lo hevi'ah Ester hamalkah
im hamelech el hamishteh
asher asatah ki im oti.
Vegam lemachar ani karu lah
im hamelech.

Vechol zeh einenu shoveh li
bechol et asher ani ro'eh
at Mordochai haYehudi
yoshev besha'ar hamelech.

Vatomer lo Zeresh ishto
vechol ohavav,
“Ya'asu etz gavo'ah chamishim amah,
uvaboker emor lamelech
veyitlu et Mordochai alav,
uvo im hamelech el hamishteh
same'ach.”

Vayitav hadavar lifnei Haman,
vaya'as he'etz.

פ

¹ “And all this doesn’t seem fair to me” or “isn’t right to me.”

² “Let them make a wood/tree/stick/gallows, 50 cubits high, and in the morning speak to the king, and they will hang Mordochai upon it.” A cubit is usually reckoned to be 18 inches, so this would be 75 feet high. Some think

Chapter 6

¹ That night sleep eluded the king
so he ordered his journal brought,
the events of each day,
and this was read before the king.¹

² In the book was found written
how Mordochai had informed
on Bigtan and Teresh,
two of the king's eunuchs,
entrance guards,
who sought to attack
King Achashverosh.

³ The king said, "What has been done,
of value and dignity²
to reward Mordochai for this?"
The king's page-boy attendants said,
"Not a thing was done for him."

⁴ The king said, "Who's out there?"
Haman had just come
to the outer palace courtyard
to tell the king to hang Mordochai
on the gallows he had prepared for him.

⁵ The king's page-boys told him,
"Here's Haman waiting outside."
The king said, "Let him in!"

בַּלַּיְלָה הַהוּא נִדְרָה שְׁנַת הַמֶּלֶךְ
וַיֹּאמֶר לְהָבִיא אֶת־סֵפֶר הַזְכֵּרֹנוֹת
דְּבָרֵי הַיָּמִים
וַיִּהְיוּ נִקְרָאִים לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ
וַיִּמְצָא כָתוּב
אֲשֶׁר הִגִּיד מֹרְדֳּכַי
עַל־בִּגְתָּנָא וְתֵרֶשׁ
שְׁנֵי סָרִיסֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ
מִשְׁמֹרֵי הַסָּף
אֲשֶׁר בִּקְשׁוּ לְשַׁלַּח יָד
בַּמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֵרֹשׁ
וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ מַה־נַּעֲשֶׂה
יָקָר וְגִדּוּלָה
לְמֹרְדֳּכַי עַל־זֶה
וַיֹּאמְרוּ נַעֲרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ מִשְׁתָּרְטָו
לֹא־נַעֲשֶׂה עִמּוֹ דָּבָר
וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ מִי בַּחֲצֵר
וְהָמָן בָּא
לְחַצְזַר בֵּית־הַמֶּלֶךְ הַחִיצוֹנָה
לְאֹמֶר לַמֶּלֶךְ לְתִלּוֹת אֶת־מֹרְדֳּכַי
עַל־הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר־הֶכִּין לוֹ
וַיֹּאמְרוּ נַעֲרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֵלָיו
הִנֵּה הָמָן עֹמֵד בַּחֲצֵר
וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ יָבוֹא

Balaila hahu nadeda shnat hamelech
vayomer lehavi et sefer hazichronot,
divrei hayamim,
vayiheyu nikra'im lifnei hamelech.

Vayimatze chatuv
asher higid Mordochai
al Bigtana vaTeresh,
shnei sarisei hamelech
mishomrei hasaf,
asher bikshu lishlo'ach yad
bamelech Achashverosh

Vayomer hamelech, "Mah na'asah
yekar ugedulah
leMordochai al zeh?"
Vayomru na'arei hamelech meshartav,
"Lo na'asah imo davar."

Vayomer hamelech, "Mi vechatzer?"
VeHaman bah
lachatzar beit hamelech hachitzonah
lemor lamelech litlot et Mordochai
al ha'etz asher hechin lo.

Vayomru na'arei hamelech elav,
"Hineh Haman bechatzer."
Vayomer hamelech, "Yavo."

people were hung on a gallows, others think they were stuck on a pole, either to execute them or just to put them on display after they were executed. In the time of the Tudors, visitors to London Bridge would see as many as 34 heads of executed criminals or traitors on display.

¹ "On that night the king's sleep wandered off, and he said to bring the book of memories, the events of the days, and these were read aloud before the king."

² Or "dearness and greatness."

⁶ Haman entered and the king asked him, וַיָּבֹא הָמָן וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ
 “What’s to be done for the man מַה-לַּעֲשׂוֹת בְּאִישׁ
 whom the king values dearly?”¹ אֲשֶׁר הַמֶּלֶךְ חָפֵץ בִּיקָרוֹ
 Haman said to himself, וַיֹּאמֶר הָמָן בְּלִבּוֹ
 “Whom would the king cherish, לִמִּי יַחֲפֹץ הַמֶּלֶךְ
 to show *his* esteem, more than me?” לַעֲשׂוֹת יָקָר יוֹתֵר מִמֶּנִּי
⁷ Haman told the king, וַיֹּאמֶר הָמָן אֶל-הַמֶּלֶךְ
 “Someone whom the king values dearly, אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הַמֶּלֶךְ חָפֵץ בִּיקָרוֹ
⁸ let there be brought royal garments יָבִיאוּ לְבוּשׁ מַלְכוּת
 that the king *himself* has worn, אֲשֶׁר לְבַשָּׁבוּ הַמֶּלֶךְ
 and a horse the king has ridden וְסוּס אֲשֶׁר רָכַב עָלָיו הַמֶּלֶךְ
 with the royal crest on its headdress,² וְאֲשֶׁר נָתַן כֶּתֶר מַלְכוּת בְּרֹאשׁוֹ
⁹ and the garments and horse delivered וְנָתַן הַלְבוּשׁ וְהַסּוּס
 by one of the king’s top chiefs; עַל-יַד-אִישׁ מִשָּׁרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ הַפְּרָתִימִים
 let the man be dressed וְהִלְבִּישׁוּ אֶת-הָאִישׁ
 (whom the king values dearly) אֲשֶׁר הַמֶּלֶךְ חָפֵץ בִּיקָרוֹ
 and placed on the horse, to ride וְהִרְכִּיבוּהוּ עַל-הַסּוּס
 through the town,³ בְּרִחוּב הָעִיר
 with cryers before him,⁴ וַקְּרָאוּ לִפְנָיו
 “This is done for the man בָּכָה יַעֲשֶׂה לָאִישׁ
 whom the king values dearly.” אֲשֶׁר הַמֶּלֶךְ חָפֵץ בִּיקָרוֹ

Vayavo Haman vayomer lo hamelech,
 “Mah la’asot ba’ish
 asher hamelech chafetz bikaro?”
 Vayomer Haman belibo,
 “Lemi yachpotz hamelech
 la’asot yekar yoter mimeni?”
 Vayomer Haman el hamelech,
 “Ish asher hamelech chafetz bikaro,
 Yavi’u levush mal’chut
 asher lavash bo hamelech,
 vesus asher rachav alav hamelech
 va’asher nitan keter mal’chut berosh,
 venaton halevush vehasus
 al yad ish misarei hamelech hapartemim
 vehilbishu et ha’ish
 asher hamelech chafetz bikaro
 vehirkivuhu al hasus
 bir’chov ha’ir,
 vekaru lefanav,
 “Kachah ye’aseh la’ish
 asher hamelech chafetz bikaro.”

¹ Or, “cherishes for his value/cherishes in his estimation.”

² Wow, a chance to wear an authentic Elvis outfit, only better! “With the royal crest on its headdress” is literally “and which has been given the crown of royalty on its head,” presumably something highly decorative like the feathered plumes in a parade headdress or the elaborate horse headdresses of Pazyryk culture.

³ “Through the width/street/open space of the town/city.”

⁴ “And let them cry out before him”

¹⁰ The king said to Haman, “Quick!
Get the garments and the horse
as you said,
and do this for Mordochai the Jew
who stays at the palace gate.
Don’t leave out a *single* thing
of all that you said.”

¹¹ Haman took
the garments and horse
and dressed Mordochai
and got him to ride through the town,
calling out before him:
“This is done for the man
whom the king values dearly.”

¹² Then Mordochai went back
to the palace gate
while Haman hurried¹ home in misery,
ashamed to show his face.²

¹³ Haman told Zeresh his wife
and all his friends
all that had happened to him.
His advisors and his wife Zeresh said,
“If he’s of Jewish stock, *this* Mordochai
before whom you have begun to fall,
you can’t beat him.
You’ll fall right down in front of him.”

וַיֹּמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְהָמָן לְמַהֵר
קַח אֶת־הַלְבוּשׁ וְאֶת־הַסּוּס
כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ
וַעֲשֵׂה־כֵן לְמֹרְדֹכַי הַיְּהוּדִי
הַיּוֹשֵׁב בְּשַׁעַר הַמָּלָךְ
אֶל־תִּפְּל דָּבָר
מִכֹּל אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ
וַיִּקַּח הָמָן
אֶת־הַלְבוּשׁ וְאֶת־הַסּוּס
וַיַּלְבֵּשׁ אֶת־מֹרְדֹכַי
וַיַּרְכִּיבֵהוּ בִּרְכוּב הָעִיר
וַיִּקְרָא לִפְנָיו
כָּכָה יַעֲשֶׂה לְאִישׁ
אֲשֶׁר הַמֶּלֶךְ חָפֵץ בִּיקְרוֹ
וַיָּשָׁב מֹרְדֹכַי
אֶל־שַׁעַר הַמָּלָךְ
וְהָמָן נִדְּחַף אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ אָבֵל
וַחֲפוּי רֹאשׁ
וַיְסַפֵּר הָמָן לְזֶרֶשׁ אִשְׁתּוֹ
וּלְכָל־אֲהָבָיו
אֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר קָרָהוּ
וַיֹּמְרוּלוֹ חֲכָמָיו וְזֶרֶשׁ
אִשְׁתּוֹ
אֲמַר מִי־נֹרֵעַ הַיְּהוּדִים מֹרְדֹכַי
אֲשֶׁר הַחֲלוֹת לְנֹפֶל לִפְנָיו
לֹא־תֻכַּל לוֹ
כִּי־נֹפֹל תִּפּוֹל לִפְנָיו

Vayomer hamelech leHaman, “Maher!
kach et halevush ve’et hasus
ka’asher dibarta,
va’aseh chen leMordochai haYehudi
hayoshev besha’ar hamelech.
Al tapel davar
mikol asher dibarta.”
Vayikach Haman
et halevush ve’et hasus
vayalbesh et Mordochai
vayarkivehu bir’chov ha’ir,
vayikra lefanav:
“Kacha ye’aseh la’ish
asher hamelech chafetz bikaro.”
Vayashav Mordochai
el sha’ar hamelech
veHaman nidchaf el beito avel
vachafui rosh.
Vayesaper Haman leZeresh ishto
ulechol ohavav
et kol asher karahu.
Vayomru lo chachamav veZeresh ishto,
“Im mizerah haYehudim Mordochai
asher hachilota linpol lefanav,
lo tuchal lo,
ki nafol tipol lefanav.”

¹ “Haman was hurried”; the verb is passive, so perhaps people pushed him around since he’d been humiliated.

² “And covered of head,” with his head covered—presumably so people wouldn’t see his humiliation.

¹⁴ They were still speaking to him
when the king's eunuchs arrived
and rushed Haman off¹
to the drinking binge that Ester made.

עוֹדֵם מְדַבְּרִים עִמּוֹ
וְסָרִיסֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ הִגִּיעוּ
וַיַּבְהִילוּ לְהַבִּיא אֶת-הַמֶּן
אֶל-הַמִּשְׁתֶּה אֲשֶׁר-עָשְׂתָה אֶסְתֵּר.

Odam medabrim imo
vesarisei hamelech higi'u,
vayavhilu lehavi et Haman
el hamishteh asher astah Ester.

Chapter 7

¹ The king went with Haman
to drink with Queen Ester.
² The king said to Ester again,
on the second day of drinking wine,
“Ask for something, Queen Ester,
and it's yours. What would you like?
Up to half the kingdom? Done!”

וַיָּבֹא הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַמֶּן
לִשְׁתוֹת עִם-אֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה
וַיֹּמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְאֶסְתֵּר גַּם
בַּיּוֹם הַשֵּׁנִי בַּמִּשְׁתֶּה הַזֶּה
מַה-שְּׁאַלְתָּ: אֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה
וְתִנַּתְנִן לָךְ וּמַה בְּקַשְׁתָּ?
עַד-חֲצִי הַמַּלְכוּת וְתַעֲשׂ
וְתֵעַן אֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה וַתֹּמֶר
אִם-מַצָּתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ
הַמֶּלֶךְ

Vayavo hamelech veHaman
lishtot im Ester hamalkah.
Vayomer hamelech le'Ester gam
bayom hasheni bemishteh hayayin,
“Mah she'elatech, Ester hamalkah,
vetinaten lach. Umah bakashatech?
Ad chatzi hamal'chut vete'as!
Vata'an Ester hamalkah vatomer,
“Im matzati chen be'einecha,
hamelech,

and if the king approves—
let my life be granted me when I ask *for it*
and my people at my request.

וְאִם-עַל-הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב
תִּנַּתְנִן-לִי נַפְשִׁי בִּישְׁאֵלָתִי
וְעַמִּי בְּבִקְשָׁתִי

ve'im al hamelech tov,
tinaten li nafshi bish'elati
ve'ami bevakashati.

⁴ For we've been sold, I and my people,
to be destroyed, murdered and annihilated.

כִּי נִמְכַּרְנוּ אֲנִי וְעַמִּי
לְהַשְׁמִיד לְהַרְגוֹ וּלְאַבֵּד
וְאֵלֵינוּ לְעַבְדִּים וּלְשִׁפְחוֹת

Ki nimkarnu, ani ve'ami,
lehashmid, laharog ule'abed.
Ve'ilu la'avadim velishfachot

⁵ If like male and female slaves
we had been sold,
I wouldn't have said anything,
but this injury isn't worth
the damage to the king.²

נִמְכַּרְנוּ
הַחֲרָשְׁתִּי
כִּי אֵין הַצָּר שׁוֹוֶה
בְּנֹזֶק הַמֶּלֶךְ

nimkarnu
hecherashti,
ki ein hatzar shoveh
benezek hamelech.

ס

¹ “Hurried to bring Haman.”

² “For not the trouble/enemy is level/even-with the injury/damage of/to the king.” She seems to argue that Haman's plan is not in the king's interest. The money Haman pays doesn't match the damage the king will suffer by killing off so many subjects—he'll lose the money he could have made selling them into slavery, or he'll lose their tax revenue, etc.

⁵ King Achashverhosh said—
he said to Queen Ester—
“Who is it, where is he
who has determined¹ to do this?”

⁶ Ester said, “A pest, an enemy!
This evil Haman!”

Then Haman felt terrified
before the king and queen.

⁷ In his anger, the stood up
from the wine party *and went*
into the palace garden,
while Haman stayed to beg for his life
from Queen Ester,
for he realized
that he’d get no mercy
from the king.²

⁸ The king came back from the palace garden
to the wine party.
Haman had collapsed on the couch³
where Ester was.

The king said,
“Would you even force the queen
with me *standing right here*?”⁴
The words came from the king’s mouth
so they covered Haman’s face.

וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֶרֶשׁ
וַיֹּאמֶר לְאֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה
מִי הוּא זֶה וַאֲיֵזָה הוּא
אֲשֶׁר מֵלֹא לְבוֹ לַעֲשׂוֹת כֵּן
וַתֹּאמֶר אֶסְתֵּר אִישׁ צָר וְאוֹיֵב
הָמָן הָרָע הַזֶּה
וְהָמָן נִבֵּעַת
מִלִּפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַמַּלְכָּה
וְהַמֶּלֶךְ קָם בַּחֲמָתוֹ
מִמִּשְׁתֵּה הַיַּיִן
אֶל־גִּיט הַבֵּיתָן
וְהָמָן עָמַד לִבְקֶשׁ עַל־נַפְשׁוֹ
מֵאֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה
כִּי רָאָה
כִּי־כָלְתָה אֵלָיו הָרָעָה
מֵאֵת הַמֶּלֶךְ
וְהַמֶּלֶךְ שָׁב מִגִּיט הַבֵּיתָן
אֶל־בֵּית מִשְׁתֵּה הַיַּיִן
וְהָמָן נָפַל עַל־הַמִּטָּה
אֲשֶׁר אֶסְתֵּר עָלֶיהָ
וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ
הֲגַם לִבְבוֹשׁ אֶת־הַמַּלְכָּה
עִמִּי בַּבַּיִת
הַדָּבָר יֵצֵא מִפִּי הַמֶּלֶךְ
וּפְנֵי הָמָן חָפּוּ

Vayomer hamelech Achashverosh,
vayomer le'Ester hamalkah,
“Mi hu zeh, ve'ei zeh hu
asher mela'o libo la'asot ken?”
Vatomer Ester, “Ish tzar ve'oyev!
Haman harah hazeh!”
VeHaman nivat
milifnei hamelech vehamalkah.
Vehamelech kam bachamato
mimishteh hayayin
el ginat habitan,
veHaman amad levakesh al nafsho
me'Ester hamalkah,
ki ra'ah
ki chaltah elav hara'ah
me'et hamelech.
Vehamelech shav miginat habitan
el beit mishteh hayayin
veHaman nofel al hamitah
asher Ester aleha.
Vayomer hamelech,
“Hagam lichbosh et hamalkah
imi babayit?”
Hadavar yatzah mipi hamelech
ufenei Haman chafu.

¹ “Who filled his heart,” so he’d do it whole-heartedly.

² “That determined/finalized toward him *was* evil from the king.” Haman saw there was no point asking the king for mercy so he tried the queen.

³ The ancients ate and drank in a reclining position (you can try this at home in your own recliner).

⁴ “Also to subdue/overcome/rape the queen, with me in the house/building?” The king sees Haman on Ester’s couch and assumes he’s trying to kill her or rape her.

⁹ Charvonah said

(he was one of the king's eunuchs),

“And there’s the gallows

Haman made for Mordochai—

who spoke *so* well to *save* the king—

standing at Haman’s house,

fifty cubits high.”

The king said, “Hang him on it.”

¹⁰ So they hanged Haman

on the gallows he prepared for Mordochai,

and the king’s anger subsided.

וַיֹּאמֶר חַרְבוֹנָה
אֶחָד מִן־הַסָּרִיסִים לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ
גַּם הִנֵּה הָעֵץ
אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה הָמָן לְמֹרְדֳּכָי
אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר־טוֹב עַל־הַמֶּלֶךְ
עֹמֵד בְּבֵית הָמָן
נִבְנָה חֲמִשִּׁים אַמָּה
וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ תִּלְהוּ עָלָיו
וַיִּתְּלוּ אֶת־הָמָן עַל־הָעֵץ
אֲשֶׁר־הֵכִין לְמֹרְדֳּכָי
וַחֲמַת הַמֶּלֶךְ שָׁכְחָה

פ

Vayomer Charvonah,

echad min hasarisim lifnei hamelech,

“Gam hineh ha’etz

asher asah Haman leMordochai,

asher diber tov al hamelech,

omed beveit Haman,

gavo’ah chamishim amah.”

Vayomer hamelech, “Teluhu alav.”

Vayitlu et Haman al ha’etz

asher hechin leMordochai,

vachamat hamelech shachachah.

Chapter 8

¹ The same day,

King Achashverosh gave

to Queen Ester the house of Haman,

the Jews’ enemy,

while Mordochai was admitted

to the king’s presence,

for Ester told how they were related.¹

² The king took back his ring, *the one*

he had transferred *to Haman*,³ from Haman,

and gave it to Mordochai,

and Ester placed Mordochai

in charge of Haman’s house.

בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא
נָתַן הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶחָשְׁוֶרֶשׁ
לְאֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה אֶת־בֵּית הָמָן
צִרֵּר הַיְּהוּדִים²
וּמֹרְדֳּכָי בָּא
לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ
כִּי־הִגִּידָה אֶסְתֵּר מַה הוּא לָהּ
וַיָּסֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת־טַבַּעְתּוֹ
אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱבִיר מֵהָמָן
וַיִּתְּנָהּ לְמֹרְדֳּכָי
וַתָּשֶׂם אֶסְתֵּר אֶת־מֹרְדֳּכָי
עַל־בֵּית הָמָן

פ

Bayom hahu

natan hamelech Achashverosh

le’Ester hamalkah et beit Haman,

tzorer haYehudim,

uMordochai bah

lifnei hamelech,

ki higidah Ester mah hu lah.

Vayasar hamelech et tabato,

asher he’evir, meHaman,

vayitnah leMordochai,

vatasem Ester et Mordochai

al beit Haman.

¹ “What he was to her.”

² A manuscript reads יהודיים

³ To Haman, in 3:10.

³ Ester resumed
speaking in front of the king.
She collapsed at his feet and wept,
begging him to renounce
the evil *decree* of Haman the Agagite
and the scheme

he designed against the Jews.

⁴ The king extended to Ester
his golden scepter,
so Ester rose
and stood before the king.

⁵ She said, “If the king approves,
if I have won his favor,
if this seems proper to the king,
and *if* I seem good to him,
rescind in writing the written decree¹
publicizing the scheme of Haman
son of Hamdata the Agagite
that he wrote, to destroy the Jews
in all the king’s provinces.

⁶ How could I *bear to*
witness the catastrophe
that threatens² my people;
how could I *bear to*
witness the ruin of my family?”³

וַתֹּסֶף אֶסְתֵּר
וַתְּדַבֵּר לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ
וַתִּפֹּל לִפְנֵי רַגְלָיו וַתִּבְכֶּה
וַתִּתְחַנֵּן לוֹ לְהַעֲבִיר
אֶת־רֵעַת הָמָן הָאֲגָגִי
וְאֶת מַחֲשָׁבְתּוֹ
אֲשֶׁר חָשַׁב עַל־הַיְּהוּדִים
וַיִּשָּׁט הַמֶּלֶךְ לְאַסְתֵּר
אֶת שַׂרְבִּית הַזָּהָב
וַתִּקָּם אֶסְתֵּר
וַתֵּעַמֵּד לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ
וַתֹּאמֶר אֶם־עַל־הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב
וְאִם־מִצָּאִיתִי חֵן לִפְנָיו
וְכִשֵּׁר הַדָּבָר לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ
וְטוֹבָה אֲנִי בְּעֵינָיו
יִכְתֹּב לְהַשִּׁיב אֶת־הַסְּפָרִים
מִחֲשֶׁבֶת הָמָן
בֶּן־חַמְדָּתָא הָאֲגָגִי
אֲשֶׁר כָּתַב לְאַבֵּד אֶת־הַיְּהוּדִים
אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל־מְדִינֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ
כִּי אֵיכָכָה אוּכַל
וְרֹאִיתִי בָרָעָה
אֲשֶׁר יִמְצָא אֶת־עַמִּי
וְאֵיכָכָה אוּכַל
וְרֹאִיתִי בְּאוּבְדָן מוֹלַדְתִּי

Vatosef Ester,
vatdaber lifnei hamelech
vatipol lifnei raglav vatevk,
vatit’chanen lo leha’avir
et ra’at Haman ha’Agagi
ve’et machashavto
asher chashav al haYehudim.
Vayoshet hamelech le’Ester
et sharvit hazahav,
vatakam Ester,
vata’amod lifnei hamelech.
Vatomer, “Im al hamelech tov
ve’im matzati chen lefanav
vechasher hadavar lifnei hamelech
vetovah ani be’einav,
yikatev lehashiv et hasfarim,
machashevet Haman
ben Hamdata haAgagi
asher katav le’abed et haYehudim
asher bechol medinot hamelech.
Ki eichecha uchal
vera’iti bara’ah
asher yimtza et ami,
ve’eichecha uchal
vera’iti be’ovdan moladti?”

ס

¹ “Let it be written to recall the scrolls.”

² “That will find/attain to.”

³ Or “the ruin of the place where I was born.”

⁷ King Ahashverosh said
to Queen Ester
and to Mordochai the Jew,
“Look, I gave Haman’s house to Ester,
and he was hanged on the gallows
for attacking the Jews.

⁸ So you should write to the Jews
as you see fit,
in the king’s name,
and seal *it* with the king’s ring.”
For a decree written
in the king’s name
and sealed with the king’s ring
can’t be rescinded.²

וַיֹּמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֶרֶשׁ
לְאֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה
וּלְמֹרְדֹכַי הַיְּהוּדִי
הִנֵּה בֵּית־הָמָן נָתַתִּי לְאֶסְתֵּר
וְאֹתוֹ תָּלוּ עַל־הָעֵץ
עַל אֲשֶׁר־שָׁלַח יָדוֹ בַּיְּהוּדִים
וְאַתֶּם כְּתֹבוּ עַל־הַיְּהוּדִים
כַּטּוֹב בְּעֵינֵיכֶם
בְּשֵׁם הַמֶּלֶךְ
וְחֻתְמוּ בְּטַבַּעַת הַמֶּלֶךְ
כִּי־כָתָב אֲשֶׁר־נִכְתָּב
בְּשֵׁם־הַמֶּלֶךְ
וְנִחְתָּמוֹ בְּטַבַּעַת הַמֶּלֶךְ
אֵין לְהַשִּׁיב
Vayomer hamelech Ashashverosh
le’Ester hamalkah
uleMordochai haYehudi,
“Hineh, beit Haman natati le’Ester,
ve’oto talu al ha’etz
al asher shalach yado baYehudim.
Ve’atem kitvu al haYehudim
katov be’eineichem
beshem hamelech,
vechitmu betaba’at hamelech.”
Ki chetav asher nichtav
beshem hamelech
venachtom betaba’at hamelech
ein lehashiv.

¹ A manuscript spells this word in an unusual manner, בִּיהוּדִים.

² The king could never admit a mistake, it seems, so he could not rescind Haman’s evil decree. Instead, the king now gives the Jews permission to defend themselves.

⁹ The king's scribes were summoned promptly, in the third month, the month of Sivan, on its twenty-third *day*. Mordochai's orders were all written,¹ for the Jews, to the premiers and governors and provincial chiefs who *governed* from Hodu to Kush, one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, in each province's *local* script, and in each people's language, and to the Jews in their script and their language.

¹⁰ He wrote *the decree* in the name of King Achashverosh and sealed *it* with the king's ring. He sent the proclamations by means of couriers on horseback riding swift steeds from the royal stables, bred from swift mares²

וַיִּקְרְאוּ סֹפְרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ
בַּעַת־הָהִיא בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁלִישִׁי
הוּא־חֹדֶשׁ סִיּוֹן
בִּשְׁלוֹשָׁה וְעֶשְׂרִים בּוֹ
וַיִּכְתֹּב כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּה מֶרְדּוּכָי
אֶל־הַיְּהוּדִים
וְאֶל־הָאֲחַשְׁדָּרְפָּנִים וְהַפָּחוֹת
וְשָׂרֵי הַמְּדִינוֹת
אֲשֶׁר ׀ מֵהוּדוּ וְעַד־כּוּשׁ
שֶׁבַע וְעֶשְׂרִים וּמֵאָה מְדִינָה
מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה כִּכְתָּבָהּ
וְעַם וְעַם כְּלִשְׁנֹו
וְאֶל־הַיְּהוּדִים
כִּכְתָּבָם וְכָל־שׁוֹנָם
וַיִּכְתֹּב בְּשֵׁם
הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֶרֶשׁ
וַיַּחְתֵּם בְּטַבַּעַת הַמֶּלֶךְ
וַיִּשְׁלַח סָפָרִים
בְּיַד הָרָצִים בְּסוּסִים
רֹכְבֵי הָרֶכֶשׁ הָאֲחַשְׁתֵּרָנִים
בְּנֵי הָרָמָכִים

Vayikaru sofrei hamelech
ba'et hahi, bachodesh hashlishi,
hu chodesh Sivan,
bishloshah ve'esrim bo,
vayikatev kechol asher tziva Mordochai
el haYehudim
ve'el ha'achashdarpenim vehapachot
vesarei hamedinot
asher meHodu ve'ad Kush,
sheva ve'esrim ume'ah medinah,
medinah umedinah kichtavah,
ve'am va'am kilshono,
ve'el haYehudim
kichtavam vechilshonam.
Vayichtov beshem
hamelech Achashverosh
vayachtom betaba'at hamelech.
Vayishlach sfarim
beyad haratzim basusim,
rochvei harechesh ha'achashteranim
benei haramachim

¹ “And there was written according to all that Mordochai instructed”

² Apart from the horses, the animals are uncertain: some combination of mules, post horses, royal horses, swift horses, mares, camels and dromedaries. The King James translation has a variety of animals (maybe they used everything they could lay hands on to get the word out quickly) whereas others stress the speed of the horses (one can assume that the king kept the fastest horses in his stables, and that couriers on a royal mission moved very fast).

¹¹ *to announce* that the king allowed the Jews
in every town

to assemble to defend their lives,

to destroy, kill and annihilate

any provincial or clan army

that attacked them, children and women,

and to ransack their homes¹ for plunder

¹² on a single day

in all the provinces

of King Achashverosh,

on the thirteenth *day*

of the twelfth month,

the month Adar.²

¹³ A copy of the written decree

was to be presented as law

in every province,

publicized to all the people,

for the Jews to be ready

for that day,

to exact revenge from their enemies.

אֲשֶׁר נָתַן הַמֶּלֶךְ לַיְּהוּדִים

אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל-עִיר-וָעִיר

לְהִקָּהֵל וְלָעֲמֹד עַל-נַפְשָׁם

לְהַשְׁמִיד וְלַהָרֹג וּלְאַבֵּד

אֶת-כָּל-חֵיל עַם וּמְדִינָה

הַצָּרִים אֹתָם טַף וְנָשִׁים

וּשְׁלָלָם לְבוֹז

בְּיוֹם אֶחָד

בְּכָל-מְדִינֹת

הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֶרוֹשׁ

בִּשְׁלוֹשָׁה עָשָׂר

לְחֹדֶשׁ שְׁנַיִם-עָשָׂר

הוּא-חֹדֶשׁ אָדָר

פֶּתֶשֶׁגֶן הַכְּתוּב

לְהִנָּתֵן דָּת

בְּכָל-מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה

גָּלוּי לְכָל-הָעַמִּים

וּלְהִיָּוֹת הַיְּהוּדִים עֲתִידִים

לְיוֹם הַזֶּה

לְהִנָּקֵם מֵאֹיְבֵיהֶם

asher natan hamelech laYehudim

asher bechol ir va'ir

lehikahel vela'amod al nafsham,

lehashmid velaharog ule'abed

et kol cheil am umedinah

hatzarim otam, taf venashim,

ushelalam lavoz

beyom echad

bechol medinot

hamelech Achashverosh,

bishloshah asar

lechodesh shneim asar,

hu chodesh Adar.

Patshegen haktav

lehinaten dat

bechol medinah umedinah

galui lechol ha'amim,

veliheyot haYehudim atidim

layom hazeh,

lehinakem me'oyveihem.

¹ “To ransack them”; now the Jews had permission to kill their enemies and take their stuff. Cf.3:13.

² You'd think anyone could legally defend himself, but not under Achashverosh. Since he had decreed anyone could kill Jews, self-defence would be illegal. This new decree legalized their self-defence but limited it to a single day. (This is another reason not to pine for the glorious past.)

³ A manuscript has the unusual spelling היהודיים.

⁴ A manuscript has the unusual spelling עתודים.

¹⁴ The couriers, riding swift steeds
from the royal stables,
galloped off at top speed¹
on the king's mission,
and the *new* law was proclaimed
in the town of Shushan.

הַרְצִים רֹכְבֵי הָרֶכֶשׁ
הָאֲחַשְׁתֵּרָנִים
יָצְאוּ מִבְּהָלִים וּדְחוּפִים
בְּדַבַּר הַמֶּלֶךְ
וַהֲדַת נִתְּנָה
בְּשׁוּשָׁן הַבִּירָה.

Haratzim, rochvei harechesh
ha'achashteranim,
yatzu mevohalim udechufim
bidvar hamelech,
vehadat nitnah
beShushan habirah.

פ

¹⁵ Mordechai left
the king's presence
in royal robes of blue and white,
a great crown of gold
and a garment of fine linen and purple,²
while the town of Shushan
was relieved and joyful.

וּמֹרְדֳּכַי יָצָא
מִלִּפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ
בִּלְבוּשׁ מַלְכוּת תִּכְלֵת וְחֹזֶר
וַעֲטֹרֶת זָהָב גְּדוּלָּה
וְתַכְרִיךְ בּוּץ וְאַרְגָּמָן
וַהֲעִיר שׁוּשָׁן
צְהֵלָה וְשִׁמְחָה.

UMordochai yatzah
milifnei hamelech
bilvush mal'chut techelet vachur
va'ateret zahav gedolah
vetachrich butz va'argaman,
veha'ir Shushan
tzohola vesamecha.

¹⁶ The Jews enjoyed
light and joy, delight and honor

לַיהוּדִים הָיְתָה
אֹרָה וְשִׁמְחָה וְשָׁשׂוֹן וִיקָר.

LaYehudim hayta
orah vesimchah vesason vikar.

¹⁷ In every province
and every town, any place where
the king's decree and law reached,
the Jews enjoyed joy and gladness,
drinking and festival,
and many of the local people
joined the Jews,³
because fear of the Jews fell upon them.

וּבְכָל-מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה
וּבְכָל-עִיר וָעִיר מְקוֹם אֲשֶׁר
דְּבַר-הַמֶּלֶךְ וְדָתוֹ מָגִיעַ
שִׁמְחָה וְשָׁשׂוֹן לַיהוּדִים
מִשְׁתֵּה יוֹם טוֹב
וְרַבִּים מֵעַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ
מִתְיָהָדִים
כִּי-נָפַל פַּחַד-הַיְּהוּדִים עֲלֵיהֶם.

Uvechol medinah umedinah
uvechol ir va'ir, mekom asher
devar hamelech vedato magi'ah,
simchah vesason laYehudim,
mishteh veyom tov,
verabim me'amei ha'aretz
mityahadim
ki nafal pachad haYehudim aleihem.

¹ “Went out in haste and driven hard”

² Perhaps the royal robes were his outer garment, first mentioned because first seen, and the other garment of fine material with the purple (reserved for royalty in some cultures) was under the royal robes.

³ The root of this word is יָדָה, related to יְהוּדִי, Judean or Jew. The word is reflexive so it signifies making oneself Jewish or becoming Jewish.

Chapter 9

¹ In the twelfth month,
that's the month of Adar,
on its thirteenth day,
when *time* came
for the king's decree and law to be executed, **וּבִשְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר חֹדֶשׁ**
הוּא חֹדֶשׁ אָדָר
בִּשְׁלוֹשָׁה עָשָׂר יוֹם בּוֹ
אֲשֶׁר הִיגִיעַ
for the king's decree and law to be executed, **דְּבַר-הַמֶּלֶךְ וְדָתוֹ לְהַעֲשׂוֹת**
when the Jews' enemies expected **בְּיוֹם אֲשֶׁר שִׁבְרוּ אִיְבֵי הַיְּהוּדִים**
to have *the Jews* in their power—
but *their plan* was overturned **לְשַׁלֹּט בָּהֶם**
וְנַהֲפֹךְ הוּא
as the Jews had their enemies in their power, **אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁלֹטוּ הַיְּהוּדִים הֵמָּה**
hating them—
בְּשִׁנְאֵיהֶם
² the Jews gathered in their towns
in all the provinces **נִקְהָלוּ הַיְּהוּדִים בְּעָרֵיהֶם**
of King Achashverosh **בְּכָל-מְדִינֹת**
to attack those who sought their harm, **הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֶרוֹשׁ**
and no one could withstand them **לְשַׁלֹּחַ יָד בַּמִּבְקָשֵׁי רָעָתָם**
because fear of *the Jews* fell **וְאִישׁ לֹא-עָמַד לִפְנֵיהֶם**
on all the peoples. **כִּי-נָפַל פַּחַדָּם**
עַל-כָּל-הָעַמִּים
³ All the provincial leaders,
premiers and governors **וְכָל-שְׂרֵי הַמְּדִינֹת**
and officers of the king's regime **וְהָאֲחַשְׁדָּרְפָּנִים וְהַפָּחוֹת**
supported the Jews **וַעֲשִׂי הַמֶּלָּאכָה אֲשֶׁר לַמֶּלֶךְ**
out of fear of Mordochai¹ **מִנְּשֹׂאִים אֶת-הַיְּהוּדִים**
⁴ since Mordochai was influential **כִּי-נָפַל פַּחַד-מֶרְדֳּכַי עֲלֵיהֶם**
in the king's household **כִּי-גָדוֹל מֶרְדֳּכַי**
and his reputation reached every province **בְּבֵית הַמֶּלֶךְ**
and this man Mordochai **וְשָׁמְעוּ הוֹלֵךְ בְּכָל-הַמְּדִינֹת**
became more and more influential. **כִּי-הָאִישׁ מֶרְדֳּכַי**
הוֹלֵךְ וְגָדוֹל

פ

¹ “For terror of Mordochai had fallen upon them.”

⁵ The Jews struck all their enemies
with sword strokes, death and destruction
and dealt with their enemies
as they wished.¹

⁶ In Shushan town
the Jews killed and destroyed
five hundred people.

⁷ Parshandata
and Dalfon
and Aspata

⁸ and Porata
and Adalya
and Aridata

⁹ and Parmashta
and Arisai
and Aridai
and Vaizata

¹⁰ the ten sons of Haman, son of Hamdata,
the Jews' enemy, they killed,
but they didn't touch any spoil.

¹¹ That day the count was brought—
those killed in Shushan town—
to the king's attention.

וַיַּכּוּ הַיְּהוּדִים בְּכָל־אֹיְבֵיהֶם
מַכַּת־חֶרֶב וְהָרֵג וְהָרָג וְאַבְדָּן

וַיַּעֲשׂוּ בְשֵׁנֵיהֶם
כְּרָצוֹנָם

וּבְשׁוּשַׁן הַבִּירָה
הָרָגוּ הַיְּהוּדִים וְאַבְדָּן
חֲמֵשׁ מֵאוֹת אִישׁ

וְאֵת | פַּרְשַׁנְדָּתָא

וְאֵת | דַּלְפֹּן

וְאֵת | אֶסְפָּתָא

וְאֵת | פּוֹרָטָא

וְאֵת | אַדְלָיָא

וְאֵת | אַרִידָטָא

וְאֵת | פַּרְמִשְׁטָא

וְאֵת | אַרִיסַי

וְאֵת | אַרִידַי

וְאֵת | וַיְזַטָּא

עֲשֶׂרֶת בְּנֵי הָמָן בֶּן־הַמְּדָתָא

צָרַר הַיְּהוּדִים הָרָגוּ

וּבִבְזָה לֹא שָׁלְחוּ אֶת־יָדָם

בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא בָּא מִסְפָּר

הַהָרוּגִים בְּשׁוּשַׁן הַבִּירָה

לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ

ס

Vayaku haYehudim bechol oyveihem
makat cherev vehereg ve'avdan
vaya'asu vesoneihem
kirtzonam.

UveShushan habirah
hargu haYehudim ve'abed
chamesh me'ot ish.

Ve'et Parshandata

ve'et Dalfon

ve'et Aspata

ve'et Porata

ve'et Adalya

ve'et Aridata

ve'et Parmashta

ve'et Arisai

ve'et Aridai

ve'et Vaizata

aseret benei Haman ben Hamdata,
tzorer haYehudim, haragu,
uvabizah lo shal'chu et yadam.

Bayom hahu bah mispar
haharugim beShushan habirah
lifnei hamelech.

¹ As the enemies wanted to treat the Jews or as the Jews wished to treat their enemies, or both.

¹² The king said to Queen Ester,

“In Shushan town

the Jews killed and destroyed

five hundred people

and Haman’s ten sons.

In the other royal provinces,

what have they done?

What is your request? It’s yours!

Whatever else you want will be done.”

¹³ Ester said, “If the king approves

let tomorrow too be granted

to the Jews in Shushan

to continue today’s regulation,¹

and as for Haman’s ten sons,

let them hang them on a gibbet.”²

¹⁴ The king ordered this to be done,

the regulation was delivered in Shushan

and they hanged up Haman’s ten sons.

¹⁵ The Jews assembled,

those in Shushan,

also on the fourteenth

of the month of Adar

and killed in Shushan

three hundred *more* people,

but they didn’t touch any spoil.

וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְאֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה

בְּשׁוּשָׁן הַבִּירָה

הָרָגוּ הַיְּהוּדִים וְאַבְדּוּ

חֲמֵשׁ מֵאוֹת אִישׁ

וְאֵת עֲשֶׂרֶת בְּנֵי־הָמָן

בְּשָׂאֵר מְדִינֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ

מֶה אֲשׁוּ?

וּמַה שֶׁאֲלִיתְךָ וַיַּנִּיתֵן לָךְ

וּמַה־בְּקָשְׁתְּךָ עוֹד וְתַעֲשׂ

וַתֹּאמֶר אֶסְתֵּר אִם־עַל־הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב

יִנָּתֵן גַּם־מָחָר

לַיְּהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר בְּשׁוּשָׁן

לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּדַת הַיּוֹם

וְאֵת עֲשֶׂרֶת בְּנֵי־הָמָן

יִתְּלוּ עַל־הָעֵץ

וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְהַעֲשׂוֹת כֵּן

וַתִּנָּתֵן דָּת בְּשׁוּשָׁן

וְאֵת עֲשֶׂרֶת בְּנֵי־הָמָן תָּלוּ

וַיִּקְהָלוּ הַיְּהוּדִים³

אֲשֶׁר־בְּשׁוּשָׁן

גַּם בְּיוֹם אַרְבַּעַה עָשָׂר

לְחֹדֶשׁ אָדָר

וַיַּהֲרֻגוּ בְּשׁוּשָׁן

שְׁלוֹשׁ מֵאוֹת אִישׁ

וּבְבִזָּה לֹא שָׁלְחוּ אֶת־יָדָם

Vayomer hamelech leEster hamalka,

“BeShushan habira

hargu haYehudim ve’abed

chamesh me’ot ish

ve’et aseret benei Haman.

Bish’ar medinot hamelech

meh asu?

Umah she’elatech, veyinaten lach,

umah bakashatech od, vete’as.”

Vatomer Ester, “Im al hamelech tov

yinaten gam machar

laYehudim asher beShushan

la’asot kedat hayom,

ve’et aseret benei Haman

yitlu al ha’etz.”

Vayomer hamelech lehe’asot ken

vatinaten dat beShushan

ve’et aseret benei Haman talu.

Vayikahalu haYehudim

asher beShushan

gam beyom arba’ah asar

lechodesh Adar

vayahargu veShushan

shelosh me’ot ish,

uvabizah lo shal’chu et yadam.

¹ The Jews had authority to defend themselves only on a single day (8:10-12).

² I assume a gallows is for hanging someone as capital punishment, while a gibbet is for displaying the body of an executed person. We don’t know if Haman’s sons were complicit in his evil, but Rule 1 for a king is to eliminate threats, and male children hungry for revenge would be a threat. Sorry, lads. “Let them hang them” could mean that someone not mentioned would handle the hanging or it could mean that the Jews are going to hang them up, despite the Torah’s command to bury a criminal in Israel before dark (Deut. 21:23).

³ A manuscript would have the unusual spelling הַיְּהוּדִים.

¹⁶ The rest of the Jews

in the king's provinces

assembled for their own defense¹

and *for* respite from their enemies

and killed of their adversaries

seventy-five thousand—

but they didn't touch any spoil—

¹⁷ on the thirteenth day of Adar.

They stopped on the fourteenth

and made it a day of drinking and joy.²

¹⁸ But the Jews of Shushan

assembled on the thirteenth of *Adar*

and on the fourteenth of *Adar*

and stopped on its fifteenth day

and made it a day of drinking and joy.

¹⁹ That's why the dispersed Jews

who live in scattered towns

make the fourteenth day

of the month of Adar

joy and drinking, a festive day,

and sharing food with neighbors.⁴

וְשָׂאֵר הַיְּהוּדִים

אֲשֶׁר בְּמִדְיֵנוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ

נִקְהָלוּ וַאֲמוֹד אֶל נַפְשָׁם

וְנוֹחַ מֵאֹיְבֵיהֶם

וַהֲרֹג בְּשֹׁנְאֵיהֶם

חֲמִשָּׁה וּשְׁבַעִים אֶלֶף

וּבְבִזָּה לֹא שָׁלְחוּ אֶת־יָדָם

בְּיוֹם־שְׁלֹשָׁה עָשָׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ אָדָר

וְנוֹחַ בְּאַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר בּוֹ

וַעֲשָׂה אֹתוֹ יוֹם מִשְׁתֵּה וְשִׂמְחָה

וְהַיְּהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר־בְּשׁוּשָׁן

נִקְהָלוּ בְּשֹׁלֹשָׁה עָשָׂר בּוֹ

וּבְאַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר בּוֹ

וְנוֹחַ בַּחֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר בּוֹ

וַעֲשָׂה אֹתוֹ יוֹם מִשְׁתֵּה וְשִׂמְחָה

עַל־כֵּן הַיְּהוּדִים הַפְּרֻזִּים

הַיּוֹשְׁבִים בְּעָרֵי הַפְּרָזוֹת

עֹשִׂים אֹת יוֹם אַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר

לַחֹדֶשׁ אָדָר

שִׂמְחָה וּמִשְׁתֵּה וַיּוֹם טוֹב

וּמִשְׁלֹחַ מַנּוֹת אִישׁ לְרֵעֵהוּ

פ

Ushe'ar haYehudim

asher bimdinot hamelech

nikhalu va'amod al nafsham

veno'ach me'oyveihem

vaharog besoneihem

chamishah veshivim alef,

uvabizah lo shal'chu et yadam

beyom shlosheh asar lechodesh Adar

veno'ach be'arba'ah asar bo

ve'aso oto yom mishteh vesimchah.

VehaYehudim asher beShushan

nikhalu bishloshah asar bo

uve'arba'ah asar bo

veno'ach bachamishah asar bo

ve'aso oto yom mishteh vesimchah.

Al ken haYehudim haprazim

hayoshvim be'arei haprazot

osim et yom arba'ah asar

lechodesh Adar

simchah umishteh veyom tov

umishlo'ach manot ish lere'ehu.

¹ “*they* assembled and standing up for their lives.” In this section the Hebrew uses some gerunds or infinitive forms where we would use verbs—“standing” for “they stood,” “killing” for “they killed,” “resting” for “they stopped.”

² Only in Shushan were the Jews allowed to continue the killing, as Ester requested in verse 13..

³ A manuscript would have the unusual spelling והיהודיים.

⁴ “And sending portions *of food* to their neighbors/friends.” They may have sent some delicacy from their festive table to the next door neighbor, with much less preparation than the widespread custom today.

⁵ A manuscript would have the unusual spelling הפרוזים.

²⁰ Mordochai wrote

these matters

and sent letters

to all the Jews

in all the provinces

of King Achashverosh,

near and far,

²¹ to establish that they should observe

the fourteenth day of Adar

and its fifteenth day

year after year

²² as the days when they found relief,

the Jews, from their enemies

and the month which was changed for them

from misery to joy,

mourning to festival;

to observe them *as*

days of drinking and joy

and sharing food with neighbors

and donations to the poor.

²³ The Jews accepted *as an obligation*

what they had started to do

and what Mordochai wrote to them,

²⁴ that Haman the son of Hamdata the Agagite,

a menace to all Jews,

plotted against the Jews, to destroy them,

and had “Pur” tossed—that’s *like* a die—¹

to alarm and destroy them,

וַיִּכְתֹּב מֶרְדֳּכָי

אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה

וַיִּשְׁלַח סְפָרִים

אֶל־כָּל־הַיְּהוּדִים

אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל־מְדִינֹת

הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֶרֶשׁ

הַקְּרוֹבִים וְהַרְחוֹקִים

לְקַיֵּם עֲלֵיהֶם לִיְהוֹת אוֹסִים

אֶת יוֹם אַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר לְחֹדֶשׁ אָדָר

וְאֶת יוֹם־חֲמִישָׁה עָשָׂר בּוֹ

בְּכָל־שָׁנָה וְשָׁנָה

כַּיָּמִים אֲשֶׁר־נָחֻוּ בָּהֶם

הַיְּהוּדִים מֵאוֹיְבֵיהֶם

וְהַחֹדֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר נִהְפָּךְ לָהֶם

מִיָּגוֹן לְשִׂמְחָה

וּמֵאֵבֶל לְיוֹם טוֹב

לַעֲשׂוֹת אוֹתָם

יָמֵי מִשְׁתֶּה וְשִׂמְחָה

וּמִשְׁלֹחַ מָנוֹת אִישׁ לִרְעֵהוּ

וּמִתְּנוּת לְאֵבְיוֹנִים

וּקְבֵל הַיְּהוּדִים

אֶת אֲשֶׁר־הִחֲלוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת

וְאֶת אֲשֶׁר־כָּתַב מֶרְדֳּכָי אֲלֵיהֶם

כִּי הָמָן בֶּן־הַמְּדַתָּא הָאֲגָגִי

צָרָר כָּל־הַיְּהוּדִים

חָשָׁב עַל־הַיְּהוּדִים לְאַבְדָּם

וְהִפִּיל פּוּר הַגּוֹרָל

לְהָמָם וּלְאַבְדָּם

Vayichtov Mordochai

et hadvarim ha’eleh

vayishlach sfarim

el kol haYehudim

asher bechol medinot

hamelech Achashverosh,

hakrovim veharechokim,

lekayem aleihem liheyot osim

et yom arba’ah asar lechodesh Adar

ve’et yom chamishah asar bo

bechol shana veshana

kayamim asher nachu vahem

haYehudim me’oyveihem

vehachodesh asher nehpach lahem

miyagon lesimchah

ume’evel leyom tov;

la’asot otam

yemei mishteh vesimchah

umishlo’ach manot ish lere’ehu

umatanot la’evyonim.

Vekibel haYehudim

et asher hechelu la’asot

ve’et asher katav Mordochai aleihem

ki Haman ben Hamdata ha’Agagi,

tzorer kol haYehudim,

chashav al haYehudim le’abdam,

vehipil Pur—hu hagoral—

lehumam ule’abdam,

¹ “And had thrown Pur, that is lot.” The lot (goral/גורל) is something small used for making decisions. Aaron cast a lot to choose between the two goats on Yom Kippur; the land of Israel was to be divided by lot. Some people think the ancients used small pebbles somehow. Maybe Haman had a calendar and had his augury

²⁵ but when *Ester* came¹ before the king
the king said about the letter of *Haman*,
“Let his evil plot come right back—
that he plotted against the Jews—
on his head,”

so they hanged *Haman* and his sons
on the gallows.

²⁶ That’s why they named these days
“Purim,” using the word “Pur.”

So in view of all the matters *recorded*
in this letter
and *in view of* what they saw of *the matter*
and what happened to them,

²⁷ the Jews established and accepted
for themselves and their descendants
and anyone who joined their community²—
and this won’t expire—
to spend³
these two days
as *the instructions were* written
and on the exact dates
every year.

וּבְבֹאֶהָ לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ
אָמַר יְהוֹשֻׁב מַחֲשָׁבְתּוֹ הָרָעָה
אֲשֶׁר־חָשַׁב עַל־הַיְּהוּדִים
עַל־רֹאשׁוֹ
וְתָלוּ אוֹתוֹ וְאֶת־בָּנָיו
עַל־הָעֵץ
עַל־כֵּן קָרְאוּ לַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה
פּוּרִים עַל־שֵׁם הַפּוּר
עַל־כֵּן עַל־כָּל־דִּבְרֵי
הָאִגֶּרֶת הַזֹּאת
וּמַה־רָאוּ עַל־כָּכָה
וּמַה הִגִּיעַ אֲלֵיהֶם
כִּימוֹ וְקִבְלוּ הַיְּהוּדִים
עֲלֵיהֶם וְעַל־זֶרַעָם
וְעַל כָּל־נִלְוִים עֲלֵיהֶם
וְלֹא יַעֲבוֹר
לַהֲיוֹת עֹשִׂים
אֶת שְׁנֵי הַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה
כְּכַתְּבָם
וְכַזְּמָנָם
בְּכָל־שָׁנָה וְשָׁנָה

uvevo’ah lifnei hamelech,
amar im hasefer,
“Yashuv machashavto hara’ah
asher chashav al haYehudim
al rosho!”
Vetalu oto ve’et banav
al ha’etz.
Al ken karu layamim ha’eleh
Furim, al shem haPur.
Al ken al kol divrei
ha’igeret hazot
umah ra’u al kachah
umah higi’ah aleihem
kimu vekiblu haYehudim
aleihem ve’al zaram
ve’al kol nilvim aleihem,
velo ya’avor,
liheyot osim
et shnei hayamim ha’eleh
kich’tavam
vechizmanam
bechol shanah veshanah.

experts toss a pebble to pick a propitious date for destroying Jews. The closest thing today would be one of a pair of dice, often tossed with fervent prayers to Lady Luck, a notoriously fickle divinity.

¹ The Hebrew says “and when she came” without mentioning Ester by name, a rather surprising omission by modern standards of storytelling.

² “All who accompanied them.”

³ “To be doing”

⁴ A manuscript has the reading וקבל, singular instead of plural, as in verse 23.

²⁸ These days *are to be*
commemorated and observed
in every generation,
every family,
every province,
and every town,
and *observance of* these Purim days
will never pass away
from among the Jews,
and their commemoration
will not cease for their descendants.

וְהַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה
נִזְכָּרִים וְנִשְׁמָרִים
בְּכָל־דּוֹר וָדוֹר
מִשְׁפָּחָהּ וּמִשְׁפָּחָהּ
מְדִינָהּ וּמְדִינָהּ
וְעִיר וָעִיר
וַיְמֵי הַפּוּרִים הָאֵלֶּה
לֹא יִעָבְרוּ
מִתּוֹךְ הַיְּהוּדִים
וְזִכְרָם
לֹא יִסּוּף מִזֶּרַעם
ס

Vehayamim ha'eleh
nizkarim vena'asim
bechol dor vador,
mishpacha umishpacha,
medina umedina
ve'ir va'ir,
vimei haPurim ha'eleh
lo ya'avru
mitoch haYehudim,
vezichram
lo yasuf mizaram.

²⁹ Queen Ester wrote
(Avichayil's daughter),
and Mordochai the Jew,
with all *their* authority, to confirm
this second Purim letter.

וַתִּכְתֹּב אֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה
בְּתֹאבִיחַיִּיל
וּמֹרְדֹכַי הַיְּהוּדִי
אֶת־כָּל־תּוֹקֶף לִקְיָם

Vatichtov Ester hamalkah
vat Avichayil
uMordochai haYehudi
et kol tokef, lekayem

³⁰ He sent letters to all the Jews,
to the 127 provinces
of Achashverosh' realm,
matters of peace and truth,
³¹ to establish these days of Purim
on their exact dates
as they established for these *days*—
Mordochai the Jew
and Queen Ester—
and as *all the Jews* confirmed
for themselves and their descendants,
matters of fasting and their wailing.¹

אֶת אִגֶּרֶת הַפּוּרִים הַזֹּאת הַשֵּׁנִית
וַיִּשְׁלַח סְפָרִים אֶל־כָּל־הַיְּהוּדִים
אֶל־שֶׁבַע וְעֶשְׂרִים וּמֵאָה מְדִינָה
מַלְכוּת אַחַשְׁוֶרֶשׁ
דִּבְרֵי שְׁלוֹם וְאֵמֶת
לִקְיָם אֶת־יְמֵי הַפָּרִים הָאֵלֶּה
בְּיָמֵיהֶם
כַּאֲשֶׁר קִיָּם עֲלֵיהֶם
מֹרְדֹכַי הַיְּהוּדִי
וְאֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה
וְכַאֲשֶׁר קִיָּמוּ
עַל־נַפְשָׁם וְעַל־זֶרַעָם
דִּבְרֵי הַצְּמוֹת וְזִעְקָתָם

et igeret haPurim hazot hashenit.
Vayishlach sfarim el kol haYehudim,
el sheva ve'esrim ume'ah medina
mal'chut Achashverosh,
divrei shalom ve'emet,
lekayem et yemei haPurim ha'eleh
bizmaneihem,
ka'asher kiyam aleihem
Mordochai haYehudi
ve'Ester hamalkah,
vecha'asher kimu
al nafsham ve'al zaram,
divrei hatzomot veza'akatam.

¹ What? You thought it was all about drinking and merriment? Finally we're told to remember the distress that preceded the relief.

³² Ester’s announcement confirmed
these matters of Purim,
and it was written in a book.¹

וּמֵאִמַּר אֶסְתֵּר קִיָּם
דִּבְרֵי הַפּוּרִים הָאֵלֶּה
וְנִכְתָּב בַּסֵּפֶר
פ

Uma’amar Ester kiyam
divrei haPurim ha’eleh,
venichtav basefer.

Chapter 10

¹ King Achashverosh imposed
a tax² on the earth and islands in the sea.
² All the achievements
of his authority and power,
with the declaration of Mordochai’s greatness
to which the king advanced him,
aren’t they written down
in the book of history
of the kings of Madai and Faras?

וַיֵּשֶׁם הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֶרֶשׁ
מָס עַל-הָאָרֶץ וְאֵיֵי הַיָּם
וְכָל-מַעֲשֵׂה
תִּקְפוֹ וְנִבְרָתוֹ
וּפְרָשַׁת גְּדֻלַּת מֹרְדֳּכַי
אֲשֶׁר גִּדְּלוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ
הָלוֹא-הֵם כְּתוּבִים
עַל-סֵפֶר דִּבְרֵי הַיָּמִים
לְמַלְכֵי מְדַי וּפָרָס

Vayasem hamelech Achashverosh
mas al ha’aretz ve’iyei hayam.
Vechol ma’aseh
tokpo ugevurato,
ufarashat gedulat Mordochai
asher gidlo hamelech,
halo hem ketuvim
al sefer diei hayamim
lemal’chei Madai uFaras?

³ For Mordochai the Jew
was second to King Achashverosh,
a great man among the Jews
and *well* received by most of⁴ his fellow-*Jews*,
seeking the welfare of his people
with a message of peace for all its members.⁵

כִּי מֹרְדֳּכַי הַיְּהוּדִי
מִשְׁנֶה לְמֶלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֶרֶשׁ
וְגָדוֹל לַיְּהוּדִים
וְרָצוּי לְרֹב אָחָיו
דּוֹרֵשׁ טוֹב לְעָמוֹ
וְדֹבֵר שְׁלוֹם לְכָל-זֶרְעוֹ

Ki Mordochai haYehudi
mishneh laMelech Achashverosh
vegadol laYehudim
veratzui lerov echav,
doresh tov le’amo
vedover shalom lechol zaro.

¹ In ancient times, when writing was more laborious than in these days of cut and paste, the written word was regarded with much greater respect. This wasn’t always good since people were reluctant to discard disproven ideas.

² Did we mention taxation as one of the rules of government?

³ A manuscript has the unusual spelling אחשרש.

⁴ Or “by the multitude of,” but “most of” seems more believable since eminence attracts detractors, even among us Jews.

⁵ “And speaking peace to all its (or his) seed/descendants.”

The Best Song

שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים

The Best Song • שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים • Shir HaShirim

This poem is a conversation between two lovers. The translation uses this font for the “male” voice, this font for the “female” voice, and this font for other voices. “Male” and “female” are in quotation marks because Jewish tradition understands this poem as an expression of love between God and the Jewish people, perhaps a wise reminder that physical and emotional desire are part of love but only part.

Chapter 1

¹ The best song of all, by Solomon: ¹	שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים אֲשֶׁר לְשִׁלְמוֹה	Shir hashirim, asher liShlomo:
² Let him kiss me, kisses from his lips, since your love is better than wine.	יִשְׁכְּנֵנִי מִנְּשִׁיכוֹת פִּיהוּ כִּי־טוֹבִים דְּדִיךְ מִיַּיִן	Yishakeni minshikot pihu ki tovim dodecha miyayin.
³ For fragrance your lotions are prized— like such a lotion, out pours your name— that’s why women desire you. ²	לְרִיחַ שְׁמָנֶיךָ טוֹבִים שֶׁמֶן תוֹרַק שְׁמֶיךָ עַל־כֵּן עֲלָמוֹת אֶהְבֶּךָ	Lere’ach shemanecha tovim, shemen turak shemecha; al ken alamot ahevecha.
⁴ Take me with you, let’s run. (The king has brought me to his rooms— he says, “Let’s have fun and play with you.”) Let’s speak of your love more than wine; they love you honorably. ³	מִשְׁכְּנֵנִי אַחֲרֶיךָ נְרוּצָה הֶבִיאֵנִי חָמֶלֶךְ חֲדָרָיו נִגְלִילָה וְנִשְׁמַחָה בָּךְ נִזְכִּירָה דְּדִיךְ מִיַּיִן מֵישָׁרִים אֶהְבֶּךָ	Mashcheni acharecha, narutzah (hevi’ani hamelech chadarav— “nagilah venismechah bach.”) Nazkirah dodecha miyayin; meisharim ahevacha.
⁵ I’m dark, but lovely, daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar ⁴ like the fabrics of Solomon.	שְׁחֹרָה אֲנִי וְנָאֵוָה בָּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם כְּאֹהֲלֵי קֵדָר כִּירֵיעוֹת שִׁלְמוֹה	Shechorah ani venavah, benot Yerushalayim, ke’oholei Kedar, kayeri’ot Shelomo.

¹ “The song of songs, which is for/by Solomon.” “Song of songs” could simply be a superlative, like “wonder of wonders, miracle of miracles” in *Fiddler on the Roof*. Solomon is usually thought to be the author, but maybe someone wrote it for him or dedicated it to him; the Hebrew allows any of these. Was this Solomon the famous wise king who impressed the Queen of Sheba? Maybe he would have had more sense than to write this down. Imagine you had an Uncle Sol who wrote this kind of stuff; you’d never be able to eat your auntie’s cooking without wondering what the two of them had been doing before you showed up.

² “For the smell your oils are fine—like such oil is-poured-out your name—for which marriageable-girls love you.” There’s a pun on name/shem and oil/shemen. In this verse, she says he’s known for being hot, hot, hot!

³ Line 1 is addressed to a male, line 3 to a female (though Biblical Hebrew is looser about gender than modern English), and “they” in line 5 might refer to the women who find this guy so hot.

⁴ Ishmael’s son, Gen. 25:13. Since sources for fabric such as wool are whitish, getting them dark takes effort and presumably raises their value. In the same way, the poet says, white skin is no particular prize.

⁶Don't stare at me because I'm black,
because the sun has scorched me;
my mother's children were irked at me,
so they made me tend the vineyards.
My own vineyard I haven't tended.

⁷Tell me, my heart's desire,
where will you graze,
where lie down at noon;
why should I be
like someone who covers *herself*
because of your friend's flocks?¹

⁸If you don't know *the way*,
lovely lady,
follow the tracks of the flock
and pasture your *flock of kids*
by the shepherds' huts.

⁹To my *fine* mare, *fit* for Pharaoh's chariots,²
have I likened you, my love.

¹⁰Lovely as doves³ are your cheeks,
your neck as *pearl* necklaces.

¹¹We shall make you golden ropes
with silver spangles,

אַל-תִּרְאִינִי שְׁאֲנִי שְׁחַרְחֹרֶת
שֶׁשְׂזָפַתְנִי הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ

בְּנֵי אִמִּי נִחְרוּ-בִּי
שָׁמֹנִי נָטְרָה אֶת-הַכְּרָמִים
כְּרָמִי שְׁלִי לֹא נָטַרְתִּי

הַגִּידָה לִּי שְׂאֵהָבָה נַפְשִׁי
אֵיכָה תִרְעָה

אֵיכָה תִרְבִּיץ בַּצְּהָרִים
שְׁלָמָה אֶהְיֶה

כְּעֹטְיָה

עַל עֲדְרֵי חֲבֵרָיִךְ

אִם-לֹא תִדְעִי לָךְ

הַיָּפָה בַּנָּשִׁים

צֹאֵי-לָךְ בְּעֶקְבֵי הַצֹּאן

וְרַעֲיִי אֶת-גִּדְיֹתַיִךְ

עַל מִשְׁכְּנוֹת הָרָעִים

לְסִסְתִּי בְּרִכְבֵּי פָרֹה

דִּמִּיתִיךְ רַעֲיָתִי

נָאֵנוּ לְחַיִּיךְ בַּתָּרִים

צֹאֲרֵךְ בַּחֲרוּזִים

תּוֹרֵי זָהָב נַעֲשֶׂה-לָךְ

עִם נִקְדּוֹת הַכֶּסֶף

Al tiruni she'ani shecharchoret,
sheshezafatni hashamesh.

Benei imi nicharu vi,
samuni noterah et hakramim.

Karmi sheli lo natarti.
Hagidah li, she'ahavah nafshi,
eicha tireh?

Eicha tarbitz batzohorayim?
Shalamah eh'yeh

ke'otyah
al edrei chaveracha?

Im lo ted'i lach,
hayafah banishim,

tze'i lach be'ikvei hatzon
ure'i et gedyotayich

al mishkenot haro'im.
Lesusati berichvei Faro

dimitich, rayati.
Navu lechayayich batorim,

tzavarech bacharuzim.

Torei zahav na'aseh lach,
im nekudot hakasef.

¹ "Tell me, whom my soul/person loves, where you will graze, where lie down at noon; for why should I be like one who covers (or wraps *myself*) because of (or upon) the flocks of your friend?" This verse seems difficult. Presumably, she wants him to graze on her; if someone else's "flock" shows up to graze, she'll cover up.

² Often translated as "a company of horses among Pharaoh's chariots," סִסְתִּי seems to mean "my female horse," while בְּרִכְבֵּי פָרֹה means "in/with/among the chariots/conveyances of Pharaoh." Presumably, Egyptian horses were prized in ancient times, and that's why the Torah forbids a king of Israel from collecting them (Deut 17:16). Mares, more manageable than stallions, might have drawn chariots.

³ תָּר/tor is often translated as a row ("strings of *jewels*"), so that both images in the verse are of strings of jewels, and this meaning is in verse 10. However, most agree that in 2:12 תָּר/tor means dove. Maybe in this verse the cheeks are praised for being soft like doves, the neck for being unimproved by adornment.

¹² until the king is within his circle *of friends*,
and my perfume yields its fragrance.¹

¹³ To me, my beloved is a bundle of myrrh,
to spend the night between my breasts.

¹⁴ To me, my beloved is a cluster of henna²
in the vineyards of Ein Gedi.³

¹⁵ You are beautiful, my love,
beautiful with eyes that are doves.⁴

¹⁶ You are beautiful and kind
and our bed is luxuriantly green.⁵

¹⁷ Cedar *trees* are the beams of our house,
and our rafters are fir *trees*.

¹ I am the rose of the Sharon *region*,
lily of the valleys.⁶

² Like a lily among thorns,
so is my love among the *other* girls.

עַד־שֶׁהַמֶּלֶךְ בְּמִסְבּוֹ
נִרְדִּי נָתַן רֵיחוֹ
Ad shehamelech bimsibo,
nirdi natan reicho.

צִדּוֹר הַמֶּר | דּוּדֵי לִי
בֵּין שְׂדֵי יָלִין
Tzeror hamor dodi li;
bein shadai yalin.

אֶשְׁכֹּל הַכֶּפֶר | דּוּדֵי לִי
בְּכַרְמֵי עֵין גִּדִּי
Eshkol hakofer dodi li
becharmei Ein Gedi.

הִנָּךְ יָפָה רַעְיָתִי
הִנָּךְ יָפָה עֵינַיִךְ יוֹנִים
Hinach yafah, rayati;
hinach yafah, einayich yonim.

הִנָּךְ יָפָה דּוּדֵי אֶף
נָעִים אֶף־עַרְשֵׁנוּ
Hinach yafah, dodi, af na'im;
af arsenu ra'anana.

רַעְנָנָה

קִרּוֹת בָּתֵּינֵנוּ אֲרָזִים
רַהִיטֵנוּ בְּרוֹתִים
Korot bateinu arazim,
rahiteinu betorim.

Chapter 2

אֲנִי חַבְצֵלֶת הַשָּׁרוֹן
שׁוֹשַׁנַּת הָאֲמָקִים
Ani chavatzelet haSharon,
shoshanat ha'amakim.

כְּשׁוֹשַׁנָּה בֵּין הַחֹחִים
כֵּן רַעְיָתִי בֵּין הַבָּנוֹת
Keshoshanah bein hachochim,
ken rayati bein habanot.

¹ The “king” and “circle,” the “perfume” and “fragrance” are all perhaps erotic symbols.

² Or “camphire,” another name for the plant from which cosmetic henna is derived. The word כֶּפֶר/kofer elsewhere means the odorous substance “pitch,” such as Noah used on his ark (Gen 6:14), or “ransom” (Ex 30:12).

³ “Spring (water source) of the goat-kid” is a possible meaning for this place name.

⁴ Dove-like eyes? Perhaps they are soft and kind, as we imagine doves to be; perhaps she has eyelashes that flutter like feathers; perhaps the whites of her eyes are white as doves.

⁵ A bed such as Donne imagined in “The Ecstasy”: “Where, like a pillow on a bed / A pregnant bank swell’d up to rest / The violet’s reclining head, / Sat we two, one another’s best.”

⁶ The “rose” may be a crocus or a saffron flower, the “lily” may be a rose. Unfortunately, it’s hard to be sure of the flowers mentioned.

³ Like a fragrant fruit¹ among the forest trees,
so is my love among the boys.

In his shade I took delight and found rest,
and his fruit *was* sweet to my taste.

⁴ He took me to the wine-bar,²
and his banner³ above me was love.

⁵ Revive me with fruit bars,⁴
sustain me with fragrant fruit,⁵
for I am languishing for love.

⁶ His left *hand* is beneath my head
while his right *hand* embraces me.

⁷ I've made you promise,
daughters of Jerusalem,
by the gazelles or the wild stags,⁶
not to disturb or rouse
my love until it's eager.

⁸ The sound of my love; here he comes,
leaping over the mountains,
jumping over the hills.

כְּתַפּוּחַ בְּעֵצֵי הָאֵר

כֵּן דּוּדִי בֵּין הַבָּנִים

בְּצִלּוֹ חֲמַדְתִּי וַיִּשְׁבַּתִּי

וּפְרִיּוֹ מְתוֹק לְחִכִּי

הֵבִיאֵנִי אֶל-בֵּית הָיָיִן

וַדְּגִלּוּ עָלַי אַהֲבָה

סַמְכֻנִי בְּאַשִּׁישׁוֹת

רַפְּדֻנִי בַתַּפּוּחִים

כִּי-חֹלֶת אַהֲבָה אֲנִי

שְׂמֹאלִי תַּחַת לְרֹאשִׁי

וְיָמִינִי תַּחֲבֹקֵנִי

הִשְׁבַּעְתִּי אֶתְכֶם

בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם

בְּצִבְאוֹת אוֹ בְּאַיָּלוֹת הַשָּׂדֶה

אִם-תִּעְזְרוּ וְאִם-תִּעְזְרוּ

אֶת-הָאַהֲבָה עַד שֶׁתַּחַפֵּץ

קוֹל דּוּדִי הִנֵּה זֶה בָּא

מְדַלֵּג עַל-תְּהָרִים

מִקַּפֵּץ עַל-הַגְּבָעוֹת

Ketapu'ach ba'atzei haya'ar,
ken dodi bein habanim.

Betzilo chimadti veyashavti,
ufiryo matok lechiki.

Hevi'ani el beit hayayin,
vediglo alai ahavah.

Sam'chuni ba'ashishot,
rapduni batapuchim,
ki cholat ahavah ani.

Semolo tachat leroshi
vimino techabkeni.

Hishbati et'chem,
benot Yerushalayim,
bitzva'ot o ve'aylot hasadeh,

im ta'iru ve'im te'oreru
et ha'ahavah ad shetechpatz!

Kol dodi, hineh zeh bah!
Medaleg al heharim,
mekapetz al hagva'ot.

¹ “Fragrant fruit” is usually translated “apple” but the Hebrew root suggests fragrance. See note on 7:9.

² “House of wine.”

³ What kind of banner was he waving? Perhaps it's whatever distinguished him from others.

⁴ Perhaps cakes of pressed grapes or raisins, or cakes of flour—like modern protein bars. The Authorized Version translates as “flagons of wine.”

⁵ Or, “support me with grape-cakes, spread me with fragrant fruit” (“fragrant fruit” is usually translated “apple” but the Hebrew root suggests fragrance). Perhaps she imagines herself recumbent and rendered fragrant below and above.

⁶ The animals mentioned are uncertain.

⁹ My love is like a gazelle,
or a young deer.

Look, he stands behind our fence,
peering through the gaps,
glimpsed through the lattice.¹

¹⁰ My love spoke and told me,
“Up, my dear, my beauty, and come

¹¹ “For see, winter is past,
the rain is over and gone;

¹² sprouts appear on the ground,
birdsong time has arrived,
the dove’s cooing² is heard in our land;

¹³ the fig tree is ripening its unripe figs
and the vine blossoms yield their aroma;
up, my dear, my beauty, and come.”

¹⁴ My dove, in the clefts of the rock,
in the secret *parts* of the *cliff* steps,
show me your face
and let me hear your voice,
for your voice is pleasant
and your appearance is lovely.

¹⁵ Seize those foxes for us—
little foxes
destroy vines—
for our vines are in blossom.

¹⁶ My love is mine; I am his,
as he grazes among the lilies.

דֹּמֶה דּוּדִי לְצִבִּי
אוֹ לְעֹפֶר הָאֵיָלִים

הִנֵּה זֶה עֹמֵד אַחֵר כְּתֻלָּנוּ
מַשְׁגִּיחַ מִן־הַחֲלוֹנוֹת

מִצִּיץ מִן־הַחֲרָקִים
עֲנֵה דּוּדִי וְאָמַר לִי

קוּמִי לָךְ רַעְיָתִי יָפָתִי וּלְכִי־לָךְ
כִּי־הִנֵּה הַסֹּתָיו עָבָר

הַגֶּשֶׁם חָלַף הַלֵּךְ לוֹ
הַנִּצָּנִים נִרְאוּ בָאָרֶץ

עַתָּה הַזְמִיר הִגִּיעַ
וְקוֹל הַתּוֹר נִשְׁמַע בְּאַרְצֵנוּ

הַתְּאֵנָה חֲנֻטָּה פִּנְיָהּ
וְהַגִּפְתִּים סִמְדָּר נִתְּנוּ רֵיחַ

קוּמִי לָךְ רַעְיָתִי יָפָתִי וּלְכִי־לָךְ
יוֹנָתִי בְּחֻנֵּי הַסֶּלַע

בְּסֹתֵר הַמַּדְרֵגָה
הָרְאֵנִי אֶת־מְרָאֶיךָ

הַשְּׁמִיעֵנִי אֶת־קוֹלֶךָ
כִּי־קוֹלֶךָ עֲרֵב

וּמְרָאֶיךָ נָאֻה
אֶחְזוּ־לָנוּ שׁוּעָלִים

שׁוּעָלִים קְטָנִים
מְחַבְלִים כְּרָמִים

וּכְרָמֵינוּ סִמְדָּר
דּוּדִי לִי וְאֲנִי לוֹ

הָרֹעֶה בַּשּׁוֹשָׁנִים

Domeh dodi litzvi
o le’ofer ha’ayalim.

Hineh zeh omed achar kotlenu,
mashgi’ach mi hachalonot,
metzitz min hacharakim.

Anad dodi ve’amar li,
“Kumi lach, rayati, yafati, ulechi lach

“Ki hineh hastav avar,
hageshem chalaf, halach lo;

hanitzanim nir’u va’aretz,
et zamir higi’ah,
vekol hator nishmah be’artzenu;

hate’enah chan’tah fageha
vehagfanim smadar natnu re’ach.

kumi lach, rayati, yafati, ulechi lach.”
Yonati, bechagvei haselah,

beseter hamadregah,
harini et marayich,

hashmi’ini et kolech
ki kolech arev

umarech naveh.

Echezulanu shu’alim—
shu’alim ketanim

mechablim keramim—
ucheramenu semadar.

Dodi li va’ani lo,

haro’eh bashoshanim.

¹ Presumably, a gazelle or deer is skittish, hard to bring inside the garden and not easy to see. The fence could be a wall; the gaps could be windows; “glimpsed” is probably related to the Hebrew root צִיץ, a fringe or plant shoot, something sticking out.

² “Sound,” but the sound of a dove is cooing (or wing-flapping).

¹⁷Until day comes
and shadows flee,
turn, be like a gazelle, my love,
or *like* a young deer
on the ridge.¹

עַד שִׁפּוֹת הַיּוֹם Ad sheyafu'ach hayom
וְנָסוּ הַצִּלְלִים venasu hatzلالim,
סֹב דִּמְהַלְכָּה דוֹדִי לִיצְבִּי sov, demeh lecha, dodi, litzvi
אוֹ לְעֹפֶר הָאֵיָלִים o le'ofar ha'ayalim
עַל-הָרֵי בָּתָר al harei vater.

Chapter 3

¹On my bed at night
I sought him whom I love;
I sought him but did not find him.
²Let me get up and go around town.
Through the markets and streets
I'll seek the one I love;
I have sought him and not found him.

עַל-מִשְׁכְּבִי בַּלַּיְלוֹת Al mishkavi baleilot
בִּקְשֵׁתִי אֶת שְׁאֲהָבָה נַפְשִׁי bikashti et she'ahavah nafshi;
בִּקְשֵׁתִי וְלֹא מָצָאתִי bikashtiv velo metzativ.
אֲקוּמָה נָא וְאֶסּוּבֶנָּה בְּעִיר Akumah nah va'asovevah va'ir.
בְּשׁוּקִים וּבְרִחוֹבוֹת Bash'vakim uvar'chovot
אֲבַקֶּשֶׁה אֶת שְׁאֲהָבָה נַפְשִׁי avakshah et she'ahavah nafshi;
בִּקְשֵׁתִי וְלֹא מָצָאתִי bikashtiv velo metzativ.

³The guards found me—
they go around town.
“Have you seen him whom I love?”

מִצְאוּנֵי הַשְּׂמֹרִים Metz'auni hashomrim
הַסּוֹבְבִים בְּעִיר hasovevim ba'ir.
אֶת שְׁאֲהָבָה נַפְשִׁי רְאִיתָם “Et she'ahavah nafshi re'item?”

⁴I had barely left them
when I found the one I love.
I held him and won't let go
until I get him to my mother's house,
into my mother's room.²

כִּמְעַט שֶׁעָבַרְתִּי מֵהֶם Kimat she'avarti mehem
עַד שֶׁמָּצָאתִי אֶת שְׁאֲהָבָה נַפְשִׁי ad shematzati et she'ahavah nafshi.
אֲחַזְתִּיו וְלֹא אֲרַפְּנוּ Achaztiv velo arpenu
עַד-שֶׁהֵבִיאתִי אֶל-בֵּית אִמִּי ad shehavetiv el bet imi
וְאֶל-חֶדֶר הוֹרָתִי ve'el cheder horati.

⁵I've made you promise,
daughters of Jerusalem,
by the gazelles or the wild stags,³
not to disturb or rouse
my love until it's eager.

הִשְׁבַּעְתִּי אֶתְכֶם Hishbati et'chem,
בָּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם benot Yerushalayim,
בִּיצְוֹת אוֹ בְּאֵיִלוֹת הַשָּׂדֶה bitzva'ot o be'aylot hasadeh,
אִם-תִּעְזְרוּ | וְאִם-תִּעְזְרוּ im ta'iru ve'im te'oreru
אֶת-הָאֲהָבָה עַד שֶׁתַּחְפֹּץ et ha'ahavah ad shetechpatz!

¹ בָּתָר can be related to a root for “divide,” and the hills that divide a landscape would be a ridge. Some understand בָּתָר to be a place, Bether (“the hills of Bether”) or the idea of distance (“the distant hills”).

² “And to the chamber of my parent/motherhood/pregnancy”; perhaps it means “the room where I’ll get pregnant.”

³ The animals mentioned are uncertain.

⁶Who is this, coming up from the desert
looking like columns of smoke
but perfumed with myrrh and frankincense,
more *fragrant* than all merchants' powders.

⁷Look at his bed, *as fine as Solomon's*,
surrounded by sixty warriors,
chosen from the warriors of Israel.

⁸They all grasp their swords,
schooled in war,
each with his sword at the ready¹
for night-terrors.²

⁹King Solomon made himself a litter
of Lebanon wood.

¹⁰Its uprights he made of silver,
its base of gold,
its throne of purple,
its interior tiled with love
from the daughters of Jerusalem.

¹¹Daughters of Zion, come out and look
at King Solomon
in the crown his mother placed on him
on his wedding day
and on the day of his happiness.³

מִי זֹאת עֹלָה מִן־הַמִּדְבָּר

כְּתִימָרוֹת עָשָׁן

מְקַטְרֶת מֹר וּלְבוֹנָה

מִכָּל אַבְקַת רוֹחֵל

הִנֵּה מִטָּתוֹ שֶׁל־שְׁלֹמֹה

שִׁשִּׁים גִּבּוֹרִים סָבִיב לָהּ

מִגִּבּוֹרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

כָּל־ם אֲחֻזֵּי חֶרֶב

מִלְמַדֵּי מִלְחָמָה

אִישׁ חָרְבוֹ עַל־יָרְכוֹ

מִפְּחַד בַּלִּילוֹת

אֲפִירְיוֹן עָשָׂה לֹא הִמְלִךְ שְׁלֹמֹה

מֵעֵצֵי הַלְבָּנוֹן

עֲמוּדָיו עָשָׂה כֶּסֶף

רִפִּידָתוֹ זָהָב

מִרְכָּבוֹ אֲרָגָמָן

תּוֹכוֹ רָצוּף אַהֲבָה

מִבְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם

צֹאֲנִיָּה | וְרֵאֲנִיָּה בְּנוֹת צִיּוֹן

בַּמֶּלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה

בַּעֲטָרָה שֶׁעֲטָרָהּ לֹא אִמּוֹ

בְּיוֹם חַתֻּנָּתוֹ

וּבְיוֹם שִׂמְחַת לִבּוֹ

Mi zot olah min hamidbar
ketimarot ashan,

mekuteret mor ulevonah
mikol avkat rochel.

Hineh mitato sheliShelomo:
shishim giborim saviv lah
migiborei Yisra'el.

Kulam achuzei cherev,
melumdei mil'chamah;
ish charbo al yerecho
mipachad baleilot.

Apiryon asah lo hamelech Shelomoh
me'atzei haLevanon.

Amudav asah kesef,
refidato zahav,
merkavo argaman,
tocho ratzuf ahavah
mibnot Yerushalayim.

Tzena urena, benot Tziyon,
baMelech Shelomoh,
ba'atarah she'itrah lo imo
beyom chatunato
uveyom simchat libo.

¹ "On his thigh"

² "From the fear of the nights"; a fear we often consider childish today was taken for granted in ancient times.

³ Maybe she's talking about King Solomon or maybe she thinks her lover is as grand as King Solomon.

Chapter 4

¹ You are beautiful, my love, beautiful.

Your eyes are doves,

peeping from your locks;

your hair like a flock of goats

skittering down Mount Gilead;

² Your teeth like a flock of sheared *sheep*

that came up from the washing station,

every one pregnant with twins,

none of them barren.¹

³ Like a scarlet thread are your lips

and your speech delightful;

your cheek is like a slice of pomegranate

covered by your hair.

⁴ Like the Tower of David is your neck,

built of gleaming stones;

a thousand shields hang from it,

each for a warrior's armor.²

⁵ Your two breasts are like two young fawns,

a pair of gazelles

browsing on lilies.³

⁶ Until day breaks

and shadows have fled

I'll roam the mound of myrrh

and the hill of frankincense.⁴

הִנָּךְ יָפָה רַעֲיָתִי הִנָּךְ יָפָה

עֵינֶיךָ יוֹנוֹיִם

מִבַּעַד לְצַמְחָתְךָ

שַׁרְעֶךָ כְּעֶדֶר הָעִזִּים

שֶׁגַלְשׁוּ מִהַר גִּלָּד

שִׁנַּיִךְ כְּעֶדֶר הַקְּצִיבוֹת

שֶׁעָלוּ מִן־הַר־חֲצָה

שֶׁכֻּלָּם מֵתַיִמוֹת

וְשֶׁכֻּלָּהּ אֵין בָּהֶם

כְּחוּט הַשָּׁנִי שֶׁפֶתֶתֶיךָ

וּמִדְּבָרֶיךָ נָאוֶה

כְּפֶלַח הָרִמּוֹן רִקְתֶּךָ

מִבַּעַד לְצַמְחָתְךָ

כְּמִגְדַּל דָּוִד צִנְאוֹרְךָ

בָּנוּי לְתַלְפִּיּוֹת

אֶלֶף הַמָּגֶן תִּלְוִי עָלָיו

כָּל שִׁלְטֵי הַגִּבּוֹרִים

שְׁנֵי שֹׁדֶיךָ כִּשְׁנֵי עֶפְרַיִם

תְּאוֹמֵי צִבְיָה

הָרוֹעִים בְּשׁוֹשָׁנִים

עַד שֶׁיִּפּוּחַ הַיּוֹם

וְנָסוּ הַצִּלְלִים

אֶלֶךְ לִי אֶל־הַר הָמוֹר

וְאֶל־גִּבְעַת הַלְּבוֹנָה

Hinach yafah, rayati, hinach yafah.

Einayich yonim

miba'ad letzamatech;

sarech ke'eder ha'izim

shegalshu meHar Gilad.

Shinayich ke'eder haktzuvot

she'alu min harachtzah,

shekulam matimot

veshakulah ein bahem.

Kechut hashani siftotayich

umidbarech naveh

kefelach harimon rakatech

miba'ad letzamatech.

KeMigdal David tzavarech,

banui letalpiyot;

elef hamagen talui alav,

kol shiltei hagiborim.

Shenei shadayich kishnei ofarim,

te'umei tzeviya

haro'im bashoshanim.

As sheyafu'ach hayom

venasu hatzlalim

elech li el har hamor

ve'el givat halvonah.

¹ The idea of hair cascading down a mountainside—maybe that's okay. The teeth like pregnant sheep fresh from the sheep dip—well, maybe the romance isn't all a woman might wish, but the lover's fantasy is as fertile as can be.

² He loves every inch of her neck, and the necklace that adorns it.

³ Soft, fair, fragrant and a little bouncy, I guess.

⁴ A delicate way of saying he'll spend all night enjoying his fragrant beloved.

⁷ You are altogether beautiful, my dear;
you are flawless.

⁸ O my bride—with me away from Lebanon,
with me away from Lebanon—come!
View from the summit of Amanah,
from the summit of Snir and Hermon,¹
from the lions' haunts,
the leopards' heights.

⁹ You've stolen my heart, my partner,² my bride,
you've stolen my heart with one of your eyes,
with one twist of your neck.³

¹⁰ How lovely are your breasts,⁴
my partner, bride,
how much better are your breasts than wine,
and your creamy fragrance
than any perfume.⁵

¹¹ Your lips drop honey, O bride;
honey and cream *lie* under your tongue
and your clothes
have Lebanon's fragrance!⁶

כָּלֶךְ יָפָה רַעֲיָתִי	Kulach yafah, rayati,
וּמוֹם אֵין בָּךְ	umum ein bach.
אֲתִי מִלְּבָנוֹן כָּלָה	Iti miLevanon, kalah,
אֲתִי מִלְּבָנוֹן תָּבוֹאִי	iti miLevanon tavoi;
תַּשְׁוִּירִי מִרֹאשׁ אָמָנָה	tashuri merosh Amanah
מִרֹאשׁ שְׁנִיר וְחֶרְמוֹן	merosh Snir veChermon,
מִמְעֻנוֹת אַרְיֹת	mimonot arayot,
מִהַרְרֵי נִמְרִים	meharerei nemerim.
לִבְבִתִּי אַחֹתִי כָלָה	Libavtini, achoti, chalah,
לִבְבִתִּי בְּאַחַת מֵעֵינֶיךָ	libavtini be'achat me'enayich,
בְּאַחַד עֵקֶב מִצַּוְרוֹנַיִךְ	be'achad anak mitzavronayich.
מַה יָּפֹה דֹּדַיִךְ	Mah yafu dodayich,
אַחֹתִי כָלָה	achoti chalah,
מַה טּוֹב דֹּדַיִךְ מִיַּיִן	mah tovu dodayich miyayin
וְרֵיחַ שְׁמָנֶיךָ	verei'ach shmanayich
מִכֹּל בְּשָׁמִים	mikol besamim.
נֹפֶת תִּטּוֹפֶנָּה שִׁפְתֹתֶיךָ כָלָה	Nofet titofnah siftotayich, kallah;
דֶּבֶשׁ וְחֶלֶב תַּחַת לְשׁוֹנֶךָ	devash vechalav tachat leshonech,
וְרֵיחַ שְׁלִמְתֶיךָ	verei'ach salmotayich
כֶּרֶי' אַח לְבָנוֹן	kerei'ach Levanon.

¹ Are these names allegorical? Amanah could be related to the word for truth or the Ammonite people; Snir may mean “glacier,” or it’s the Amorite name for Mount Hermon; Chermon could remind one of חֶרֶם, the word for excommunication.

² Or, “My sister,” with whatever meanings it might connote in this context.

³ עֵקֶב is giant or necklace or neck chain or torque (twisting), so translations of this phrase differ. Perhaps he means she gave him a single nod and he fell for her at once.

⁴ Or, “loves.”

⁵ “And the fragrance of your oils/creams above all spices.”

⁶ “And the fragrance of your clothes/raiment *is* like the fragrance of Lebanon.” Lebanon is famous for cedars, so you may think she got her best duds from the cedar closet, but this probably means that everything about her smells good.

¹² A locked garden *is* my partner, bride,
a covered well, a sealed-up fountain.¹

¹³ Your buds are an orchard of pomegranates
with delicious fruit,
fragrant camphire and spikenard.

¹⁴ Spikenard and saffron,
cannabis and cinnamon,
with every *kind of* aromatic wood;²
myrrh and aloes,
with all the best spices.

¹⁵ A garden spring, a well of fresh water,
and streams from Lebanon.³

¹⁶ Wake up, north *wind*; come, south *wind*;
breathe upon my garden,
let its perfumes drift,
let my lover come to his garden
and feast on its delicious fruit.

גַּן | נְעוּל אַחֹתִי כְּלָה
גַּל נְעוּל מַעַיִן חָתוּם
שֶׁל־חַיִּיךָ פָּרְדֵּס רִמּוֹנִים
עִם פְּרֵי מְגָדִים
כִּפְּרִים עִם־נֶרָדִים
נֶהְרָד | וְכַרְכֹּם
קָנֶה וְקִנְמֹן
עִם כָּל־עֵצֵי לִבְנָה
מֹר וְאַהֲלוֹת
עִם כָּל־רָאשֵׁי וְשָׁמִים
מַעַיִן גָּנִים בְּאֵר מַיִם חַיִּים
וְנוֹזְלִים מִן־לִבְנוֹן
עוֹרֵי צָפוֹן וְבוֹאֵי תִימָן
הַפִּיחִי גָנִי
יִזְלֻ וְשָׁמָו
יָבֹא דוֹדִי לִגְנִי
וַיֹּאכַל פְּרֵי מְגָדָו

Gan na'ul achoti chalah,
gal na'ul, mayan chatum.
Shelachayich pardes rimonim
im peri megadim,
kefarim im neradim.
Nehrd vecharkom,
kaneh vekinamon,
im kol atzei levonah;
mor va'ahalot
im kol rashei vesamim.
Mayan ganim, be'er mayim chayim,
venozlim min Lebanon.
Uri, tzafon, uvo'i, teiman;
hafichi gani.
yizlu vesamav,
yavo dodi legano
veyochel peri megadav.

¹ גַּל often refers to a heap of stones, and I presume it could refer to the stone wall around a well. The Hebrew word is also related to words for round things such as wheels (and cycles in time, such as reincarnation), as well as waves of the sea.

² Or, “trees of frankincense.” I presume the poet uses frankincense (the gum of the tree) as the model for all aromatic types of wood.

³ Streams or drops or distillation or waters—presumably, water from Lebanon is prized because it could be fragrant with the aroma of cedars.

Chapter 5

¹ I reached my garden, partner, bride;

I added myrrh to my perfume

ate honeydrops with my honey

drank wine with my cream.¹

Friends, *come and* eat;

drink and get drunk, my dears.

² I'm sleeping but my mind is awake;

my love's voice knocks *at my door*;

"Open up, my partner, my dear,

my dove, my innocent,

for my head is filled with dew,

my locks with the dewdrops of night."

³ I've taken off my dress;

how could I put it on *again*?

I've washed my feet;

how could I get them dirty *again*?²

⁴ My lover moved his hand

from the door-latch

and my body ached for him.³

⁵ I stood up to open for my lover;

my hands dripped myrrh,

my fingers delightful myrrh,

on the bolt-handle.⁴

בָּאֲתִי לְגַנִּי אַחֹתִי כָלָה

אַרִּיתִי מוֹרִי עִם־בִּשְׁמִי

אַחֲלִיתִי יַעְרִי עִם־דְּבָשִׁי

שָׁתִיתִי יַיִן עִם־חֲלָבִי

אֲכָלוּ רֵעִים

שָׁתוּ וְשִׁכְרוּ דוֹדִים

אָנִי יֶשֶׁנָּה וְלִבִּי עֹר

קוֹל | דוֹדִי דוֹפֵק

פִּתְחִי־לִי אַחֹתִי רַעֲיָתִי

יוֹנָתִי תַמָּתִי

שֶׁרָאֲשִׁי נִמְלֵא־טָל

קִנְצוֹתַי־רִסִּי לַיֵּלָה

פָּשַׁטְתִּי אֶת־כִּתְנֵי

אֵיכָכָה אֶלְבָּשֶׁנָּה

רַחֲצִיתִי אֶת־רַגְלִי

אֵיכָכָה אֲטַנְפֶּם

דוֹדִי שָׁלַח יָדוֹ

מִן־הַחֹר

וּמַעַי הָמוּ עָלָיו

קָמְתִי אָנִי לִפְתֹּחַ לְדוֹדִי

וַיִּדְּי נִטְפו־מֹר

וַאֲצַבְעֹתַי מֹר עָבַר

עַל כַּפּוֹת הַמַּנְעוּל

Bati legani, achoti chalah,

ariti mori im besami,

achalti yari im divshi,

shatiti yeini im chalavi.

Ichlu, re'im,

sh'tu veshichru, dodim.

Ani yeshenah, velibi er;

kol dodi dofek:

"Pit'chi li, achoti, rayati,

yonati, tamati,

sheroshi nimlah tal,

kevutzotai resisei laylah."

Pashat'ti et kutanti;

eichecha elbashenah?

Rachatzti et raglai;

eichecha atanfem?

Dodi shalach yado

min hachor

ume'ai hamu alav.

Kamti ani lifto'ach ledodi;

veyadai natfu mor,

ve'etzbe'otai mor over,

al kapot hamanul.

¹ "I gathered myrrh with my spice/perfume, ate dripping honey with my honey, drank my wine with my milk/cream"; I already had something delicious, and I added to it—myrrh to perfume, dripping honey to honey, and wine with cream. It's as if he had ice cream on pie or a cherry on whipped cream. Yum.

² She's in bed, and she's not getting up again.

³ חור/chor is usually a hole; here some kind of opening for the "door." מַעַי/me'ai often means "guts," a part of the body where feelings can be strongest—"and my guts/bowels/innards yearned for it/him."

⁴ "Upon the concave parts (some kind of handle) of the locking mechanism (bolt)."

⁶I opened for my lover,
but my lover had turned around and gone.
Oh, my heart leaped when he spoke;¹
I went after him but could not find him,
called him but he did not answer me.

⁷The guards found me—
they go around town.
They struck me, wounded me;
they lifted my veil,
the wall-guards.

⁸I've made you promise,
daughters of Jerusalem:
if you find my love,
what are you to tell him?
That I'm sick with love!

⁹"How is your love better than another,
lovely lady?
How is your lover better than another,
that you made us give such a promise?"²

¹⁰My love is bright and red;
he stands out in a crowd.³

¹¹His head is gleaming gold,⁴
his locks *are* curly,
black like a raven.

פָּתַחְתִּי אָנִי לְדוּדִי Patachti anu ledodi,
וְדוּדִי חָמַק עָבָר vedodi chamak avar.
נַפְשִׁי יָצָאָה בְּדַבְרוֹ Nafshi yatzah vedabro;
בִּקְשָׁתִּיחוּ וְלֹא מָצְאֵתִיחוּ bikashtihu velo metzatihi,
קִרְאתִיו וְלֹא עָנָנִי kerativ velo anani.
מִצָּאֵנִי הַשְּׂמֹרִים Metza'uni hashomrim
הַסִּבְבִּים בְּעִיר hasovevim ba'ir.
הִכּוּנִי פָצְעוּנִי Hikuni, fetza'uni;
נָשְׂאוּ אֶת־רִדְדִי מֵעָלַי nasu et redidi me'alai,
שְׂמֹרֵי הַחֲמוֹת shomrei hachomot.
הִשְׁבַּעְתִּי אֶתְכֶם Hishbati et'chem,
בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם benot Yerushalayim,
אִם־תִּמְצְאוּ אֶת־דוּדִי im timtze'u et dodi,
מַה־תִּגִּידוּ לוֹ mah tagidu lo?
שְׁחֹלַת אַהֲבָה אָנִי Shecholat ahavah ani.
מַה־דוֹדְךָ מִדּוֹד "Mah dodech midod,
הֵיפָּהּ בְּנָשִׁים hayafah banashim?
מַה־דוֹדְךָ מִדּוֹד Mah dodech midod,
שֶׁכָּכָה הִשְׁבַּעְתָּנוּ shekachah hishbatanu?"
דוּדִי צָח וְאָדוֹם Dodi tzach ve'adom,
דָּגוּל מִרֵּבְבָּה dagul merevevah.
רֹשׁוֹ כֶּתֶם פָּז Rosho ketem paz,
קִוְצוֹתַי תַּלְתָּלִים kevutzotav taltalim
שְׁחֹרוֹת כְּעוֹרֵב shechorot ke'orev.

¹ "My-soul/self went-out at-his-speaking."

² Presumably, this verse is spoken by the daughters of Jerusalem: "In what way is your lover *different* from *someone else's* lover, O beautiful among women? In what way is your lover *different* from *someone else's* lover, that in this manner you have made us make a promise?"

³ Bright could mean white or clear or hot like a hot wind. He is "flagged more than a myriad": perhaps he's conspicuous (for his beauty) in a huge crowd; perhaps he is as impressive to see as a huge troop with banners waving.

¹² His eyes are like doves

upon streams of water,

bathed in milk,

fastened *like gems* in their setting.¹

¹³ His cheeks are like a bed of herbs,

mounds of fragrant spices are his lips,

roses dropping sweet myrrh.

¹⁴ His hands bear rings of gold

set with topaz;²

his belly is like carved ivory³

overlaid with sapphires.

¹⁵ His legs are pillars of marble

set into sockets of gold;

he looks like Lebanon,⁴

prized for *its* cedars.

¹⁶ His mouth is sweetness itself—

everything about him is delightful.⁵

This is my love, this my dear friend,

daughters of Jerusalem.⁶

עֵינָיו כִּיּוֹנִים

עַל־אַפֵּיקֵי מַיִם

רֹחֲצוֹת בְּחֶלָב

יִשְׁבּוֹת עַל־מִלְּאָת

לְחַיּוֹ כְּעֲרוֹגַת הַבֹּשֶׂם

מִגְדְּלוֹת מֶרְקָחִים שִׁפְתוֹתָיו

שֹׁשָׁנִים נֹטְפוֹת מִזֶּרַע עֵבֶר

יָדָיו גִּלְגִּילֵי זָהָב

מִמְּלָאִים בַּתַּרְשִׁישׁ

מִעֵוֶר עֶשֶׂת שֵׁן

מִעֻלְפֶּת סַפִּירִים

שׁוֹקָיו עַמּוּדֵי שֶׁשׁ

מִיּוֹסָדִים עַל־אֲדָנֵי־פָז

מִרְאֵהוּ כַּלְבָּנוֹן

בַּחֹר כְּאַרְזִים

חֵכוֹל מִמְּתָקִים

וְכֹל מִחֲמָדִים

זֶה דוֹדִי וְזֶה רֵעִי

בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם

Einav keyonim

al afikei mayim,

rochatzot bechalav,

yoshvot al mileit.

Lechayav ka'arugat habosem,

migdelot merkachim siftotav,

shoshanim notfot mor over.

Yadav gelilei zahav

memula'im batarshish;

me'av eshet shen

me'ulefet sapirim.

Shokav amudei shesh,

meyusadim al adnei faz;

mareihu kaLevanon,

bachur ka'arazim.

Chiko mamtakim

vechulo machamadim.

Zeh dodi, vezeh re'i,

benot Yerushalayim.

⁴ פָּז and כֶּתֶם can both mean gold; together perhaps they mean specially fine gold. Since his hair is black, what is gold? Maybe he's wearing a fancy hat.

¹ She's not excited simply because his eyes don't pop out, but because his eyes are like jewels in the glorious setting of his beautiful face.

² The exact identity of this precious stone is up for discussion. The Hebrew phrase could mean "set in Tarshish (Tarsus; or, in *Moby Dick*, Cadiz, Spain)," if the jewelers of that town were notably skilled.

³ Carved ivory could be "fabricated tooth," or elephant tusk, or something that looks like it, such as marble.

⁴ "His appearance is like Lebanon."

⁵ "And all of him is delights."

⁶ After this detailed description, who could fail to identify him?

⁷ Some read מִחֲמָדִים instead of מִמְּתָקִים.

Chapter 6

¹ Where did your lover go,
lovely lady,

Which way did your lover turn?
We'll look for him with you.

² My lover went down to his garden,
to the fragrant *garden* beds,
to graze in the gardens
and gather lilies.

³ I am my lover's; my lover is mine
as he grazes on the lilies.

⁴ Darling, you are as beautiful as you can wish,¹
lovely as Jerusalem,
splendid like a *throng* of flag-waving women.²

⁵ Turn your eyes from me,
for they have dazzled me.
Your hair is like a flock of goats
skittering down Mount Gilead,

⁶ your teeth like a flock of ewes
that came up from the washing station,
every one pregnant with twins,
none of them barren.

⁷ Your cheek is like a slice of pomegranate
covered by your hair.

⁸ Sixty they are, *all* queens,
and eighty mistresses,
and damsels beyond number—³

אָנָה הָלַךְ דֹּדֶךָ Anah halach dodech,

הַיָּפָה בְּנָשִׁים hayafah banashim,

אָנָה פָּנָה דֹּדֶךָ anah panah dodech?

וְנִבְקֶשְׁנוּ עִמָּךְ Unevakshenu imach.

דֹּדִי יָרַד לִגְנוֹ Dodi yarad legano,

לְעֲרוּגוֹת הַבָּשָׂם la'arugot habosem,

לְרֻעוֹת בִּגְנִים lir'ot baganim

וּלְלֶקֶט שׁוֹשָׁנִים velilkot shoshanim.

אֲנִי לְדֹדִי וְדֹדִי לִי Ani ledodi, vedodi li,

הָרֹעָה בַּשּׁוֹשָׁנִים haro'eh bashoshanim.

יָפָה אֶת רַעְיָתִי כְּתִירְצָה Yafah, at rayati ketirtzah,

נָאֵה כִּירוּשָׁלַם navah kIrushala'im,

אֵימָה כַּנִּגְדָּלוֹת ayumah kanigdalot.

הַסִּבִּי עֵינַיִךְ מִנִּגְדִּי Hasebi einayich minegdi,

שֶׁהֵם הִרְחִיבֵנִי shehem hirhivuni.

שַׁעֲרֶךָ כְּעֵדֶר הָעִזִּים Sarech ke'eder ha'izim

שֶׁגָּלְשׁוּ מִן הַגִּילָד shegalshu min haGilad,

שִׁנַּיִךְ כְּעֵדֶר הָרָחֵלִים shinayich ke'eder har'chelim

שֶׁ'אֻלּוּ מִן הָרַחֲצָה she'alu min harachtzah,

שֶׁכֻּלָּם מֵתַאֲמִוֹת shekulam matimot

וְשֶׁכֻּלָּהּ אֵין בָּהֶם veshakulah ein bahem.

כֶּפֶלַח הָרִמּוֹן רַקְתֶּךָ kefelach harimon rakatech

מִבָּעַד לְצַמָּתֶךָ miba'ad letzamatech.

שִׁשִּׁים הֵמָּה מֵלָכוֹת Shishim hemah melachot,

וּשְׁמֹנִים פִּילָגְשִׁים ushemonim pilagshim

וְעֵלְמוֹת אֵין מִסְפָּר va'alamot ein mispar—

¹ Or, "as Tirzah." This is the name of one of Zelofehad's daughters (Num 27:1-11), notable for character, not appearance.

² כַּנִּגְדָּלוֹת, "like females who are flagged," i.e., women equipped with flags or banners.

⁹ but my dove, my flawless *beloved*, is unique,
she's her mother's *only* one,
favorite of the one who gave her birth;
girls saw her and wished her happiness,
queens and mistresses praised her.

¹⁰ Who is this, glimpsed like the dawn,
fair as the moon, favored as the sun,
splendid like *a host of women* waving banners?

¹¹ I went down to the nut grove
to see the fruits in the valley,
to see if the vine was in bloom,
if the pomegranate *was* in blossom.

¹² Suddenly, I felt I *was dashing along*
like Aminadiv's chariots!¹

אֶחָת הִיא יוֹנָתִי תַמָּתִי achat hi yonati, tamati,
אֶחָת הִיא לְאִמָּהּ achat hi le'imah,
בָּרָה הִיא לְיוֹלֶדֶתָהּ barah hi leyoladtah;
רָאוּהָ בָנוֹת וַיֵּאֲשְׁרוּהָ ra'uha vanot vay'ashruha,
מְלָכוֹת וּפִילָגְשִׁים וַיְהַלְלוּהָ melachot ufilagshim vayhaleluha.
מִי־זֹאת הַנִּשְׁקָפָה כְּמוֹ־שַׁחַר Mi zot hanishkafah kemo shachar,
יָפָה כָּל־בְּנוֹת בָּרָה כַּחמָה yafah chalvana, barah kachama,
אֵימָה כַּנִּידְגָלוֹת Ayuma kanidgalot?
אֶל־גִּינַת עֵגוֹז יָרַדְתִּי El ginat egoz yaradti
לִרְאוֹת בַּאֲבֵי הַנַּחַל lir'ot beibei hanachal,
לִרְאוֹת הַפָּרָחָה הַגֶּפֶן lir'ot hafarcha hagefen,
הַנֶּצֶז הַרְמוֹנִים henetzu harimonim.
לֹא יָדַעְתִּי נַפְשִׁי שָׂמָתִּי Lo yadati nafshi samatni
מַרְכָּבוֹת עַמִּי־נָדִיב markevot ami nadiv.

Chapter 7

¹ Come back, come back, Shulamite girl,
come back, come back, so we can see you.
What will you *all* see in the Shulamite girl?
She's as lovely to see as a country dance!²

שׁוּבִי שׁוּבִי הַשְּׁוֹלְמִית Shuvi, shuvi, haShulamit,
שׁוּבִי שׁוּבִי וְנִנְחֶזֶה בָּךְ shuvi, shuvi venechezeh bach.
מִה־תֵּחֶזֶז בַּשְּׁוֹלְמִית Mah techezu baShulamit?
כִּמְחֹלוֹת הַמַּחֲנָיִם Kimcholot hamachanayim.

³ The mistresses could be concubines (a step down from wives) and the damsels could be virgins or maidservants (sexual partners or scullery maids, or both).

¹ “I did not know: my mind placed me: the chariots of Aminadav”; or “Before I knew it, my mind/soul placed me *like* Aminadav’s chariots.” Suddenly, the speaker was overcome by a feeling of being part of an onrushing army. Aminadav may mean “my people *are* magnanimous” or “my magnanimous people,” or it may refer to someone who had a Lamborghini for a chariot.

² “*Looking at the Shulamite girl is like looking at the dance of two camps*”; this could refer to the clash of two armies, or a dance with two groups, a line of men and a line of women facing each other as in a country dance. This might be a fine sight in an 18th-century ballroom, but I wonder what it might look like in Biblical times. Incidentally, this verse ends Chapter 6 for many editors.

² How fair are your sandaled steps,
princess;

your thigh-curves *shimmy*
like necklaces,

the work of an expert artisan.¹

³ Your navel is like a round goblet—
fill it with wine!²

Your belly is *like* a sheaf of wheat
surrounded by lilies.

⁴ Your breasts are like two fawns,
twin gazelles.

⁵ Your neck is like an ivory tower,
your eyes *like* ponds in Cheshbon,³
above the entrance to a crowded suburb;⁴
your nose is like the Tower of Lebanon
with a view *all the way* to Damascus.

⁶ Your head is like Carmel,
your cascading hair⁵ like *prized* purple,
royalty captured in *your* tresses.⁶

⁷ How lovely you are, how delightful,
my love, among *all other* pleasures.

מַה־יָּפֹו פְּעָמַיִךְ בְּנֹעָלִים

בַּת־נָדִיב

חַמוּקֵי יָרֵכַיִךְ

כְּמוֹ חֻלָּאִים

מַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵי אֲמֹן

שָׂרֵרֶךְ אָגֶן הַסֶּהַר

אֶל־יַחְסָר הַמָּזֶג

בִּטְנֶךָ עֲרֵמַת חִטִּים

סוּגָה בַּשּׁוֹשָׁנִים

שְׁנֵי שָׂדַיִךְ כְּשְׁנֵי עֶפְרַיִם

תְּאֵמִי צִבְיָה

צִזְאֲרֶךְ כְּמִגְדַּל הַשָּׁן

עֵינַיִךְ בְּרֵחוֹת בְּחֶשְׁבוֹן

עַל־שַׁעַר בַּת־רַבִּים

אַפֶּךָ כְּמִגְדַּל הַלְבָּנוֹן

צוֹפֶה פְּנֵי דַמָּשֶׁק

רֹשֶׁךְ עַל־יָד כְּכַרְמֶל

וְדַלַּת רֹשֶׁךְ כְּאַרְגָּמָן

מֶלֶךְ אַסּוּר בְּרַחֲתִים

מַה־יָּפִית וּמַה־נְעִמָּה

אַהֲבָה בַּתְּעֻנּוּגִים

Mah yafu fe'amayich ban'alim,
bat nadiv;

chamukei yerechayich

kemo chala'im,

ma'sah yedei aman.

Sharerech agan hasahar—

al yechsar hamazeg!

Bitnech aremat chitim,

sugah bashoshanim.

Shenei shadayich kishnei ofarim,

ta'omei tzeviyah.

Tzarech kemigdal hashen,

einayich berechot beCheshbon,

al sha'ar bat rabim;

apech keMigdal haLevanon,

tzofeh penei Damashek.

Roshech alayich kaKarmel

ve dalat roshech ke'argaman;

melech asur barhatim.

Mah yafit umah na'amt,

ahavah, bata'anugim.

¹ “How beautiful are your steps in shoes, daughter of a magnanimous one; your thighs’ hollows/hidden parts/movements are shiny like jewels *or* shaking like necklaces”; I translated as if he admires her dancing.

² “Let not the mixed *wine* be lacking”; the ancients diluted wine with water.

³ Cheshbon can mean reason or thinking, or it may be a town famous for its ponds.

⁴ Or, “over/next to a gate for daughter/suburb-of-many (or a gate for a place called Batrabim).” If there’s a crowded suburb, the cool ponds may offer notable relief. **בַּת** usually means daughter, but in connection with a town it can mean a suburb, a dependent village on the town outskirts.

⁵ “What comes down from your head.”

⁶ “A king, confined to or banned from, watering-troughs or locks of hair. If watering troughs hold running water, which reduces the labor filling them, then they might suggest flowing locks of hair. The King James version follows the Septuagint and translates, “the king is held in the galleries.”

⁸ Your figure is like a palm tree and your breasts <i>like dangling clusters of grapes</i> .	זֹאת קוֹמַתְךָ לְתָמָר וְשָׁדַיִךְ לְאֶשְׁכִּלּוֹת	Zot komatech damtah letamar veshadayich le'eshkoliyot.
⁹ I said, "I'll scale a palm-tree, I'll seize its <i>pendulous</i> boughs"; your breasts shall be like clusters of the vine and the scent of your breath like fragrant fruit. ¹	אֶמְרָתִי אֶשְׁלַח בְּתָמָר אֶחְזֶה בְּסַנְסִנָּיו וַיְהִי־נָא שָׁדַיִךְ כְּאֶשְׁכִּלּוֹת הַנֶּפֶן וְרִיחַ אֶפְּךָ כַּתְּפוּחִים	Amarti, "E'eleh vetamar, ochazah besansinav." Veyiheyu-nah shadayich ke'eshkelot hagefen vere'ach apech katapuchim.
¹⁰ Your mouth <i>tastes</i> like fine wine that flows smoothly for my beloved, bringing speech to the lips of the slumbering. ²	וְחִכֶּךָ כִּי־יֵין הַטּוֹב הוֹלֵךְ לְדוּדִי לְמִישָׁרִים דּוֹבֵב שִׁפְתֵי יֶשְׁנִים	Vechikech keyayim hatov, holech ledodi lemesharim, dovev siftei yeshenim.
¹¹ I am my beloved's, and I'm the one he desires.	אֲנִי לְדוּדִי וְעָלַי תְּשׁוּקָתוֹ	Ani ledodi ve'alai teshukato.
¹² Come, my love, let's go out to the country and stay in the villages.	לֵךְ דּוּדִי נֵצֵא הַשָּׂדֶה נָלִינָה בַּכְּפָרִים	Lecha, dodi, netzeh hasadeh, nalinah bakfarim.
¹³ We'll wake early <i>to enjoy</i> the vineyards, see if the vines are in flower, <i>if</i> the buds are open, <i>if</i> the pomegranates bloom; there shall I give you my love.	נִשְׁכִּימָה לַכְּרָמִים נִרְאֶה אִם פָּרְחָה הַנֶּפֶן פִּתַּח הַסְּמָדָר הִנֵּצּוּ הָרְמוֹנִים שָׁם אֶתֵּן אֶת־דּוּדִי לָךְ	Nashkimah lakramim, nireh im par'chah hagefen, pitach hasmadar, henetzu harimonim; sham eten et dodai lach.
¹⁴ The mandrakes yield <i>their</i> aroma; as we open <i>ourselves to each other</i> <i>there is</i> every delight, ³ both new and old, my love, which I have stored up for you.	הַדּוּדָאִים נָתְנוּ־רֵיחַ וְעַל־פֶּתַח־יְנֹנִי כָּל־מְגָדִים חֲדָשִׁים גַּם יֶשְׁנָנִים דּוּדִי צָפַנְתִּי לָךְ	Haduda'im natnu rei'ach, ve'al petacheinu kol megadim, chadashim gam yeshanim, dodi, tzafanti lach.

¹ "The odor of your nose"; the smell of what comes from her nose is the aroma of her breath. In modern Hebrew "תפוח/tapu'ach" means apple, but the word may suggest the wafting aroma of the blossoms. The root נפח refers to blowing, inflating, breathing, etc., or swelling (since fruit swells as it ripens).

² He wakes her with kisses, which she enjoys, and then she tells him so.

³ Or, "And at our gates are all delights." The root פתח means opening—a door, a budding flower, a loving self.

Chapter 8

¹ I wish you were like my brother,
who suckled at my mother's breasts;
if I met you in public,¹ I could kiss you,
and nobody would criticize me.²

² I would lead you, bring you
into my mother's house
where she would teach me
to give you to drink the spiced wine
of the juice of my pomegranate.³

³ His left arm is beneath my head
while his right arm embraces me.

⁴ I made you promise,
daughters of Jerusalem,
so why do you rouse and waken
love before it's willing?⁴

⁵ Who is this, coming up from the desert,
leaning on her lover?

Under the fragrant fruit tree I roused you;
there your mother birthed⁵ you,
there your birth-mother gave birth.

מי יתנך כָּאֵחַ לִי Mi yitnech ke'ach li,
יוֹנֵק שְׂדֵי אִמִּי yonek shedei imi;
אִמְצָאָה בְּחוּץ אֶשְׁקֶךָ emtza'acha vachutz, eshak'cha,
גַּם לֹא יִבְזוּ לִי gam lo yavuzu li.
אֶנְהַגָּךְ אֲבִיָּאָה Enhagacha, avi'acha
אֶל-בֵּית אִמִּי el beit imi;
תֵּלַמְדֵנִי telamdeni
אֶשְׁקֶךָ מִיַּיִן הָרֶקֶחַ ashkecha miyayin harekach
מֵעֵסִיס רִמּוֹנִי me'asis rimoni.
שֶׁמֶלֶל תַּחַת רֹאשִׁי Semolo tachat roshi
וַיְמִינוּ תַּחְבֵּקֵנִי vimino techabkeni.
הִשְׁבַּעְתִּי אֶתְכֶם Hishbati et'chem
בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם benot Yerushalayim:
מִה־תַּעֲרִירוּ וּמִה־תַּעֲרִרוּ mah ta'iru, umah te'oreru
אֶת־הָאֲהָבָה עַד שֶׁתַּחַפֵּץ et ha'ahavah, ad shetechpatz.
מִי זֹאת עֹלָה מִן־הַמִּדְבָּר Mah zot olah min hamidbar,
מִתְרַפֶּקֶת עַל־דֹּדָהּ mitrapeket al dodah?
תַּחַת הַתְּפֹחִת עוֹרֶרְתִּיךָ tachat hatapu'ach orarticha;
שָׁמָּה חִבְּלָתְךָ אִמִּיךָ shamah chiblat'cha imecha,
שָׁמָּה חִבְּלָה יֵלַדְתְּךָ shamah chiblah yeladat'cha.

¹ "If I found you outside."

² "Also, they would not scorn me."

³ I suspect we may let our imagination run wild here. Do you picture Gina Lollobrigida seducing Yul Brynner by offering the juice of her pomegranate?

⁴ Or, "before he wants *it*," before he's ready to reciprocate her love.

⁵ The root חבל for birth is related to the word for rope, perhaps because labor pangs can cause twisting and writhing, and perhaps because you see an umbilical cord, and perhaps because you tie off the umbilical cord.

⁶Set me as an *indelible* mark¹ on your heart, שִׁמְנִי כַחֲתָם עַל־לִבְךָ Simeni chachotam al libecha,
like an *indelible* mark on your arm, כַּחֲתָם עַל־זְרוֹעֶךָ kachotam al zero'echa,
for love is strong as death, כִּי־עֲזָה כַּמּוֹת אָהָבָה ki azah chamavet ahavah,
passion as unyielding as the grave; קָשָׁה כַּשְּׂאוֹל קִנְאָה kashah chish'ol kin'ah;
its sparks are sparks of fire, blazing. רֶשֶׁפֶה רִשְׁפֵּי אֵשׁ שְׁלֵה־בְתִיָּה reshafefa rishpei esh shalhevetyah.
⁷Even lots of water could not מַיִם רַבִּים לֹא יוֹכְלוּ Mayim rabim lo yuchlu
quench love, לְכַבּוֹת אֶת־הָאֵהָבָה lechabot et ha'ahavah,
no rivers drown it. וְנַהֲרוֹת לֹא יִשְׁטְפוּהָ uncharot lo yishtefuha.
If someone devoted אִם־יִתֵּן אִישׁ Im yiten ish
all the resources at his command אֶת־כָּל־הוֹן בֵּיתוֹ et kol hon beito
in a vain attempt to quench love, בְּאֵהָבָה ba'ahavah,
people would ridicule him.² בּוֹז יָבּוּזוּ לוֹ boz yavuzu lo.
⁸We have a young sister אַחֹת לָנוּ קִטְנָה Achot lanu ketanah,
and she has no breasts yet; וְשָׁדַיִם אֵין לָהּ veshadayim ein lah;
what shall we do for our sister מַה־נַּעֲשֶׂה לְאַחֲתָנוּ mah na'aseh la'achotenu
on the day when she is spoken for? בַּיּוֹם שֶׁיִּדְבַּר־בָּהּ bayom sheyedubar bah?
⁹If she is a wall, אִם־חֹמָה הִיא Im chomah hi,
let's build a silver rampart upon her; נִבְנֶה עָלֶיהָ תִּירַת כֶּסֶף nivneh aleha tirat kasef,
if she is a door, וְאִם־דֶּלֶת הִיא ve'im delet hi,
let's board her up with cedar planking. נִצְוֹר עָלֶיהָ לוּחַ אֶרֶז natzur aleha luach arez.
¹⁰I am a wall; my breasts are like towers; אֲנִי חֹמָה וְשָׁדַי כַּמִּגְדָּלוֹת Ani chomah, veshadai kemigdalot;
so to him I've become אֲזִי הָיִיתִי בְּעֵינָיו az hayiti ve'cinav
like one who projects *her* maturity.³ כֶּמֶתֶזֶת שְׁלוֹם kemetzet shalom.

פ

¹ “Seal”—but who uses a seal nowadays, except as an animal to watch at the zoo?

² “If a man were to give away (or devote) all the wealth of his house (or family) in love, scorning they would scorn him.”

³ “Like one who projects/finds completion/peace/welcome.” I think it means he can see she's old enough for marriage, unlike the young sister.

¹¹ Solomon had a *prized* vineyard;

he was master of riches;¹

he gave the vineyard to guards;

someone would bring

a thousand silver *pieces to pay* for his fruit.

¹² My vineyard is before me.

You can keep your thousand, Solomon,

and two hundred for the guards, with its fruit.

¹³ She who dwells in gardens—

friends listen to her voice—

let me hear her *too*!

¹⁴ Run away, my dear,

be like a deer

or a frisky hart

on the fragrant hills.

כֶּרֶם הָיָה לְשִׁלְמוֹהַ

בְּבַעַל הַמֹּזֶן

נָתַן אֶת־הַכֶּרֶם לְנֹטְרִים

אִישׁ יָבֵא

בְּפִרְיוֹ אֶלֶף כָּף

כַּרְמִי שְׁלִי לִפְנֵי

הָאֶלֶף לְךָ שִׁלְמוֹהַ

וּמֵאתַיִם לְנֹטְרִים אֶת־

פִּרְיוֹ

הַיּוֹשֵׁבֶת בַּגָּנִים

חֲבֵרִים מַקְשִׁיבִים לְקוֹלָהּ

הַשְּׁמִיעֵנִי

בְּרַח דּוֹדִי

וּדְמֶה לֶךָ לִצְבִי

אוֹ לְעֹפֶר הָאֵילִים

עַל הָרֵי בְשָׁמִים

Kerem hayah liShlomoh

beVa'al Hamon;

natan et hakerem lanotrim;

ish yavi

befiryo elef kaf.

Karmi sheli lefanai.

Ha'elef lecha, Shelomoh,

umatayim lenotrim et piryo!

Hayoshevet baganim—

chaverim makshivim lekolech—

hasmi'ini!

Brach, dodi,

udemeh lecha litzvi

o le'ofer ha'ayalim

al harei vesamim.

¹ “As a master of abundance” or a place name, Ba'al Hamon.

SPS Draft

The Book of Rut

רוֹת

SPS Draft

The Book of Rut - רות - Rut

What is this story about?

For one thing, it's about a time in Israel's history when people were nice. It beats reading the historical books with war and murder, sin and politics, with occasional public works.

Ruth seems to be accepted into the Jewish community even though Moabites are not invited, so maybe it's a book about the possibility of "conversion"—even for excluded groups—before the process was made formal.

Ruth is an ancestor of King David, so perhaps the story is about the great king's humble origins. By matrilineal standards, you can question whether he was Jewish.

It's also a story about family. First, if a man dies childless, his brother (if he has one) is expected to marry the widow; this perpetuates the legacy of the deceased and protects widows, who need not return to their former family or go begging. Naomi alludes to this practice in 1:13. Second, Leviticus 25:25 says that when someone in poverty has to sell land, close family should buy it back. This keeps land in the family and shows how family should help each other. Boaz assumes this responsibility.

The story could be allegorical; perhaps the names hint at some mystery:

- BetLechem—"House of Bread" could refer to a granary or barn or food bank, perhaps the last place to feel a famine (until the cupboard is bare) or perhaps the first (since people with bare cupboards flock to the food bank).
- Elimelech—"My God is King"; perhaps he was a devout Jew, or perhaps a rather confident apostate.
- Naomi—"My Delight"; perhaps her husband loved her.
- Machlon—could be from the root מָחַל, a word we use when imploring God to annul or forget our sins on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, so perhaps his name means Excuser or Annuler; perhaps it implies that he neglected his religious duty or, on the other hand, that he was kind and forgiving.
- Chilyon—the word appears in Deuteronomy 28:65 meaning some kind of ruin or failure, so perhaps his name means Failure.
- Mo'av—Moabites were given a presumably shameful ancestry as progeny of incest (Gen 19:30-38) and excluded from the community of Israel because they wouldn't supply food and water to, and hired Bilam to curse, the travelling Israelites (Deut 23:4).
- Rut (usually spelled with a silent h)—possibly related to the Hebrew word רַחוּם, gentle.
- Orpah—possibly related to the Hebrew root עָרַף, meaning the back of the neck (hence, break a neck or decapitate, or turn one's back on), or leak/drip. You could turn her name into an insult. But maybe it was a lovely name in the language of the Moabites of Biblical times.
- Boaz—meanings for this name escape me.
- Efrat (1:2, 4:12)—a place name, perhaps related to the word for dust, or associated with Ephraimites.
- Oved—from the Hebrew for labor, slave or serve.
- Yishai—meaning uncertain though I've seen some confident interpretations.
- Peretz—from the Hebrew for rupture.
- Chetzron—from the Hebrew for a public square, the area of town outside the house.
- Ram—from the Hebrew for high.
- Aminadav—from the Hebrew for "My people are magnanimous."
- Nachshon—from the Hebrew for snake or copper, perhaps meaning shiny.
- Salmah—from the Hebrew for an outer garment.
- David—related to the Hebrew for beloved or uncle.

I won't interrupt your speculations on what these names could mean by offering my own, so I wish you joy of the hidden profundities you may discover.

Chapter 1

¹ This happened when judges governed.¹

There was famine in the land
so a man left the granary in Judah *district*²
to live in the fields of Moab,
he and his wife and his two sons.

² The man's name was Elimelech,
his wife's name was Naomi,
and the names of his two sons were
Machlon and Chilyon,
people of Ephraim,
from the food bank in Judah.

They arrived in the fields of Moab,
and that's where they were.

³ Naomi's husband Elimelech died;
she and her two sons were left.

⁴ They married Moabite women,
one named Orpah
and the other named Rut.
There they lived for about ten years.

⁵ Then they both died,
Machlon and Chilyon,
and *Elimelech's* wife was left, *bereaved*
of her two children and her husband.

וַיְהִי בִּימֵי שְׁפֹט הַשְּׁפֹטִים

וַיְהִי רָעָב בְּאֶרֶץ

יִשְׂרָאֵל אִישׁ מִבֵּית לֶחֶם יְהוּדָה

לָגוּר בְּשָׂדֵי מוֹאָב

הוּא וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וּשְׁנֵי בָנָיו

וּשְׁם הָאִישׁ אֱלִמֶלֶךְ

וּשְׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ נְעֹמִי

וּשְׁם שְׁנֵי בָנָיו

מַחֲלֹן וְכִלְיוֹן

אֶפְרַתִּים

מִבֵּית לֶחֶם יְהוּדָה

וַיָּבֹאוּ שְׂדֵי-מוֹאָב

וַיְהִי-שָׁם

וַיָּמָת אֱלִמֶלֶךְ אִישׁ נְעֹמִי

וַתֵּשָׁאֶר הִיא וּשְׁנֵי בָנֶיהָ

וַיֵּשְׁבוּ לָהֶם נָשִׁים מֹאבִיּוֹת

שֵׁם הָאֶחָת עֹרְפָּה

וּשְׁם הַשֵּׁנִית רוּת

וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׁם כְּעֶשֶׂר שָׁנִים

וַיָּמָוּתוּ גַם-שְׁנֵיהֶם

מַחֲלֹן וְכִלְיוֹן

וַתֵּשָׁאֶר הָאִשָּׁה

מִשְׁנֵי יְלָדֶיהָ וּמֵאִשָּׁהּ

Vayehi bimei shefot hashoftim,
vayehi ra'av ba'aretz,
Vayelech ish mibeit lechem Yehudah
lagur bisdei Mo'av,
hu ve'ishto ushnei vanav.
Veshem ha'ish Elimelech,
veshem ishto Na'omi,
veshem shenei vanav
Machlon veChilyon,
Efratim
mibeit lechem Yehudah,
vayavo'u sdei Mo'av,
vayiheyu sham.

Vayamat Elimelech ish Na'omi,
vatisha'er hi ushenei vaneha.

Vayisu lahem nashim Mo'aviyot,
shem ha'achat Orpah
veshem hashenit Rut,
vayeshvu sham ke'eser shanim.

Vayamutu gam sheneihem,
Machlon veChilyon,
vatisha'er ha'ishah
mishnei yeladeha ume'ishah.

¹ “And it happened in the days of the judging by the judges.” Judges were political and military leaders for the Israelite community before they had a king. Their leadership rarely deserved admiration but with few exceptions they were not as bad as the kings.

² “And there went a man from the house of food/bread (or Bethlehem or food bank or grain barn) in the district of Judah”; Beit Lechem could simply be the name of a place, or it may mean that during the famine this man lived at the grain storehouse and left the place for some reason.

⁶ She arose¹ with her daughters-in-law
and returned from the fields of Moab,
for she heard in the fields of Moab
that God had taken note of *God's* people,
granting them food *after the ten-year famine*.

⁷ She left the place
she had been
with her two daughters-in-law,
and they took the road
to return to the district of Judah.

⁸ Naomi told her two daughters-in-law,
“Go on, go back,
each *of you* to her mother’s house.

May God treat you *as* kindly

as you have treated the dead, and me.

⁹ May God grant you—

may you find rest,

as a wife in her husband’s house.”³

She kissed them,

and they *all* wept aloud.⁴

¹⁰ They answered her,

“But we’ll go back with you to your people!”

¹¹ Naomi said, “Go back, my daughters.

Why would you go with me?

Do I still have sons in my womb

who can become your husbands?

וַתָּקָם הִיא וּבָלֹתֶיהָ
וַתָּשָׁב מִשְׂדֵּי מוֹאָב
כִּי שָׁמָעָה בַּשָּׂדֶה מוֹאָב
כִּי־פָקַד יְהוָה אֶת־עַמּוֹ
לָתֵת לָהֶם לֶחֶם
וַתֵּצֵא מִן־הַמָּקוֹם
אֲשֶׁר הָיְתָה־שָׁמָּה
וּשְׁתֵּי בָלֹתֶיהָ עִמָּהּ
וַתֵּלַכְנָה בַּדֶּרֶךְ
לָשׁוּב אֶל־אֶרֶץ יְהוּדָה
וַתֹּאמֶר נָעֻמִּי לְשְׁתֵּי בָלֹתֶיהָ
לָכְנָה שְׁבֹנָה
אִשָּׁה לְבֵית אִמָּהּ
יַעֲשֵׂי יְהוָה עִמָּכֶם חֶסֶד
כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתֶם עִם־הַמֵּתִים וְעִמָּדִי
יֵתֵן יְהוָה לָכֶם
וּמִצָּאֻן מְנוּחָה
אִשָּׁה בֵּית אִשָּׁה
וַתִּשָּׁק לָהֶן
וַתִּשְׁאַנֶּה קוֹלָן וַתִּבְכֶּינָה
וַתֹּאמְרֶנָּה־לָּהּ
כִּי־אֵתָךְ נָשׁוּב לְעַמָּךְ
וַתֹּאמֶר נָעֻמִּי שְׁבֹנָה בְּנֹתַי
לָמָּה תֵּלַכְנָה עִמִּי
הֲעוֹד־לִי בָנִים בְּמִעִי
וְהָיוּ לָכֶם לְאָנָשִׁים

Vatakam hi vechaloteha
vatashav misdei Mo'av
ki shamah bisdei Mo'av
ki fakad Adonai et amo,
latet lahem lachem.
Vatetzeh min hamakom
asher haytah shamah,
ushte chaloteha imah,
vatelachnah vaderech
lashuv el eretz Yehudah.
Vatomer Na'omi lishte chaloteha,
“Lechnah, shovnah,
ishah leveit imah;
ya'as Adonai imachem chesed
ka'asher asitem im hametim ve'imadi.
Yiten Adonai lachem
umetzna menuchah,
ishah beit ishah.”
Vatishak lahen,
vatisena kolan, vativkenah.
Vatomarna lah,
“Ki itach nashuv le'amech!”
Vatomer Na'omi, “Shovnah, venotai.
Lamah telachnah imi?
Ha'od li vanim beme'ai
vehayu lachem la'anashim?

¹ Today Jewish mourners sit on low chairs and “rise from mourning” when the most intense period of mourning (Shivah) is concluded. Perhaps Na’omi rose from mourning in a similar fashion.

² A manuscript version would have the spelling יַעֲשֵׂה, which would not change the meaning significantly.

³ Na’omi wishes them the security of a new husband.

⁴ “They raised their voices and wept.”

¹² Go back, my daughters, go on,
for I'm too old to be with a man.
If I could say I had *any* hope
that even tonight I'd be with a man
and *that* I'd even bear sons,
¹³ would you wait around for them¹
until they were grown?
Would you keep yourselves for them,
and not be with *any other* man?²
Don't *do it*, my daughters.
I feel terrible for you³
that God's power has *so* affected me."⁴
¹⁴ They wept aloud, again;
Orpah kissed her mother-in-law
while Rut clung to her.
¹⁵ Naomi said,
"Look, your sister-in-law went back
to her people and her gods.
Go back *too*, after your sister-in-law."

שׁוּבְנָהּ, וְנֹתַי, לֵכְנָהּ
כִּי זָקַנְתִּי מִחַיּוֹת לְאִישׁ
כִּי אִמַּרְתִּי יֵשֶׁשׁ לִי תִקְוָה
גַּם הַיּוֹמִי הַלַּיְלָה לְאִישׁ
וְגַם יִלְדֹתִי בָנִים
הֲלָהֶנּוּ תִשְׁבְּרֶנָּה
עַד אֲשֶׁר יִגְדְּלוּ
הֲלָהֶנּוּ תִעֲנֶנָּה
לְבִלְתִּי הָיוֹת לְאִישׁ
אֵל בְּנֹתַי
כִּי-מַר לִי מְאֹד מִכֶּם
כִּי-יָצָאָה בִּי יְדֵי-הוָה
וַתִּשְׁנֶה קוֹלִי וַתִּבְכֶּינָה עֹד
וַתִּשָּׁק עֹרְפָּהּ לַחֲמוֹתָהּ
וְרוּת דָּבְקָה בָּהּ
וַתֹּאמֶר
הִנֵּה שָׁבָה יְבִמְתִּי
אֶל-עַמָּהּ וְאֶל-אֱלֹהֶיהָ
שׁוּבִי אַחֲרַי יְבִמְתִּי
Shovnah, venotai, lechnah
ki zakanti mihyot le'ish
ki amarti yesh li tikvah
gam hayiti halaylah le'ish
vegam yaladti vanim,
halahen tesabernah
ad asher yigdalū?
Halahen te'agenah
levilti heyot le'ish?
Al, benotai,
ki mar li me'od mikem
ki yatzah vi yad Adonai."
Vatisenah kolan vativkenah od;
vatishak Orpah lachamotah
veRut davkah bah.
Vatomer,
"Hineh shavah yevimtech
el amah ve'el eloheha;
shuvi acharei yevimtech."

¹ Some say לָהֶן means "therefore" not "for them," because it's normally the feminine form of "for them." However, the word appears again in this verse and pretty obviously means "for them," referring to the sons that Na'omi can't have. In addition, Na'omi sometimes uses masculine pronouns for the women (לָכֶם in 1:11) so feminine pronouns for men seem part of her language. Maybe it's something she learned during ten years in Moab, and maybe Moabites were less particular about gender than modern grammarians.

² All the women seem very familiar with the Jewish institution of levirate marriage: if Na'omi had another son, he'd be obliged to marry the childless widows of his deceased brothers. Na'omi feels bad that her sons are gone and her daughters-in-law have no ready marriage prospect. The root עָנָן (hold, or keep) in תִּעֲנֶנָּה is the root for agunah, a woman who is not free to marry, either because her estranged husband refuses to grant a divorce and rabbinical authorities decline to intervene, or because her husband has disappeared.

³ "For bitter to me very much from you"; i.e., I feel rotten because of your situation.

⁴ "That it has gone out against me, the hand of God."

¹⁶ Rut replied,

“Don’t make me leave you
or go back from following you,
for where you go, I will go;
where you lodge, I will lodge;
your people *will be* my people;
your God *will be* my God.

¹⁷ Where you die, I *too* will die,
and there will I be buried;

may God make it so, now and in the future, כֹּחַ יַעֲשֶׂה יְהוָה לִי וְכֵן יִסִּיף,
that *only* death may part me from you.”¹ כִּי הַמָּוֶת יַפְרִיד בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶיךָ

¹⁸ Naomi realized

that Rut was determined to go with her,
so she gave up persuading her *to leave*.

¹⁹ They both went on

until they reached the food bank.

When they arrived at the food bank,
the whole town was surprised at them
and wondered, “Is this Naomi?”

²⁰ She told them,

“Don’t call me Naomi,

call me Marah²

for the Almighty has given me great bitterness.

²¹ I was full when I left

but God sent me back empty.

Why would you call me Naomi

וַתֹּאמֶר רֹוּת

אֶל-תִּפְגַּעִי בִי לְעֹזְבֶךָ

לָשׁוּב מֵאַחֲרָיִךְ

כִּי אֶל-אֲשֶׁר תֵּלְכִי אֵלַיְךָ

וּבֵאֲשֶׁר תֵּלִינִי אֲלֵינִי

עַמֶּךָ עָמִי

וְאֱלֹהֶיךָ אֱלֹהָי

בִּאֲשֶׁר תָּמוּתִי אָמוּת

וְשָׁם אֶקָּבֵר

כֹּחַ יַעֲשֶׂה יְהוָה לִי וְכֵן יִסִּיף

כִּי הַמָּוֶת יַפְרִיד בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶיךָ

וַתֵּרָא

כִּי-מִתְאַמֶּצֶת הִיא לֵלֶכֶת אִתָּהּ

וַתַּחְדַּל לְדַבֵּר אֵלֶיהָ

וַתֵּלַכְנָה שְׁתֵּיהֶם

עַד-בֹּאֲנָה בֵּית לָחֶם

וַיְהִי כַּבֹּאֲנָה בֵּית לָחֶם

וַתִּהְיֶה כָּל-הָעִיר עֲלֵיהֶן

וַתֹּאמְרֶנָּה הַזֹּאת נָעָמִי

וַתֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶן

אֶל-תִּקְרְנָה לִי נָעָמִי

קֶרֶן לִי מָרָא

כִּי-הֵמָּר שָׁדַי לִי מָאֵד

אֲנִי מְלֵאָה הָלַכְתִּי

וְרִיקָם הֵשִׁיבֵנִי יְהוָה

לָמָּה תִקְרְנָה לִי נָעָמִי

Vatomer Rut,

“Al tifge’i vi le’ozvech,

lashuv me’acharayich,

ki el asher tel’chi elech,

uva’asher talini alin,

amech ami

vElohayich Elohai.

Ba’asher tamuti amut

vesham ekaver;

ko ya’aseh Adonai li vecho yosif,

ki hamavet yafrid beini uveinech.”

Vatereh

ki mitametzet hi lalechet itah,

vatechdal ledaber eleha.

Vatelachna shteihem

ad bo’ana Beit Lachem,

vayehi kevo’ana Beit Lechem

vatehom kol ha’ir aleihen

vatomarna, “Hazot Na’omi?”

Vatomer aleihen,

“Al tikrena li Na’omi,

kerena li Marah

ki hemar Shadai li me’od.

Ani mele’ah halachti

vereikam heshivani Adonai.

Lamah tikrena li Na’omi

¹ “So may God do for me and so continue, that *only* death will make a division between me and you.”

² Na’omi from “delight,” Marah from “bitter.” Na’omi uses the feminine plural imperative so she’s talking to women. Hebrew speakers would probably say מָרָה, not מָרָא; they’d both sound the same in modern pronunciation, but perhaps the writer wants to show that Na’omi’s speech became a bit foreign.

since God has spoken against me
and the Almighty treated me badly?”
²² Naomi returned;
Rut the Moabite woman,
her daughter-in-law, *was* with her;
she returned from the fields of Moab;
they arrived at the food bank
at the beginning of the barley harvest.

וַיהוָה עָנָה בִּי
וַשְׁדַּי הִרָע לִי
וַתָּשָׁב נָעֲמִי
וְרוּת הַמּוֹאֲבִיָּה
כַּלְתָּהּ עִמָּהּ
הִשְׁבָּה מִשְׂדֵּי מוֹאָב
וַהֲמָהּ בָּאוּ בֵּית לֶחֶם
בְּתַחֲלַת קִצִּיר שְׁעִרִים

vAdonai anah vi
veShadai herah li?”
Vatashav Na’omi
veRut haMo’aviyah,
chalatah, imah;
hashavah misdei Mo’av;
vehemah ba’u Beit Lechem
bit’chilat ketzir se’orim.

Chapter 2

¹ Naomi had a friend of her husband’s,
a powerful man of wealth
from Elimelech’s family.
His name was Boaz.
² Rut the Moabite woman said
to Naomi,
“May I go to the *harvest* field
and gather *fallen stalks* among the sheaves
following a *reaper* who is kind to me.”²
She said to her, “Go on, my daughter.”
³ Off she went and arrived *at the field*
and gleaned *fallen stalks* in the field
following behind the reapers,
and it just happened that
the section of field belonged to Boaz,
who was of Elimelech’s family.

וּלְנַעֲמִי מוֹדַע לְאִשָּׁה
אִישׁ גִּבּוֹר חַיִּיל
מִמִּישְׁפַּחַת אֱלִימֶלֶךְ
וּשְׁמוֹ בּוֹאֵז
וַתֹּאמֶר רוּת הַמּוֹאֲבִיָּה
אֶל-נָעֲמִי
אֵלְכֶּה-נָּא הַשָּׂדֶה
וְאֶלְקָטָה בַּשִּׁבּוֹלִים
אַחַר אֲשֶׁר אֶמְצָא-חֵן בְּעֵינָיו
וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ לְכִי בְתִי
וַתֵּלֶךְ וַתָּבֹא
וַתִּלְקֹט בַּשָּׂדֶה
אַחֲרֵי הַקֹּצְרִים
וַיִּקֶּר מִקְרֶה
חֶלְקֵת הַשָּׂדֶה לְבּוֹאֵז
אֲשֶׁר מִמִּישְׁפַּחַת אֱלִימֶלֶךְ

UleNa’omi modah le’ishah,
ish gibor chayil
mimishpachat Elimelech,
ushemo Bo’az.
Vatomer Rut haMo’aviyah
el Na’omi,
“El’cha nah hasadeh
va’alakotah vashibolim
achar asher emtza chen be’einav.”
Vatomer lah, “Lechi, viti.”
Vatelech vatavo
vatlaket basadeh
acharei hakotzrim;
vayikar mikreh,
chelkat hasadeh leVo’az
asher mimishpachat Elimelech.

¹ A manuscript would have the unusual spelling מידע. The word seems related to words for knowing, so it may mean an acquaintance or friend. However, he is from Elimelech’s family so he’s an in-law.

² “After *him* who I’ll find favor in his eyes.” Lev 19:9 says harvesters must leave the “corners” of the field and the gleanings for the poor. Rut plans to follow one of the harvesters, and if he or she takes a liking to this destitute woman who is trying to provide for herself and her mother-in-law, maybe the harvester will drop a few extra stalks for Rut to pick up.

⁴ And here came Boaz from the food bank;
he greeted the reapers,
“God be with you,”
and they replied,
“May God bless you!”

⁵ Boaz said to his employee
who supervised the reapers,
“Whose girl is that?”

⁶ The worker answered
(the reapers’ supervisor) and said,
“She’s a Moabite girl
who came back with Naomi
from the fields of Moab.

⁷ She asked, ‘Please may I glean
and collect *stalks* among the sheaves,
following behind the reapers?’
She arrived, and she kept going
from early morning *right* up to now,
and she’s hardly taken a break in the shelter.”¹

⁸ Boaz said to Rut,
“Listen, dear.
Don’t go gleaning in any other field;
really, don’t leave this one,
but stick right here with my serving girls.”²
⁹ *Keep* your eyes on the field they reap
and walk *right* behind them.

וְהִנֵּה-בָּעַז בָּא מִבֵּית לֶחֶם
וַיֹּאמֶר לַקּוֹצְרִים
יְהוָה עִמָּכֶם
וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ
יְבָרֶכְךָ יְהוָה
וַיֹּאמֶר בֹּעַז לַנַּעֲרָה
הַנֹּצֵב עַל-הַקּוֹצְרִים
לְמִי הַנַּעֲרָה הַזֹּאת
וַיַּעַן הַנַּעֲרָה
הַנֹּצֵב עַל-הַקּוֹצְרִים וַיֹּאמֶר
נַעֲרָה מוֹאֲבִיָּה הִיא
הַשֹּׁבָה עִם-נָעֲמִי
מִשְׁדֵּה מוֹאָב
וַתֹּאמֶר אֲלֵקֶטָה נָא
וְאֶסְפֹּתִי בְעִמְרִים
אַחֲרֵי הַקּוֹצְרִים
וַתָּבוֹא וַתַּעֲמֹד
מֵאֵז הַבֹּקֶר וְעַד-עֹתָה
וְהָ שִׁבְתָּה בְּבֵית מְעֹט
וַיֹּאמֶר בֹּעַז אֶל-רוּת
הֲלוֹא שָׁמַעַתְּ בָּתִּי
אֶל-תֵּלְכִי לִלְקֹט בְּשָׂדֶה אֲחֵר
וְגַם לֹא תַעֲבֹרִי מִזֶּה
וְכֹה תִדְבָּקִין עִם-נַעֲרֹתַי
עֵינֶיךָ בְּשָׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר-יִקְצְרוּן
וְהִלַּכְתִּי אַחֲרֵיהֶן

Vehineh Vo’az bah mibeit lechem
vayomer lakotzrim,
“Adonai imachem,”
vayomru lo,
“Yevarechecha Adonai.”
Vayomer Bo’az lena’aro
hanitzav al hakotzrim,
“Lemi hana’arah hazot?”
Vaya’an hana’ar
hanitzav al hakotzrim, vayomar:
“Na’arah Mo’aviyah hi,
hashavah im Na’omi
misdeh Mo’av.
Vatomer, ‘Alakotah nah
ve’asafiti va’omarim
acharei hakotzrim’
vatavo vata’amod
me’az haboker ve’ad atah
zeh shivtah habayit me’at.
Vayomer Bo’az el Rut,
“Halo shamat biti,
al tel’chi lilkot besadeh acher,
vegam lo ta’avuri mizeh,
vecho tidbakin im na’arotai.
Einayich basadeh asher yiktzoron
vehalachhti achareihen.

¹ “This is her going back *to* the building a little”

² “Have you not heard, my daughter? Do not go to glean in a different field. Also, you shall not pass from this *one*. And here shall you stick (דָּבַק is glue in modern Hebrew) with my girls.” To refer to the reapers, Boaz uses the feminine pronoun but the “workers” he mentions are male, so presumably the women did the work and the men made trouble.

Don't worry, I've told the male workers¹
not to bother you.

If you're thirsty, go to the *water* jugs
and drink from *the water* that
the male workers have drawn.

¹⁰ She fell to her knees and bowed low²
and said to him,

"Why do you treat me *so* well

and acknowledge me, when I'm *just* a foreigner!"³

¹¹ Boaz responded and told her,

"I heard—they told me⁴—all you did
for your mother-in-law

after the death of your husband:

how you left your father and mother

and your native land

and went to a people you'd never known
ever before.

¹² May God reward your deed,
may you get all that you deserve⁵

from God, the God of Israel,

under whose wing you came for shelter.⁶

הִלֹּא צִוִּיתִי אֶת־הַעֲבָדִים

לִבְלֹתִי נֹגֵעַךְ

וְצִמְתְּ וְהִלַּכְתְּ אֶל־הַכֵּלִים

וְשָׁתִית מֵאֲשֶׁר

יִשְׁאֲבוּן הַעֲבָרִים

וַתִּפֹּל עַל־פָּנֶיהָ וַתִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה אֶרְצָהּ

וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו

מָדוּעַ מַצָּאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ

לְהַכִּירֵנִי וְאֲנֹכִי נִכְרִיָּה

וַיַּעַן בָּעוֹז וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ

הִגַּד הִגַּד לִי כָל־אֲשֶׁר־עָשִׂיתְ

אֶת־חַמּוֹתֶיךָ

אַחֲרֵי מוֹת אִישֶׁךָ

וַתַּעֲזָבִי אָבִיךָ וְאִמֶּךָ

וְאֶרֶץ מוֹלַדְתְּךָ

וַתֵּלְכִי אֶל־עַם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדַעְתְּ

תְּמוֹל שִׁלְשׁוֹם

יִשְׁלַם יְהוָה פְּעֻלָּךְ

וַתְּהִי מִשְׁכֻּרְתֶּךָ שְׁלֵמָה

מֵעַם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

אֲשֶׁר־בָּאת לַחֲסוֹת תַּחַת־כְּנָפָיו

Halo tziviti et hane'arim

levilti nog'ech.

Vetzamit, vehalacht el hakelim

veshatit me'asher

yish'avun hane'arim.

Vatipol al paneha vatishtachu artzah

vatomer elav,

"Madu'a matzati chen be'einecha

lehakireni, va'anochi nochriyah?"

Vaya'an Bo'az vayomer lah,

"Hugad, hugad li kol asher asit

et chamotech

acharei mot ishech,

vata'azvi avich ve'imech

ve'erez moladtech,

vatel'chi el am asher lo yada'at

temol shilshom.

Yeshalem Adonai po'olech

utehi maskurtech shelemah

me'im Adonai, Elohei Yisra'el,

asher bat lachasot tachat kenafav.

³ This is an anomalous grammatical form. You might want to change this to "vehalacht" without the final *i*, the usual feminine form for "and you shall go." However, in verse 11 Boaz uses verbs ending in *i* (with a ם), usually a feminine imperative, to describe Rut's completed (not future) actions. Following the principle of *durior lectio* (accept a difficult reading because transcription errors favor familiar forms), one keeps the anomalous form.

¹ "Haven't I told the workers?"

² "She fell on her face and bowed to the ground"; obviously, once you're on your face you can't bow any lower, so this is an idiom to describe assuming a submissive position.

³ "Why have I found favor in your eyes, to acknowledge me, and I'm a foreign woman?" I don't think she asks him the question but instead wonders out loud how this could happen.

⁴ "It was told, it was told to me"

⁵ "May your payment be complete"

⁶ "that you have come to find shelter under *God's* wings"

¹³ She said, “I’ll seek your *continued* favor,
sir, for you have reassured me
and spoken to the heart of
this female worker,
though *as a foreigner* I couldn’t *really* be
like one of your female workers.”

¹⁴ Boaz said to her,
“At mealtime, come over here;
share our food
and dip your bread in the sauce.”¹
She sat next to the reapers
while he passed her parched corn.²
She ate until she was full, and had leftovers!

¹⁵ She got up *after the meal break* to glean more,
but Boaz instructed his male workers:
“She can glean right among the sheaves,³
so don’t scold her,

¹⁶ And you can drop *some stalks* for her
from the bunches *in your hand*, and leave *them*
so she can glean them, and don’t tell her off.”

¹⁷ She gleaned in the field until evening
and threshed what she had gleaned;
it was about five gallons⁴ of barley!

¹⁸ She carried it back to town
where her mother-in-law saw
how much she had gleaned;

וְתֹאמֶר אֶמְצָא חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ
אֲדֹנִי כִּי נִחַמְתָּנִי
וְכִי דִבַּרְתָּ עַל-לֵב
שִׁפְחָתֶךָ
וְאֲנֹכִי לֹא אֶחְיָה
כְּאַחַת שִׁפְחוֹתֶיךָ
וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ בֹּא
לֶעֱת הָאֶכֶל וְנָשִׂי הָלֶם
וְאָכַלְתְּ מִן-הַלֶּחֶם
וְשִׁבַּלְתְּ פִתֶּךָ בַּחֲמֹץ
וַתֵּשֶׁב מִצַּד הַקּוֹצְרִים
וַיַּצִּיב־לָהּ קָלִי
וַתֹּאכַל וַתִּשְׂבַּע וַתֵּתֶר
וַתָּקֶם לִלְקֹט
וַיֵּצֵא בֹאֵז אֶת-נַעֲרָיו לֵאמֹר
גַּם בֵּין הָעֵמָרִים תִּלְקֹט
וְלֹא תְכַלְמֶנָּהּ
וְגַם שֹׁל-תִשְׁלֹו לָהּ
מִן-הַצִּבּוֹתִים וַעֲזַבְתֶּם
וְלִקְטָהּ וְלֹא תוֹעֲרוּ-בָּהּ
וַתִּלְקֹט בַּשָּׂדֶה עַד-הָעָרֶב
וַתַּחֲבֹט אֶת אֲשֶׁר-לִקְטָהּ
וַיְהִי כְּאַיִפָּה שְׁעִרִים
וַתִּשָּׂא וַתָּבוֹא הָעִיר
וַתֵּרֶא חַמּוֹתָהּ
אֶת אֲשֶׁר-לִקְטָהּ

Vatomer, “Emtzah chen be’einecha,
adoni, ki nichamtani
vechi dibarta al lev
shifchatecha,
ve’anochi lo ehych
ke’achat shifchotecha.
Vayomer lah Vo’az,
“Le’et ha’ochel, goshi halom,
ve’achalt min halechem
vetavalt pitech bachometz.”
Vateshev mitzad hakotzrim,
vayitzbat lah kali
vatochal vatisbah, vatotar.
Vatakam lelaket,
vayetzav Bo’az et ne’arav lemor:
“Gam bein ha’omarim telaket
velo tachlimuha.
vegam shol tasholu lah
min hatzevatim, va’azavtem,
veliktah, velo tigaruh.”
Vatlaket basadeh ad ha’arev,
vatachbot et asher liketah,
vayehi ke’ephah se’orim.
Vatisah vatavo ha’ir
vatereh chamotah
et asher liketah,

¹ “At the time for eating, come close over here; and you can eat from the bread/food (*i.e.*, our food) and you can dip your bread in the sauce/vinegar (presumably the bread was the main part of the food, flavored with sauce).”

² Like sharing popcorn in the movies; isn’t he sweet?

³ Boaz means that Rut can keep level with the reapers instead of following behind them like the other paupers.

⁴ “About an ephah”

she brought out and gave her
the leftovers from eating her fill *earlier*.

¹⁹ Her mother-in-law said to her,
“Where were you gleaning today,
where were you doing *it*?
Blessed be the man who permitted you.”¹
She told her mother-in-law
how she had acted with him and said,
“The name of the man I dealt with
today is Boaz.”

²⁰ Naomi said to her daughter-in-law,
“May he be blessed by God
who has not abandoned *God’s* kindness
with the living and the dead.”

Naomi *also* said to her,
“That man is close to us. He’s family.”²

²¹ Said Rut the Moabite woman,
“What’s more, he told me,
‘Stick to my male workers
until they finish all my harvest.’”

²² Naomi said to her daughter-in-law Rut,
“That’s fine, dear,
if you go out with his female workers,
so long as they don’t attack³ you
in some other field.”

וַתוֹצֵא וַתִּיתֶן לָהּ
אֶת אֲשֶׁר־הוֹתִירָה מִשִּׁבְעָהּ
וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ חַמּוֹתָהּ
אֵיפֹה לִקְטֹתָ הַיּוֹם
וְאַנָּה עָשִׂית
יְהִי מִכִּירֶךְ בָּרוּךְ
וַתֵּגֵד לַחַמּוֹתָהּ
אֶת אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂתָה עִמּוֹ וַתֹּאמֶר
שֵׁם הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי עִמּוֹ
הַיּוֹם בֹּזַז
וַתֹּאמֶר נָעֳמִי לְכַלָּתָהּ
בָּרוּךְ הוּא לַיהוָה
אֲשֶׁר לֹא־עָזַב חַסְדּוֹ
אֶת־הַחַיִּים וְאֶת־הַמֵּתִים
וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ נָעֳמִי
קָרוֹב לָנוּ הָאִישׁ מִנְּאֻלָּנוּ הוּא
וַתֹּאמֶר רוּת חַמּוֹאֲבִיָּה
גַּם אִי־אָמַר אֵלַי
עַם־הַנְּעָרִים אֲשֶׁר־לִי תִדְבְּקִין
עַד אִם־כָּלוּ אֶת כָּל־הַקֹּצִיר אֲשֶׁר־לִי
וַתֹּאמֶר נָעֳמִי אֶל־רוּת כַּלָּתָהּ
טוֹב בְּחַי
כִּי תֵצֵאִי עִם־נְעוּרוֹתָיו
וְלֹא יִפְגְּעוּ־בְךָ
בְּשָׂדֶה אַחֵר
vatotzeh vatiten lah
et asher hotirah misavah.
Vatomer lah chamotah,
“Eifah likat’t hayom
ve’anah asit?
Yehi makirech baruch!”
Vataged lachamotah
et asher astah imo, vatomer,
“Shem ha’ish asher asiti imo
hayom Bo’az.”
Vatomer Na’omi lechalatah,
“Baruch hu lAdonai
asher lo azav chasdo
et hachayim ve’et hametim.”
Vatomer lah Na’omi,
“Karov lanu ha’ish; migo’alenu hu.”
Vatomer Rut haMo’aviyah,
“Gam ki amar elai,
‘Im hane’arim asher li tidbakin
ad im kilu et kol hakatzir asher li.”
Vatomer Na’omi el Rut kalatah,
“Tov, biti,
ki tetzi im na’arotav
velo yifge’u vach
besadeh acher.”

¹ “Blessed be the one who acknowledged you”—Boaz saw her and gave her favored status in his field; her right to glean was not in question.

² Boaz is related to Naomi’s husband Elimelech (1:3); Naomi now says he’s close enough to do something for her and Rut. (Lev. 25:25 says that when a poor person has to sell land, close family should buy it back.) If Elimelech went to Moab because he had to sell his land, Naomi sees a chance that family will (at last) help.

³ Or “meet,” but Naomi seems concerned about some kind of threat to Rut.

²³ So she gleaned with Boaz' female workers¹ וַתִּדְבַּק בְּנִעְרוֹת בֹּעַז לְלֶקֶט Vatidbak bena'arot Bo'az lelaket
until the barley harvest was completed— עַד־כְּלוֹת קִצִּיר־הַשְּׁעָרִים ad kelot ketzir hase'orim
and the wheat harvest, *too*— וּקְצִיר הַחֲטִיטִּים uketzir hachitim,
and she lived with her mother-in-law. וַתֵּשֶׁב אֶת־חֲמוּתָהּ vateshev et chomatah.

Chapter 3

¹ Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ נָעֲמִי חֲמוּתָהּ Vatomer lah Na'omi chamotah,
“My dear, aren't I looking to get you a break בִּיתִי הֲלֹא אֲבַקֶּשׁ־לָךְ מְנוּחָה “Biti, halo avakesh lach mano'ach
that will do you *a world of* good! אֲשֶׁר יִיטַב־לָךְ asher yitav lach!
² Now, isn't Boaz someone we know וְעַתָּה הֲלֹא בֹעַז מֵדַעְתָּנוּ Ve'atah, halo Vo'az modatanu,
(you were with his female workers);² אֲשֶׁר הָיִית אֶת־נִעְרוֹתָיו asher hayit et na'arotav;
Look, he'll be winnowing הִנֵּה־הוּא זֹרֵה hineh hu zoreh
at the barley-threshing floor³ tonight. אֶת־גֶּרֶן הַשְּׁעָרִים הַלַּיְלָה et goren hase'orim halaylah.
³ Have a wash, put on some lotion,⁴ וְרַחֲצֵתָּ וְסָכַתָּ Verachatzt vasacht
put on your *good* clothes וְשִׁמְתָּ שִׁמְלֹתַיִךְ עָלֶיךָ vesamt simlotayich alayich,
and go down to the threshing floor. וַיֵּרָדָתָּ הַגֶּרֶן veyarad't hagoren.
Don't let the man know *you're there* אַל־תִּדְעִי לְאִישׁ Al tivadi la'ish
until he's finished eating and drinking. עַד כִּלְתּוֹ לֶאֱכֹל וְלִשְׁתּוֹת ad kaloto le'echol velishtot.

¹ “And she stuck with the female workers of Boaz to glean.”

² You wouldn't think Naomi needs to remind Rut who Boaz is. Maybe Naomi is reminding herself how well things are going between Rut and Boaz.

³ For threshing (separating grain from chaff, usually by bashing it with a flail or stomping on it) and winnowing (blowing off the chaff) you could use a flat area outside so the wind could carry away the chaff.

⁴ Before the practice of a daily shower, people used to bathe and oil themselves. I think bathing was optional.

⁵ A manuscript has the spelling שְׂמִלְתֶּךָ, which could be singular whereas שְׂמִלְתֶּיךָ looks like plural garments.

⁶ A manuscript has the word וַיִּרְדֵּי, “I will go,” as if Naomi will be right with Rut for this expedition.

⁴ When he lies down *to sleep*,

take note of the place

where he is going to lie down;

then go, follow his footsteps;¹ lie down,

and he will tell you what to do.

⁵ Rut answered Naomi,

“I’ll do exactly what you tell me.”

⁶ She went down to the threshing-floor

and did everything

her mother-in-law told her.

⁷ Boaz ate, drank and felt good.³

He went to lie by the last row of sheaves.⁴

She crept in,⁵

followed his footsteps and lay down.

⁸ In the middle of the night,

the man *woke up* trembling; he turned

and—look!—there was a woman lying in

his footsteps.

וַיְהִי בְשָׁכְבוֹ

וַיֵּדַעַת אֶת־הַמָּקוֹם

אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכַּב־שָׁם

וַבָּאָת וַנִּלְיֵת מִרְגְּלֹתָיו וְשָׁכַבְתִּי

וְהוּא יַגִּיד לָךְ אֶת אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשִׂין

וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ

כָּל אֲשֶׁר־תֹּאמַרְי אֵלַי אֲעֵשֶׂה

וַתֵּרֶד הָגֶרֶן

וַתַּעַשׂ כְּכֹל

אֲשֶׁר־צִוְּתָהּ חַמּוּתָהּ

וַיֹּאכַל בָּעֵז וַיִּשְׁתַּ וַיֵּיטֵב לָבֹ

וַיָּבֹא לִשְׁכַב בִּקְצֵה הָעֵרֶמָּה

וַתֵּבֵא בַלַּט

וַתֵּגַל מִרְגְּלֹתָיו וַתִּשְׁכַּב

וַיְהִי בַחֲצֵי הַלַּיְלָה

וַיַּחֲרֹד הָאִישׁ וַיִּלָּפֶת

וַהֲנִיחַ אִשָּׁה שֹׁכֶכֶת

מִרְגְּלֹתָיו

Vayehi veshochvo,

veyada’at et hamakom

asher yishkav sham;

uvat vegilit margelotav, veshachavt;

vehu yagid lach et asher ta’asin.

Vatomer eleha,

“Kol asher tomri elai e’eseh.”

Vatered hagoren,

vata’as kechol

asher tzivatah chamotah.

Vayochal Bo’az vayesht, vayitav libo

vayavo lishkav biktzeh ha’aremah.

Vatavo valat

vatgal margelotav, vatishkav.

Vayehi bachatzi halaylah

vayecherad ha’ish vayilafet

vehineh ishah shochevet

margelotav.

¹ The word for “follow” is from the root גלה, “uncover/reveal” (or “send into exile”); Naomi tells Rut to be clear (uncover”) which way he went; Rashi points out that Boaz would sleep by his crop to protect it from thieves. מִרְגְּלֹתָיו is a fancy word from the root רגל, foot or leg; if it means “his feet,” you’d expect the dual plural, so some scholars think it refers to the place where his feet have been, his footsteps. Some think “follow his footsteps” really means “uncover his feet,” the lower part of his bed covering; according to Ex. 22:27 or B.T. Ketuvot 48a, people used to remove their daytime garment and use it as a blanket. (מִרְגְּלֹתָיו could also mean “his pearls/jewels,” from מִרְגְּלִית, pearl, but I’m too naïve to know what that might mean, and as for you, you should stop snickering.)

² A manuscript has the word ושכבתי, “I will lie down,” as if Naomi is taking responsibility for what Rut does.

³ “And his heart was good.”

⁴ “At the edge of the sheaves (the word for sheaves is singular, but it’s used as a collective noun).” The harvest was complete (2:22) so the reapers had stacked it into sheaves, so there was lots of threshing still to do.

⁵ “And she came quietly.”

⁹ He said, “Who are you?”

She answered, “I’m Rut. I’m your servant.

Spread your cloak over *me*, your servant,
for you can help *us*.”¹

¹⁰ He said, “God bless you, my dear.²

You’ve done the right thing.

You’re even kinder now than before;³
you’re not chasing the young fellows,
whether poor or rich.

¹¹ So now, my dear,⁴ don’t worry;

all that you ask, I’ll do for you,

for the whole town knows⁵

that you’re a good woman.

¹² Yes, it’s true

that I’m family;

still, someone else is closer family than I.

¹³ Stay the night *here*.

In the morning, if he acts as family should,
fine, let him be family.

And if he doesn’t want to act as your family
then I’ll be family for you, I swear it.⁷

So lie *here* until morning.”

וַיֹּאמֶר מִי־אַתָּה

וַתֹּאמֶר אֲנֹכִי רוּת אַמְטֶחָהּ

וּפְרַשְׁתָּ כְנָפֶיךָ עַל־אֲמָתֶיךָ

כִּי גֹאֵל אַתָּה

וַיֹּאמֶר בְּרוּכָה אַתָּה לַיהוָה בְּתִי

הֵיטֵבָהּ

חֲסִדֶּיךָ הָאֲחֵרֹן מִן־הָרִאשׁוֹן

לְבִלְתִּי־לֶכֶת אַחֲרֵי הַבָּחֻרִים

אִם־דָּל וְאִם־עָשִׁיר

וַעֲתָה בְתִי אֶל־תִּירְאִי

כֹּל אֲשֶׁר־תֹּאמְרִי אֶעֱשֶׂה־לָּךְ

כִּי יוֹדֵעַ כָּל־שָׂעַר עָמִי

כִּי אִשֶּׁת חַיִּיל אַתָּה

וַעֲתָה כִּי אֹמְנָם

כִּי־גֹאֵל אֲנֹכִי

וְגַם יֵשׁ גֹּאֵל קָרוֹב מִמֶּנִּי

לִינִי | הַלַּיְלָה

וְהָיָה בְּבֹקֶר אִם־יִגְאָלֶךָ

טוֹב יִגָּל

וְאִם־לֹא יַחְפֹּץ לְגַאֲלֶךָ

וְגִאֲלִיתִיךָ אֲנֹכִי חַי־יהוָה

שְׁכִבִי עַד־הַבֹּקֶר

Vayomer, “Mi at?”

Vatomer, “Anochi Rut, amatecha,

ufarasta chenafecha al amat’cha

ki go’el atah.”

Vayomer, “Beruchah at lAdonai, biti.

Hetavt.

Chasdech ha’acharon min harishon

levilti lechet acharei habachurim,

im dal ve’im ashir.

Ve’atah, biti, al tiri;

kol asher tomri, e’eseh lach,

ki yode’ah kol sha’ar ami

ki eshet chayil at.

Ve’ata ki omnam

ki go’el anochi

vegam yesh go’el karov mimeni.

Lini halaylah

vehayah vaboker im yigalech,

tov, yigal;

ve’im lo yachpotz lega’olech

uge’altich anochi, chai Adonai.

Shichvi ad haboker.

¹ “For you are a redeemer.” Lev 25:25 says that when a poor person is forced to sell land, family should buy it back. This keeps land in the family and shows how family should help each other.

² “Blessed may you be to God, my daughter.”

³ “Your later kindness *is more than* the first *kindness*.” Her first kindness was being nice to Naomi. The later kindness is being nice to Boaz—choosing him instead of going for a young fellow.

⁴ “My daughter.”

⁵ “For all the gate of my people.” Gate stands for city, an instance of synecdoche like “a sail!” for a ship.

⁶ A manuscript inserts the word אִם. It’s not pronounced or translated.

⁷ “As God lives,” quite an oath to take!

¹⁴ She slept in his footsteps until morning	וַתִּשָּׁכַב מִרְגְּלוֹתָיו עַד-הַבֹּקֶר	Vatishkav margelotav ad haboker,
and got up before <i>it was light enough that</i>	וַתָּקָם בְּטָרֶם ²	vatakam betereṁ
anyone could recognize a friend,	יָכִיר אִישׁ אֶת-רֵעֵהוּ,	yakir ish et re'ehu,
while he thought, “I hope no-one finds out ³	וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-יְהוָה	vayomer, “Al yivada
that this woman came to the threshing-floor!”	כִּי-בָאָה הָאִשָּׁה הַזֹּאת	ki va’ah ha’ishah hagoren.”
¹⁵ He said <i>to her</i> ,	וַיֹּאמֶר	Vayomer,
“bring <i>me</i> the cloak you’re wearing, ⁴	הָכִי הַמְּטַפַּחַת אֲשֶׁר-עָלֶיךָ	“Havi hamitpachat asher alayich
and hold it out.”	וְאֶחֱזִי-בָהּ	ve’echozi vah.”
So she held it out, while he measured <i>into it</i>	וַתֵּאָחֶז בָּהּ וַיִּמַּד	Vatochez bah, vayamad
six <i>measures</i> of barley	שֵׁשׁ-שְׁעָרִים	shesh se’orim
and placed it on her and went into town. ⁵	וַיִּשֶׁת עָלֶיהָ וַיָּבֹא הָעִיר	vayashet aleha vayavo ha’ir.
¹⁶ She came to her mother-in-law,	וַתָּבוֹא אֶל-חַמּוֹתָהּ	Vatavo el chamotah
who said, “Who are you, my dear?” ⁶	וַתֹּאמֶר מִי-אַתְּ בִּתִּי	vatomer, “Mi at, biti?”
<i>Rut</i> told her everything that	וַתַּגֵּד-לָהּ אֶת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר	Vataged lah et kol asher
the man had done for her.	עָשָׂה-לָּהּ הָאִישׁ	asah lah ha’ish.
¹⁷ <i>Rut</i> said, “These six <i>measures</i> of barley	וַתֹּאמֶר שֵׁשׁ-הַשְּׁעָרִים הָאֵלֶּה	Vatomer, “Shesh hase’orim ha’eleh
he gave me as he said to me,	נָתַן לִי כִי אָמַר אֵלַי	natan li ki amar elai,
‘Don’t go empty-handed	אֶל-תָּבוֹאִי רֵיקָם	‘Al tavo’i reikam
to your mother-in-law.”	אֶל-חַמּוֹתֶךָ	el chamotech.”

¹ A manuscript version has the unusual spelling מרגלותיו in this instance; the accepted spelling מרגלותיו is also unusual because of the dot on the final letter, מרגלותיו; as you can just see in the codex: מרגלותיו

² A manuscript version has the unusual spelling בטרם.

³ “Let *it* not be known.”

⁴ “Which is upon you.”

⁵ (If she slept in her cloak and nothing else, this could be awkward.) He gives her all this barley perhaps as a bonanza to a destitute woman, or perhaps so she’ll look like she’s been at work and not sleeping close to Boaz. Some translators say she and not he went back to town, though the Hebrew word is masculine. Boaz might have gone back to town because he didn’t need to guard his crop in daylight—his workers would be out threshing during the daylight hours.

⁶ “My daughter.” Naomi pretends not to recognize Rut because she’s loaded with merchandise.

¹⁸ Naomi said, “Sit down, my dear,
until you find out
how things will turn out.¹
Boaz won’t rest
unless he settles this matter today.”

וַתֹּמֶר שְׁבִי בְתִי
עַד אֲשֶׁר תֵּדְעִין
אֵיךְ יִפֹּל דָּבָר
כִּי לֹא יִשְׁקֹט הָאִישׁ
כִּי־אִם־כָּלֶה הַדָּבָר הַיּוֹם
Vatomer, “Shevi, viti,
ad asher ted’in
eich yipol davar.
Ki lo yishkot ha’ish
ki im kilah hadavar hayom.”

Chapter 4

¹ Boaz went up to the *town* gate
and sat down there.
Here came the *other* relative
of whom Boaz had spoken.
Boaz said, “Come and sit over here,
what’s-your-name the widower”;
he came over and sat down.
² Boaz gathered ten
of the town elders
and said “Sit here”; they sat down.
³ Boaz said to the *other* family member,
“The piece of land
that belonged to Elimelech our relative,
Naomi sold it,
Naomi who came back from the fields of Moab.

וַבַּעֲזָאֵל הָשַׁעַר
וַיֵּשֶׁב שָׁם
וַהֲנִיחַ הַגָּאֵל עֹבֵר
אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר־בָּעֻז
וַיֹּמֶר סוּרָה שְׁבַח־פֹּה
פְּלוֹנִי אֱלֹמוֹנִי
וַיָּסֶר וַיֵּשֶׁב
וַיִּקָּח עֲשָׂרָה אָנָשִׁים
מִזִּיקְנֵי הָעִיר
וַיֹּמֶר שְׁבִי־פֹה וַיֵּשְׁבוּ
וַיֹּמֶר לַגָּאֵל
חֶלֶקֶת הַשָּׂדֶה
אֲשֶׁר לְאַחִינִי לְאֵלִימֶלֶךְ
מִכְרָה נָעָמִי
הַשְׁבָּה מִשְׂדֵּה מוֹאָב
הַשְׁבָּה מִשְׂדֵּה מוֹאָב
UVo’az alah hasha’ar
vayeshev sham,
vehineh hago’el over,
asher diber Bo’az,
vayomer, “Surah, shevah po,
ploni almoni”;
vayasar vayeshev.
Vayikach asarah anashim
miziknei ha’ir
vayomer, “Shevu fo”; vayeshevu.
Vayomer lagoonel,
“Chelkat hasadeh
asher le’achinu, le’Elimelech,
machrah Na’omi,
hashavah misdei Mo’av.

⁴ I thought I’d say this in public:²
Buy *it*, in the presence of those seated,
in the presence of our people’s elders.
If you *want to* buy it back, *then* buy it back;
if you won’t buy it back,
tell me, and I’ll know.

וָאֲנִי אֹמְרָתִי אֶגְלֶה אוֹזְנֶךָ לְאָמֹר
קִנֵּה נֶגֶד הַיּוֹשִׁבִים
וַנִּגַּד זִקְנֵי עָמִי
אִם־תִּגָּאֵל גָּאֵל
וְאִם־לֹא יִגָּאֵל
הַגִּידָה לִּי וְאֶדְעָה
Va’ani amarti, egleh oznecha, lemor:
‘Keneh neged hayoshvim
veneged ziknei ami.
Im tigel, ge’al,
ve’im lo yigal,
hagidah li ve’edah.

¹ “How the matter will fall.”

² “And I said I will reveal *to* your ears, saying.”

³ A manuscript version has the unusual spelling ואדע

No-one has a better right to buy back *the land*,¹
but I'm next to you *in line*.”

The other relative answered, “I'll buy it back.”

⁵ Then Boaz said,

“On the day you buy that land,
from Naomi—

and from Rut the Moabite woman,
the dead man's wife—you'll have bought it,
to perpetuate the dead man's name
on his legacy.”

⁶ The *other* relative said,

“I can't buy it back, *to make it mine*,
lest I damage my *own* legacy.”³

You can take over my option
because I can't exercise it.⁴

⁷ This is how, in former times in Israel,

they handled buying back *property*

and transfer of *property options*,

to settle any *such* transaction:

one party would take off his shoe
and give it to the other.

This was the public acknowledgement in Israel.

⁸ The *other* relative said to Boaz,

“You can buy it.” So *Boaz* pulled off his shoe.

⁹ Boaz said to the elders

כִּי אֵין זִילְתָּהּ לְגֹאֵל

וְאֲנֹכִי אַחֲרָיָהּ

וַיֹּאמֶר אָנֹכִי אֶגָּאֵל

וַיֹּאמֶר בֹּעַז

בְּיוֹם כְּנוֹת'כָּהּ הַשָּׂדֶה

מִיַּד נָעֻמִּי

וְמוֹעֲבִיָּהּ

אִשֶּׁת הַמֵּת קָנִיתָהּ²

לְהַקִּים שֵׁם הַמֵּת

עַל־נַחֲלָתוֹ

וַיֹּאמֶר הַגֹּאֵל

לֹא אוּכַל לְגָאֵל־לִי

כִּי אֲשַׁחֲיֵת אֶת־נַחֲלָתִי

גֵּאֹל־לָךְ אַתָּה אֶת־גֵּאֻלָּתִי

כִּי לֹא־אוּכַל לְגָאֵל

וְזֹאת לִפְנֵים בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל

עַל־הַגֹּאֻלָּה

וְעַל־הַתְּמוּרָה

לְקַיֵּם כָּל־דָּבָר

שָׁלַף אִישׁ נַעְלוֹ

וְנָתַן לְרֵעֵהוּ

וְזֹאת הַתְּעוּדָה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל

וַיֹּאמֶר הַגֹּאֵל לְבֹעַז

קְנֵה־לָךְ וַיִּשְׁלַף נַעְלוֹ

וַיֹּאמֶר בֹּעַז לְזִקְנֵים

Ki ein zulat'cha ligol,

va'anochi acharecha.”

Vayomer, “Anochi egal.”

Vayomer Bo'az,

“Beyom kenot'cha hasadeh

miyad Na'omi—

ume'et Rut haMo'avayah,

eshet hamet—kanita

lehakim shem hamet

al nachalato.”

Vayomer hago'el,

“Lo uchal ligal li

pen ash'chit et nachalati.

Ge'al lecha atah et ge'ulati

ki lo uchal ligol.”

Vezot lefanim beYisra'el

al hage'ulah

ve'al hatemurah

lekayem kol davar:

shalaf ish na'alo

venatan lere'ehu,

vezot hate'udah beYisra'el.

Vayomer hago'el leVo'az,

“Keneh lach.” Vayishlof na'alo.

Vayomer Bo'az lazkenim

¹ “For there is none except you to redeem.”

² A manuscript version reads קניתי, “I have bought.”

³ He's concerned that he'll spend his children's inheritance to buy back this plot of land, and it won't go to them but to Rut's future children. Even if he marries Rut so that her children are his children, he's worried that his grown children will give him trouble for diluting their future inheritance. Children! What can you say?

⁴ “Buy back for yourself my *right of* buying *it* back, because I can't buy it back.”

⁵ A manuscript version reads לגאול.

and all the people *present*,

“Today, you are witnesses that I bought
all of Elimelech’s *property*—
with all of Chilyon’s and Machlon’s—
from Naomi.¹

¹⁰ What’s more, Rut the Moabiteess,

wife of Machlon, have I acquired as my wife,
to perpetuate the dead man’s name
on his legacy,

so the dead man’s name should not be scratched
from *the list* of his relatives
and the gate of his hometown.

You are witnesses today.”

¹¹ They agreed, all the people at the gate
and the elders: “Yes, we are witnesses.

May God bestow upon the woman
who joins your household *prominence*
like Rachel and Leah

who both built up
the household of Israel,
and may you succeed in Efrat
and be famous at the food bank.

¹² May your family become
like the family of Peretz
whom Tamar bore to Judah—
from the seed which God grants you—
from this young woman.”

וְכָל־הָעָם
עֲדִים אַתֶּם הַיּוֹם כִּי קָנִיתִי
אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר לְאֵלִימֶלֶךְ
וְאֶת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר לְכִלְיוֹן וּמַחֲלֹן
מִיַּד נָעֳמִי
vechol ha’am,
“Edim atem hayom ki kaniti
et kol asher le’Elimelech—
ve’et kol asher leChilyon uMachlon
—miyad Na’omi.

וְגַם אֶת־רוּת הַמֹּאבִיטָה
אִשֶּׁת מַחֲלֹן קָנִיתִי לִי לְאִשָּׁה
לְהָקִים שֵׁם־הַמֵּת
עַל־נַחֲלָתוֹ
Vegam et Rut haMo’aviyah,
eshet Machlon, kaniti li le’ishah,
lehakim shem hamet
al nachalato,

וְלֹא־יִכָּרֵת שֵׁם־הַמֵּת
מִעַם אֲחָיו
וּמִשְׁעַר מְקוֹמוֹ
ולא־יִכָּרֵת שֵׁם־הַמֵּת
מִעַם אֲחָיו
umisha’ar mekomo.

עֲדִים אַתֶּם הַיּוֹם
וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָל־הָעָם אֲשֶׁר־בַּשָּׁעַר
וְהַזְקֵנִים עֲדִים
Edim atem hayom.”
Vayomru kol ha’am asher basha’ar
vehazkenim, “Edim.

יִתֵּן יְהוָה אֶת־הָאִשָּׁה
הַבָּאָה אֶל־בֵּיתְךָ
כְּרַחֵל וּכְלֵאָה
אֲשֶׁר בָּנוּ שְׂתֵיהֶם
אֶת־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל
וַעֲשֵׂה־חַיִּיל בְּעַפְרָתָהּ
וּקְרָא־שֵׁם בְּבֵית לַחֵם
Yiten Adonai et ha’ishah
haba’ah el beitecha
keRachel ucheLeah,
asher banu shtei hem
et beit Yisra’el,
va’aseh chayil be’Efratah
ukerah shem beveit lachem.

וַיְהִי בֵיתְךָ
כְּבֵית פֶּרֶץ
אֲשֶׁר־יָלְדָה תָמָר לִיהוּדָה
מִן־הַזֶּרַע אֲשֶׁר יִתֵּן יְהוָה לָךְ
מִן־הַנְּעָרָה הַזֹּאת
Vihi veit’cha
keveit Peretz,
asher yaldah Tamar liYehudah
min hazerah asher yiten Adonai lecha
min hana’arah hazot.”

¹ Naomi doesn’t get a voice in the transaction but presumably she relies on family to take care of her. Such a plan doesn’t always work out well.

¹³ Boaz took Rut

and she became his wife.

He came to her *as a sexual partner*,

God granted her pregnancy

and she delivered a boy.

¹⁴ The women commented to Naomi,

“Blessed be God,

who did not block your helper today.

May *the boy* become famous in Israel.

¹⁵ May he restore your fortunes

and sustain your old age,

for your loving daughter-in-law

has borne him.

She’s better for you than seven sons!” ^{אֲשֶׁר-הָיָא טוֹבָה לָךְ מִשְׁבַּעָה בָּנִים}

¹⁶ Naomi picked up the child

and took it to her breast

and became its nanny.¹

¹⁷ The neighbor ladies named him.

They announced, “Naomi has a boy,”

and they named him Oved.

He’s the father of Yishai, father of David.

¹⁸ This is the family line of Peretz.

Peretz fathered Chetzron,

¹⁹ Chetzron fathered Ram,

Ram fathered Aminadav,

²⁰ Aminadav fathered Nachshon,

Nachshon fathered Salmah,

²¹ Salmah fathered Boaz,

Boaz fathered Oved,

וַיִּקַּח בֹּאֵז אֶת-רוּת

וַתְּהִי-לּוֹ לְאִשָּׁה

וַיָּבֹא אֵלֶיהָ

וַיֵּיתֶן יְהוָה לָהּ הֶרָיוֹן

וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן

וַתֹּאמְרָנָה הַנָּשִׁים אֶל-נָעֲמִי

בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה

אֲשֶׁר לֹא הִשְׁבִּית לָךְ גֹּאֵל הַיּוֹם

וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל

וַהֲיָה לָךְ לְמִשְׁיֵב נֶפֶשׁ

וּלְכֹלֶל אֶת-שִׁבְתְּךָ

כִּי כָלַתְךָ אֲשֶׁר-אֶהְיֶה

יְלָדָתוֹ

אֲשֶׁר-הָיָא טוֹבָה לָךְ מִשְׁבַּעָה בָּנִים

וַתִּקַּח נָעֲמִי אֶת-הַיֶּלֶד

וַתְּשִׁתְּהוּ בְּחִיקָהּ

וַתְּהִי-לּוֹ לְאֹמֶנֶת

וַתִּקְרָאנָהּ לּוֹ הַשְׁכֵּנוֹת שֵׁם

לֵאמֹר יֶלֶד-בֶּן לְנָעֲמִי

וַתִּקְרָאנָה שְׁמוֹ עוֹבֵד

הוּא אָבִי-יִשָּׁי אָבִי דָוִד

וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת פֶּרֶץ

פֶּרֶץ הוֹלִיד אֶת-חֶצְרוֹן

וְחֶצְרוֹן הוֹלִיד אֶת-רָם

וְרָם הוֹלִיד אֶת-עֲמִינָדָב

וְעֲמִינָדָב הוֹלִיד אֶת-נַחֲשֹׁן

וְנַחֲשֹׁן הוֹלִיד אֶת-שַׁלְמָה

וְשַׁלְמוֹן הוֹלִיד אֶת-בֹּאֵז

וּבֹאֵז הוֹלִיד אֶת-עוֹבֵד

Vayikach Bo’az et Rut

vatehi lo le’ishah

vayavo eleha,

vayiten Adonai lah herayon,

vateled ben.

Vatomarna hanashim el Na’omi,

“Baruch Adonai

asher lo hishbit lach go’el hayom.

Veyikareh shemo beYisra’el.

Vehayah lach lemeshiv nefesh

ulechalkel et sevatech,

ki chalatech asher ahevatech

yeladatu,

asher hi tovah lach mishivah banim!”

Vatikach Na’omi et hayeled

vat’shitehu vecheikah,

vat’hi lo le’omenet.

Vatikrenah lo haschenot shem

lemor, “Yulad ben leNa’omi,”

vatikrenah shemo Oved.

Hu avi Yishai avi David.

Ve’eleh toldot Paretz:

Peretz holid et Chetzron,

veChetzron holid et Ram,

veRam holid et Aminadav,

ve’Aminadav holid et Nachshon,

veNachshon holid et Salmah,

veSalmah holid et Bo’az

uVo’az holid et Oved,

¹ אֹמֶנֶת can mean nurse, wet-nurse, nanny or carer; the term is used of Mordochai’s care for Ester.

²² Oved fathered Yishai,
and Yishai fathered David.

וְעִבֵּד הוֹלִיד אֶת־יִשָּׂי ve'Oved holid et Yishai
וְיִשָּׂי הוֹלִיד אֶת־דָּוִד veYishai holid et David.

SPS Draft

The Book of Lamentations

אֵיכָה

SPS Draft

Lamentations ▪ אֵיכָה ▪ Eicha

Chapter 1

The word “daughter / בת / bat” can refer to a village near a larger town; we might think of it as a suburb, dependent on its larger neighbor. The word also means treasured part, as in “apple of the eye.” The poet uses **בת** in all three senses. When the poem speaks of “the daughter of Zion” or “the daughter of Judah,” the beloved town of Jerusalem is personified as a vulnerable female figure and as a little village. With its walls and courtyards, citadels and palaces, it should have been the protector of its smaller neighbors, but it is now reduced to dependency and ruin.

¹ How empty sits
the *once* densely populated town;
she’s like a *grieving* widow.
She who was once great among nations,
princess among provinces,
has *now* become a conscript!¹

² She weeps and weeps at night
and tears are on her cheek;
all who loved her bring no comfort,²
all her friends have betrayed her
and have become her enemies.

³ Judah is exiled,
by pain and great toil,
so that she lives among foreigners
finding no respite.
All who chased her caught her
in their ambush.³

אֵיכָה יֹשְׁבֵה בָדָד	Eicha yashvah vadam,
הָעִיר רַבָּתִי עֵם	ha'ir rabati am,
הַיְתָה כְּאַלְמָנָה	haytah ka'almanah.
רַבָּתִי בְּגוֹיִם	Rabati vagoyim,
שָׂרָתִי בְּמַדִּינֹת	sarati bamdinot,
הַיְתָה לָמָס	haytah lamas.
כָּלוּ תִבְכֶּה בַּלַּיְלָה	Bacho tivkeh balailah,
וְדַמְעָתָהּ עַל לִחְיָהּ	vedim'atah al lecheyah:
אֵין־לָהּ מְנַחֵם מִכֹּל־אֲהָבֶיהָ	ein lah menachem mikol ohaveha.
כָּל־רֵעֶיהָ בָּגְדוּ בָּהּ	Kol re'eha bagdu vah—
הָיוּ לָהּ לְאֹיְבִים	hayu lah le'oyvim.
גָּלְתָהּ יְהוּדָה	Galta Yehuda
מֵעֲנִי וּמִרֵּב עֲבֹדָה	me'oni umerov avoda.
הִיא יֹשְׁבָה בְּגוֹיִם	Hi yashva vagoyim,
לֹא מָצְאָה מְנוּחַ	lo matza mano'ach.
כָּל־רֹדְפֶיהָ הִשִּׁיגוּהָ	Kol rodfeha hisiguha
בֵּין הַמִּצְרִים	bein hamtzarim.

¹ **מס** (tax) refers to forced or conscripted labor. To build the Temple, Solomon conscripted a labor force: “King Solomon levied a conscript labor force from all Israel / וַיַּעַל הַמֶּלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה מִס מִכָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל / Vaya'al haMelech Shelomo mas mikol Yisra'el” (I Kings 5:13).

² “For her, there is no comforter among all her lovers”—those who love her or whom she loves.

³ “Between the narrow places.”

⁴ Zion's roads are in mourning
for no-one comes to a festival;
all her gates are abandoned,
her priests sigh,
her girls are sick and she feels awful.

⁵ Her foes are in charge,¹
her enemies content,
for God has hurt her
for her many sins,
her children have gone to captivity
before the enemy.

⁶ All her beauty has left Zion's daughter.²
Her princes have become
like harts that find no pasture
and flee the hunter, exhausted.

⁷ Jerusalem recalled
in her days of pain and misery,
all her pleasures
that existed in the old days,
when her people fell at the foe's hand
with no-one to help her:
her foes saw her and mocked her ruin.

דַּרְכֵי צִיּוֹן אֵבֵלוֹת
מִבְּלִי בָּאֵי מוֹעֵד
כָּל־שַׁעְרֶיהָ שׁוּמֵמִין
כֹּהֲנֶיהָ נֹאכְחִים
בְּתוּלוֹתֶיהָ נִיגוֹת וְהִיא מֵרָלָה
הָיוּ צָרֶיהָ לְרֹאשׁ
אֵיבֶיהָ שְׁלוּ
כִּי־יְהוָה הוֹגָה
עַל רֹב־פְּשָׁעֶיהָ
עוֹלָלֶיהָ הִלְכּוּ שָׁבִי
לִפְנֵי־צָר

Darchei Tziyon aveilot
mibli ba'ei mo'ed.
Kol she'areha shomemin,
Kohaneha ne'enachim;
betuloteha nugot, vehi mar lah.
Hayu tzareha lerosh,
oyveha shalu,
ki Adonai hogah
al rov pesha'eha,
olalecha hal'chu sh'vi
lifnei tzar.

וַיֵּצֵא מִבֵּית צִיּוֹן כָּל־הַדָּרָה
הָיוּ שָׂרֶיהָ
כְּאַיִלִים לֹא־מַצְאוּ מְרֹעָה
וַיִּלְכּוּ בְּלֹא־כֹחַ לִפְנֵי רוֹדֶף

Vayetzeh mibat Tziyon kol hadarah.
Hayu sareha
ke'ayalim lo matzu mireh,
vayelchu velo cho'ach lifnei rodef.

זָכְרָה יְרוּשָׁלַם
יָמֵי עֲנִיָּה וּמְרוּדֶיהָ
כָּל מַחְמוּדֶיהָ
אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ מִיָּמֵי קֶדֶם
בִּנְפֹל עֲמָהּ בְּיַד־צָר
וְאֵין עֹזֶר לָהּ

Zachrah Yerushala'im
yemei onyah um'rudeha,
kol machmudeha
asher hayu mimei kedem
binfol amah beyad tzar,
ve'ein ozer lah;
ra'uha tzarim, sachaku al mishbateha.

רָאוּהָ צָרִים שָׂחָקוּ עַל מִשְׁבָּתָהּ

¹ "Her foes have become the head/chief."

² Two notes on this. First, the "written" word (in manuscript versions) is מִן־בֵּית instead of מִבֵּית; there's no difference in meaning. Second, the word בֵּית not only means daughter, it can refer to the (presumably) unprotected dwellings around a town, "daughters" in that they depend on the protection of the walled town.

⁸ Jerusalem performed a sin,
so she has become untouchable.¹

All who honored her deride her
for *now* they've seen her naked.

Even she groans and recoils *from herself*.

⁹ Her filth was in *lifting* her skirts,
she didn't think of her future,
she fell suddenly, no one comforts her:
“See, God, my misery,
for the foe has triumphed.”

¹⁰ The foe's power stretched
to all she held dear,
for she saw foreigners
who came to her sanctuary,
whom you told
they should not enter your congregation.

¹¹ All her people groan,
hunting for food.
They've given up their treasures² for food
to sustain life.
“See, God, and look
how I am despised!”

¹² *It's* nothing to all you who cross the road.
Look and see
if there's any suffering like my suffering
which has hurt me,
which God has inflicted
on the day of *God's* anger.

חַטָּאת חַטָּאתָּהּ יְרוּשָׁלַם
עַל־כֵּן לִנְדָה הַיָּתָה
כָּל־מְכַבְּדֶיהָ הִזִּילוּהָ
כִּי־רָאוּ עֲרוֹתָהּ
גַּם־הִיא נִאְנָחָה וַתִּשָּׁב אַחֲוֹר
טִמְאַתָּהּ בִּשְׁוֹלֶיהָ
לֹא זָכְרָה אַחֲרִיתָהּ
וַתִּרְדַּד פְּלִאִים אֵין מְנַחֵם לָהּ
רָאָה יְהוָה אֶת־עֲוֹנֶיהָ
כִּי הִגְדִּיל אוֹיֵב
יָדוֹ פָּרַשׁ צָר
עַל־כָּל־מַחְמָדֶיהָ
כִּי־רָאָתָהּ גּוֹיִם
בָּאוּ מִקְדָּשָׁהּ
אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתָהּ
לֹא־יָבֹאוּ בְּקֹהֶל לָךְ
כָּל־עַמָּה נֹאֲמָחִים
מִבְּקָשִׁים לֶחֶם
נָתְנוּ מַחְמָדֵיהֶם בְּאֹכֶל
לְהַשִּׁיב נַפְשׁ
רָאָה יְהוָה וַתְּהַבִּיטָהּ
כִּי הָיִיתִי זֹלֶלָה
לֹא אֲלֵיכֶם כָּל־עֹבְרֵי דֶרֶךְ
הַבִּיטוּ וּרְאוּ
אִם־יֵשׁ מַכּוֹב כְּמַכּוֹבִי
אֲשֶׁר עוֹלָל לִי
אֲשֶׁר הוֹגָה יְהוָה
בְּיוֹם חָרוֹן אַפּוֹ

Chet chatah Yerushala'im;
al ken lenidah hayatah.
Kol mechabdeha hiziluha
ki ra'u ervatah;
gam hi ne'en'chah, vatashav achor.
Tumatah beshuleha,
lo zachrah acharitah,
vatered pela'im: ein menachem lah.
“Re'eh Adonai et onyi
ki higdil oyev.”
Yado paras tzar
al kol machamadeha
ki ra'atah goyim
ba'u mikdashah
asher tzivitah
lo yavo'u vakahal lach.
Kol amah ne'enachim
mevakshim lechem;
natnu machamadeihem be'ochel
lehashiv nafesh.
re'eh Adonai vehabitah
ki hayiti zolelah!
Lo aleichem kol ovrei derech;
habitu ure'u
im yesh machov kemachovi
asher olal li,
asher hogah Adonai
beyom charon apo.

¹ “Like a menstruating woman,” who (by Jewish tradition) refrains from physical contact with her husband.

² The written text has מַחְמָדֵיהֶם but we read מִמְּחֻדֵּיהֶם. There may be little difference in meaning.

¹³ From above <i>God</i> sent into my bones fire that overcame <i>me</i> , spread a net <i>to trip</i> my feet, dragged me backwards leaving me dazed, ¹ sick all day long.	מִמָּרוֹם שָׁלַח אֵשׁ בְּעַצְמוֹתַי וַיִּרְדֵּנָה פָּרַשׁ רֶשֶׁת לִרְגְלִי הִשְׁכִּיבָנִי אַחֲוָר נִתְּנָנִי שׁוֹמֵמָה כָּל־הַיּוֹם דָּוָה	Mimarom shalach esh be'atzmotai vayirdenah; paras reshet leraglai, heshivani achor, netanani shomemah, kol hayom davah.
¹⁴ The yoke of my sins is bound to <i>God's</i> hand, they are tethered on to my neck; <i>God</i> has made my strength fail; <i>God</i> has surrendered me into the power of <i>enemies</i> I cannot resist.	נִשְׁקָד עַל פִּשְׁעֵי בִיְרֹ יִשְׁתָּדְדֵנִי עָלַי עַל־צָוָאֲרִי הִכְשִׁיל כֹּחִי נִתְּנָנִי אֲדֹנָי בִּידֵי לֹא־אוֹכֵל קוֹם	Niskad ol pesha'ai beyado; yistargu alu al tzavari; hichshil kochi; netanani Adonai bidei lo uchal kum.
¹⁵ God tossed aside my dearest fighters named a date to crush my <i>fighting</i> lads; <i>God</i> has bloodied ² Judah's virgin daughter.	סָלַח כָּל־אַבִּירֵי אֲדֹנָי בְּקִרְבִּי קָרָא עָלַי מוֹעֵד לִשְׁבֹּר בַּחוּרֵי גַּת דָּרַח אֲדֹנָי לִבְתוּלַת בַּת־יְהוּדָה	Silach chol abirai Adonai bekirbi karah alai mo'ed lishbor bachurai. Gat darach Adonai livtulat bat Yehuda.
¹⁶ I weep for <i>all</i> these <i>disasters</i> ; my eye, my eye lets water flow for far away is <i>any</i> consolation that might revive ³ me; my children are desolate because the enemy has prevailed.	עַל־אַלֶּה אֲנִי בֹכֶיָה עֵינִי עֵינֵי יְרֹדָה מַיִם כִּי־רָחַק מִמֶּנִּי מְנַחֵם מְשִׁיב נַפְשִׁי הָיוּ בָנִי שׁוֹמֵמִים כִּי נִבָּר אוֹיֵב	Al eleh ani vochi'ah, eini, eini yorda mayim ki rachak mimeni menachem meshiv nafshi; hayu vanai shomemim ki gavar oyev.

¹ “*God* has given me destruction/stunning.”

² “The *wine*-trough has-trodden *God*”; treading grapes makes a lot of red liquid so presumably this is an idiom that means spilling blood. בְּתוּלָה means young woman or virgin—in ancient times, a young woman would likely live in her father's (and mother's) house until marriage; then, she'd become a matron instead of a maid.

³ “Bring back my life-force,” or restore and refresh.

¹⁷ Zion reaches out *in supplication*¹

but none can comfort her.

God has decreed for Jacob

those around him are to be his enemies,

among whom Jerusalem seems sick.²

¹⁸ God is right; I defied *God's* decree;

listen, all peoples,³

and see my pain:

my girls and lads are gone to captivity.

¹⁹ I called to my lovers

but they cheated me.

My priests and elders died in the town

while searching for food

to revive themselves.

²⁰ See, God, how I suffer.

My guts are boiling,

my heart is twisted inside me

for oh, I have rebelled.

Outside, the sword is killing *people*,

while in the house, it's like death.

²¹ They have heard me groaning

but no one comforts me;

all my foes heard my trouble and celebrated

that you did *this*.

If only you would bring the day you promised

so they would be like me *in suffering*!

פֶּרֶשֶׁה צִיּוֹן בְּיָדֶיהָ

אֵין מְנַחֵם לָהּ

צִוָּה יְהוָה לְיַעֲקֹב

סְבִיבוֹ צָרָיו

הָיְתָה יְרוּשָׁלַם לְנִדָּה בֵּינֵיהֶם

צַדִּיק הוּא יְהוָה כִּי פִי־הוּ מְרִיתִי

שְׁמַעוּ נָא כָּל־הָעַמִּים

וְרֹאוּ מַכּוֹבִי

בְּתוֹלְתֵי וַיַּחְזִירֵי הִלְכוּ בַשָּׁבִי

קָרָאתִי לְמֵאֲהָבִי

הִמָּה רִמּוּנִי

כֹּהֲנֵי וְזִקְנֵי בְעִיר גָּזְעוּ

כִּי־בִקְשׁוּ אֹכֶל לָמוֹ

וַיִּשְׁבּוּ אֶת־נַפְשָׁם

רָאָה יְהוָה כִּי־צָרָלִי

מֵעֵי חֲמָרְמָרוּ

נִהְפָּךְ לִבִּי בִקְרִבִּי

כִּי מָרוּ מְרִיתִי

מִחוּץ שִׁכְלָה־חֶרֶב

בְּבֵית כַּמּוֹת

שָׁמְעוּ כִּי נִאֲנַחָה אָנִי

אֵין מְנַחֵם לִי

כָּל־אֵיבֵי שְׁמַעוּ רַעְתִּי שָׁשׂוּ

כִּי אַתָּה עָשִׂיתָ

הַבָּאתָ יוֹם־קָרָאתָ

וַיְהִי כַמוֹנִי

Persah Tziyon beyadeha;

ein menachem lah.

Tzivah Adonai leYa'akov

sevivav tzarav.

Hayta Yerushala'im lenida beineihem.

Tzadik hu Adonai ki fihu mariti.

Shimu nah chol ha'amim

ure'u machovi;

betulotai uvachurai hal'chu bashevi.

Karati lam'ahavai,

hemah rimuni;

kohanai uzekenai ba'ir gava'u

ki vikshu ochel lamo

veyashivu et nafsham.

Re'eh Adonai ki tzar li,

me'ai chomarmaru.

Nehpach libi bekirbi

ki maro mariti.

Michutz shiklah cherev

babayit kamavet.

Shamu ki ne'enachah ani;

ein menachem li.

Kol oyvai shamu ra'ati, sasu

ki atah asita.

Heveta yom karata,

veyiheyu chamoni.

¹ "Zion reaches out her hands," in prayer or for help.

² "Jerusalem has become a sick woman among them," or "a menstruating woman"; when societies value population growth, women are most honored when they are or can become pregnant; menstruation (with or without the discomfort it can bring) may be viewed as sickness.

³ The manuscript "written" text is כְּלַעֲמִים and the text we read and translate is instead כְּלִי־עֲמִים.

²² May all their evil come before you,
and you do to them
what you did to me for all my sins,
for great is my misery
and my heart is in pain.

תָּבֹא כָל־רָעָתָם לְפָנֶיךָ
וְעוֹלַל לָמוֹ
כַּאֲשֶׁר עוֹלַלְתָּ לִּי עַל כָּל־פְּשָׁעִי
כִּי־רַבּוֹת אֲנֹחֲתִי
וּלְבִי דָוַי.

Tavo chol ra'atam lefanecha
ve'olel lamo
ka'asher olalta li al kol pesha'ai
ki rabot an'chotai,
velibi davai.

Chapter 2

¹ How God in anger has clouded
Zion's *bright* daughter,
flung from *high* heaven down to earth
Israel's splendor,
neglected *God's glorious* footstool¹
in *God's* day of anger!

אֵיכָה יָעִיב בָּאָפוֹ אֲדֹנָי
אֶת־בַּת־צִיּוֹן
הַשְּׁלִיךְ מִשְׁמַיִם אֶרֶץ
תִּפְאֶרֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל
וְלֹא־זָכַר הָדָם־רַגְלָיו
בְּיוֹם אָפּוֹ

Eicha ya'iv be'apo Adonai
et bat Tziyon,
hishlich mishamayim eretz
tiferet Yisra'el,
velo zachar hadom raglav
beyom apo.

² God has swallowed without remorse²
all Jacob's pastures³
in anger razed
the forts of Judah's daughter,
brought *them* down to the ground
dishonored the government and its leaders.

בָּלַע אֲדֹנָי וְלֹא חֲמַל
אֶת כָּל־נְאוֹת יַעֲקֹב
הָרָס בְּעִבְרָתוֹ
מִבְצָרָיו בְּתִי־הַיְּהוּדָה
הִנִּיעַ לְאָרֶץ
חֵלֶל מַמְלָכָה וְשָׂרָיָהּ

Bilah Adonai, velo chamal,
et kol ne'ot Ya'akov;
haras be'evrato
mivtzerei vat Yehudah,
higi'ah la'aretz,
chilel mamlachah vesareha.

³ In fierce anger has *God* cut down
Israel's every pride,⁴
retreated in battle from the foe⁵
and blazed in Jacob's *dwelling*s
like a flaming tongue
that consumes everything in reach.⁶

גָּדַח בַּחֲרִי אֵף
כָּל קֶרֶן יִשְׂרָאֵל
הֶשִׁיב אַחֹר יְמִינוֹ מִפְּנֵי אוֹיֵב
וַיִּבְעַר בְּיַעֲקֹב
כַּאֲשֶׁר לֶהָבָה
אֹכְלָה סָבִיב

Gadah bachori af
kol keren Yisra'el,
heshiv achor yemino mipnei oyevev,
vayivar beYa'akov
ke'esh lehavah
achlah saviv.

¹ What's the glory in being a footstool? This is no common role, for it's where Heaven meets Earth.

² The Hebrew בָּלַע וְלֹא חֲמַל is what we read. In a scroll, we would write חֲמַל, which means the same.

³ I.e., the places where Jewish people live.

⁴ "Horn." Hunters value an animal by the size of its horns, and some motorists are proud of their horns. "Nice horn, Sol," is always a welcome compliment.

⁵ "Turned back *God's* right hand (i.e., the fighting arm) from the presence of the foe."

⁶ "Eating around," i.e., burning up everything it touches in every direction.

⁴ God has bent¹ God's bow like an enemy,
set God's right arm, *the fighting arm*, like a foe
and killed all the good-looking *soldiers*;²
in the tent of Zion's daughter
God has poured out anger like fire.

⁵ God has become an enemy,
has swallowed Israel,
swallowed all its palaces,
destroyed its castles,
and worsened for Judah's daughter
wailing and weeping.

⁶ God has wrecked God's shelter, like the garden,³
destroyed God's meeting place;
God has driven from Zion's memory
festival and Sabbath day
and in fierce anger humiliated
ruler and priest.

⁷ God has rejected God's altar,
shunned God's sanctuary,
trapped in the enemy's power
the walls of its citadels;
the enemy make a noise in God's house
as if *they're celebrating* a festival day.

דָּרַךְ קִשְׁתּוֹ כְּאֹיֵב Darach kashto ke'oyev,
נִצָּב יְמִינוֹ כְּצָר nitzav yemino ketzar
וַיִּתֵּן כָּל מַחֲמַדֵּי-עֵין vayaharog kol machamadei ayin;
בְּאוֹהֶל בַּת-צִיּוֹן be'ohel bat Tziyon
שָׁפַךְ כָּאֵשׁ חֲמָתוֹ shafach ka'esh chamato.
הִיָּה אֲדֹנָי אֶיֱמִיב Haya Adonai ke'oyev;
בִּלְהַי יִשְׂרָאֵל bilah Yisra'el,
בִּלְהַי כֹּל אֲרֻמֹּתֶיהָ bilah kol armenoteha,
שִׁחֶת מִיִּצְרָאָו shichet mivtzarav,
וַיִּרֶב בְּבֵית-יְהוּדָה vayerev bevat Yehudah
תֵּאֲנִיָּה וְאֵנִיָּה ta'anayah va'anayah.
וַיַּחֲמֹס כָּגֵן שָׂכוֹ Vayachmos kagan sukoh,
שִׁחֶת מוֹעֵדוֹ shichet mo'ado;
שִׁכַּח אֲדֹנָי בְּצִיּוֹן shikach Adonai beTziyon
מוֹעֵד וְשִׁבָּת mo'ed veshabat,
וַיִּנָּאץ בְּזַעַם-אָפוֹ vayin'atz beza'am apo
מֶלֶךְ וְכוֹהֵן melech vechohen.
זָנַח אֲדֹנָי מִזְבְּחוֹ Zanach Adonai mizbecho,
נֶאֱדָר מִקְדָּשׁוֹ ni'er mikdasho,
הִסְגִּיר בְּיַד-אֹיֵב hisgir beyad oyev
חוֹמוֹת אֲרֻמֹּתֶיהָ chomot armenoteha;
קוֹל נַתְּנוּ בְּבֵית-יְהוָה kol natnu bebeit Adonai
כִּיּוֹם מוֹעֵד keyom mo'ed.

¹ The word דָּרַךְ usually means “stepped” or “trod,” and some archers use their feet when stringing a bow.

² “All the ones that please the eye”; don’t you love a parade, with all the uniformed ranks polished and gleaming?

³ “God-has-wrecked like-the-garden God’s-shelter,” reading שָׂכוֹ, “God’s shelter,” as סִינֶה (from סִינָה, a temporary shelter). God’s “shelter” is the Temple; as for the garden with a definite article, I suspect it refers to the Garden of Eden. Both are inaccessible.

⁸ God planned to destroy
the wall of Zion's daughter,
set a limit,¹

devoured without restraint,²
brought mourning to rampart and wall;
they collapsed together.

⁹ Her gates have sunk into the ground,
God broke and shattered her *gates*' bars,
her ruler and leaders are *exiled* among foreigners;
there's no law.

Even her prophets have found no inspiration
from God.

¹⁰ They sit on the ground, silent,
the elders of Zion's daughter;
they have thrown dust on their heads
and dressed themselves in sackcloth.
They have bowed their heads to the ground,
the daughters of Jerusalem.

¹¹ I can't see for weeping,³
my innards are seething,
my liver is spilled on the ground
at the ruin of my people's daughter,
as children and babies faint
in the streets of the town.

חָשַׁב יְהוָה לְהַשְׁחִית
חוֹמַת בַּת־צִיּוֹן

נָטָה קֶוֶן
לֹא־הִשִּׁיב יָדוֹ מִבִּלְעַל
וַיֹּאבֶל־חֵל וַחֲמוּמָה
יַחַדָּו אִמְלָלוּ

טָבְעוּ בָּאָרֶץ שַׁעֲרֶיהָ
אֶבֶד וְשִׁבַּר בְּרִיחֶיהָ
מַלְכָּה וְשָׂרֶיהָ בְּגוֹיִם
אֵין תּוֹרָה

גַּם־נְבִיאֶיהָ לֹא־מָצְאוּ חֲזוֹן
מִיְהוָה

יֹשְׁבוּ לָאָרֶץ יִדְמוּ
זִקְנֵי בַת־צִיּוֹן
הָעֵלּוּ עָפָר עַל־רֹאשָׁם
חָגְרוּ שָׁקִים

הוֹרִידוּ לָאָרֶץ רֹאשָׁן
בְּתוֹלוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם
כָּלּוּ בַדְּמָעוֹת עֵינַי
חִמְרָמְרוּ מַעֵי

נִשְׁפַּךְ לָאָרֶץ כֶּבֶדִּי
עַל־שֶׁבַר בַּת־עַמִּי
בַּעֲטֵף עוֹלָל וַיּוֹנֵק
בִּרְחֻבוֹת קִרְיָה

Chashav Adonai lehashchit
chomat bat Tziyon,
natah kav,
lo heshiv yadoh mibale'ah,
vaya'avel chel vechomah;
yachdav umlalu.

Tav'u va'aretz she'areha,
ibad veshibar bericheha,
malkah vesareha vagoyim;
ein Torah.

Gam nevi'cha lo matz'u chazon
me'Adonai.

Yeshvu la'aretz, yidmu
ziknei vat Tziyon;
he'elu afar al rosham,
chagru sakim.

Horidu la'aretz roshan
betulot Yerushalayim.

Kalu vadmā'ot einai,
chomarmeru me'ai,
nishpach la'aretz kevedi
al shever bat ami,
be'atef olel veyonek
bir'chovot kiryah.

¹ "Stretched out a line," presumably to mark a limit in time rather than in space, a date for destruction.

² "Did not hold back *God's* hand."

³ "They are done, with tears, my eyes," i.e. my eyes don't work any more because of my weeping.

¹² To their mothers they say,
“Where is there grain and wine?”

as they collapse as if dying¹
in the town streets,
as their life spills out
on their mothers’ breast.

¹³ How shall I be your witness,
to what can I compare you,
O daughter Jerusalem?
to what can I liken you, to comfort you,
virgin daughter of Zion,
for your wreckage is vast as the sea;
who can heal you?

¹⁴ Your prophets told you lies and folly;
they did not expose your sin
so as to make you repent;
they prophesied for you
unreliable, misleading oracles.²

¹⁵ They clapped their hands at you,⁴
all who passed along the road,
they hissed and shook their heads
at Jerusalem’s daughter.
Is this the town
they call the ultimate in beauty,
the joy of all the earth?

לְאִמּוֹתָם יֹאמְרוּ
אֵיכָה דָגָן וַיַּיִן
בְּהִתְעַטְפָם כְּחָלָל
בִּרְחוֹבוֹת עִיר
בְּהִשְׁתַּפֵּךְ נַפְשָׁם
אֶל-חֵיק אִמּוֹתָם

Le’imotam yomru,
“Ayeih dagan vayayin?”
behitattfam kechalal
bir’chovot ir,
behishtapech nafsham
el chek imotam.
Mah a’idech,
mah adameh lach,
habat Yerushala’im?
Mah ashveh lach va’anachamech,
betulat bat Tziyon,
ki gadol kayam shivrech;
mi yirpah lach?

נְבִיאֵיךְ חָזוּ לָךְ שָׁוָא וְתַפֵּל
וְלֹא-גִלוּ עַל-עֲוֹנֶךָ
לְהָשִׁיב שְׁבוּתֶךָ;³
וַיַּחֲזִיזוּ לָךְ

Nevi’ayich chazu lach shav vetafel
velo gilul al avonech
lehashiv shevutech,
vayechezu lach

מִשָּׁאוֹת שָׁוָא וּמַדּוּחִים
סָפְקוּ עָלֶיךָ כַּפַּיִם
כָּל-עֹבְרֵי דֶרֶךְ
שָׁרְקוּ וַיִּנְעוּ רֹאשָׁם
עַל-בַּת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם

masot shav umaduchim.
Safku alayich kapayim,
kol ovrei derech,
sharku vayani’u rosham
al bat Yerushalayim.

הַזֹּאת הָעִיר
שֵׁיאוֹמְרוּ כִלִּילַת יוֹפִי
מָשׁוֹשׁ לְכָל-הָאָרֶץ

Hazot ha’ir
sheyomru kelilat yofi,
masos lechol ha’aretz?

¹ “Like a dying person”; the root חלל suggests pierced, like a person run through by the sword.

² Some translate this to say the prophets gave proper warning, placing the blame on the people: “Your prophets foresaw falsehood and folly. Did they not expose your sin, *so as* to bring you back from your captivity (or, to repentance)? And they foresaw for you equivocation and misleading visions.”

³ שְׁבִיתָךְ is written (in a manuscript scroll), but not read.

⁴ Presumably, a gesture of contempt in ancient times, the opposite of modern applause.

¹⁶ All your enemies gape at you;¹
they hiss and gnash their teeth.

They say, “We’ve swallowed *her*:

How we hoped for this day!

It’s here,² and we’ve seen *it*!”

¹⁷ God has done what *God* planned.

God has accomplished the pledge
decreed in ancient times.

God has flattened *the town* without pity

so the enemy can triumph over you;

God has raised the pride of your foes.

¹⁸ Their heart cried out to God.

O wall of Zion’s daughter,

let your tears fall like a river,

day and night;

give yourself no respite.

Don’t let your favorite be silent.³

¹⁹ Get up and shout in the night

when the night watches begin;⁴

like water pour out your heart

in the presence of God,

lift your hands to *God*

for the life of your toddlers

who faint with hunger

at the entrance of every courtyard.⁵

פָּצוּ עֲלֶיךָ פִּיהֶם כָּל־אֹיְבֶיךָ

שָׁרְקוּ וַיִּחְרְקוּ־שֵׁן

אָמְרוּ בִלְעָנִי

אֲךָ זֶה הַיּוֹם שֶׁקִּוִּינוּהוּ

מַצָּאנִי רָאִינוּ

עָשָׂה יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר זָמַם

בַּצֵּעַ אֶמְרָתוֹ

אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה מִימֵי־קֶדֶם

הָרָס וְלֹא חָמַל

וַיִּשְׁמַח עָלֶיךָ אוֹיֵב

הֶרִים קֶרֶן צָרָיִךְ

צָעַק לִבָּם אֶל־אֲדֹנָי

חֹמַת בַּת־צִיּוֹן

הוֹרִידִי כִנְחָל דִּמְעָה

יוֹמָם וּלְיָלָה

אֶל־תִּתְּנִי פִּוְנָתְךָ לָךְ

אֶל־תִּדְּמִי בַת־עֵינֶךָ

קוּמִי רֹנִי בַלַּיְלָה

לְרֹאשׁ אֲשֻׁמְרוֹת

שִׁפְכִי חֲמַיִם לִבְּךָ

נֹחַח פְּנֵי אֲדֹנָי

שֵׂאִי אֵלָיו כַּפְּיךָ

עַל־נֶפֶשׁ עוֹלָלֶיךָ

הָעֲטוּפִים בְּרָעָב

בְּרֹאשׁ כָּל־חֻצּוֹת

Patzu alayich pihem kol oyvecha;

sharku vayacharku shen.

Amru, “Bilanu.

Ach zeh hayom shekivinu.

Matzanu, ra’inu!”

Asah Adonai asher zamam,

bitzah emrato

asher tzivah mimei kedem.

Haras velo chamal

vay’samach alayich oyev;

herim keren tzarayich.

Tza’ak libam el Adonai.

Chomat bat Tziyon,

horidi chanachal dimah

yomam valaylah;

al titni fugat lach,

al tidom bat einech.

Kumi, roni valaylah

lerosh ashmurot;

shifchi chamayim libech

nochach penei Adonai,

se’i elav kapayich

al nefesh olalayich

ha’atufim bera’av

berosh kol chutzot.

¹ “They have suddenly opened against you their mouths, all your enemies.”

² “We have found (or, encountered) *it*.”

³ It’s hard to know how to interpret the idioms and metaphors. חֹמַת בַּת־צִיּוֹן means “the wall (or, protection) of Zion’s daughter (or, dependent village)”; אֶל־תִּדְּמִי בַת־עֵינֶךָ means “don’t silence the daughter (or, “apple”) of your eye,” your favorite. In both cases, the daughter may be a metaphor.

⁴ “At the head of the night watches”; since watches is plural, presumably this refers to several nights.

²⁰ Look, God, and see

to whom you have done this.

Must women eat their offspring,

their babes in arms?¹

Must they be killed in God's sanctuary,

both priest and prophet?

²¹ They lie on the ground, *in the* courtyards,

young and old;

girls and lads have fallen by the sword;

You killed *them* on your day of anger,

slaughtered them and had no remorse.

²² You invited as if to a celebration

my terrors *who lived* around me,

and on God's day of anger there was no

fugitive or survivor.

My children whom I cuddled and reared,

my enemy destroyed them.

רֵאֵה יְהוָה וְהִבִּיטָהּ

לְמִי עוֹלָלָת כֹּהֵן

אִם-תֹּאכְלֶנָּה נָשִׁים פִּירָאִם

עַל־לֵי טִפּוּחִים

אִם-יִהְיֶה בְּמִקְדָּשׁ אֲדֹנָי

כֹּהֵן וְנָבִיא

שָׁכְבוּ לְאַרְץ חוּצוֹת

נָעַר וְזָקֵן

בְּתוֹלָתַי וּבְחוּרַי נָפְלוּ בַּחֶרֶב

הָרַגְתָּ בְּיוֹם אַפֶּךָ

טָבַחְתָּ לֹא חֲמַלְתָּ

תִּקְרָא כְּיוֹם מוֹעֵד

מִגּוּרַי מִסָּבִיב

וְלֹא הָיָה בְּיוֹם אַף-יְהוָה

פָּלִיט וְשָׂרִיד

אֲשֶׁר-טִפַּחְתִּי וְרִבִּיתִי

אֹיְבֵי כָלָם

Re'eh, Adonai, vehabitah

lemi olalta koh.

Im tochalnah nashim piryam,

olalei tipuchim?

Im yehareg bemikdash Adonai

kohen venavi?

Shachvu la'aretz chutzot,

na'ar vezaken;

betulotai uvachurai nafli vecharev;

haragta beyom apecha,

tavachta lo chamalta.

Tikrah cheyom mo'ed

megurai misaviv,

velo hayah beyom af Adonai

palit vesarid.

Asher tipachti veribiti,

oyvi chilam.

Chapter 3

¹ I am the man *who has* felt pain

at the cudgel of *God's* anger.

² *God* marched me away;

it's darkness, not light.

³ For sure, *God* keeps on

slapping and punching me all day.²

אָנִי הַגֵּבֶר רָאָה עֹנִי

בְּשֶׁבֶט עֲבָרְתּוֹ

אוֹתִי נָהַג וַיִּלְךָ

חֹשֶׁךְ וְלֹא-אוֹר

אֵךְ בִּי יָשָׁב

יַהֲפֹךְ יָדוֹ כָּל-הַיּוֹם

Ani hagever, ra'ah oni

beshevet evrato.

Oti nahag vayolach,

choshech velo or.

Ach bi yashuv,

yahafoch yado kol hayom.

⁵ Or, "at the head of every street" or "at the corner of every street," depending on your view of ancient city planning.

⁶ The manuscript would have בליל; adding the letter ה makes the word familiar.

¹ Or, "the toddlers in their care," or "the toddlers they dandle"; טִפּוּחִים may mean "extended," so you can imagine a mother picking up a youngster by the hands to help him toddle a few steps. What a cutie, what a loss!

² "Oh, to-me *God*-would-return, would-turn-over *God's*-hand all-the-day." I presume that turning your hand over means punching with the fist and then slapping with the palm, or something similarly nasty.

⁴ God has shriveled up my flesh and skin,
shattered my bones,
⁵ built *siege-engines* against me,
hemmed *me* in with bitterness and exhaustion,
⁶ settled me in gloomy places
like people long dead,¹
⁷ confined me so I can't escape,
weighted down my brass *shackles*.
⁸ Even when I screamed and cried for help,
God barred² my prayer.
⁹ *God* clogged my way with stone blocks,
made me take detours.³
¹⁰ To me, *God* is a bear, lurking in ambush,
a lion in hiding,
¹¹ that blocks my path⁵ and tears me to pieces,
leaving me ravaged.⁶
¹² *God* bent *God's* bow and placed me
as a target for the arrow.
¹³ *God* shot into me
arrows that come from *God's* quiver.⁷
¹⁴ I was the butt of everyone's jokes,
the constant theme of their *spiteful* songs.⁸

בִּלְהַ בְּשָׂרִי וְעוֹרִי Bilah besari ve'ori,
שִׁבַּר עֲצְמוֹתַי shibar atzmozai,
בָּנָה עָלַי banah alai,
וַיִּקָּף רוֹשׁ וּתְלָאָה vayakaf rosh utela'ah,
בְּמַחֲשָׁכִים הוֹשִׁיבָנִי bamachashakim hoshivani
כְּמֵתַי עוֹלָם kemetei olam,
גָּדַר בְּעָדִי וְלֹא אֶצֵּא gadar ba'adi velo etzeh,
הִחְבִּיד נֶחֱשָׁתִי hichbid nechashti.
גַּם כִּי אֶזְעַק וְאֶשְׁוֶה Gam ki ez'ak va'ashave'ah,
שָׂתַם תְּפִלָּתִי satam tefilati.
גָּדַר דֶּרֶכִּי בְּנִזִּית Gadar derachai begazit,
נִתְיַבְּתִי עוֹהָ netivotai ivah.
דּוֹב אֲרֵב הוּא לִי Dov orev hu li,
אֲרִי בְּמִסְתָּרִים ari bemistarim.
דֶּרֶכִּי סוֹרֵר וַיַּעֲפֹשְׁחֵנִי derachai sorer vayefashcheni,
שָׁמָנִי שׁוֹמֵם samani shomem.
דָּרַח קָשְׁתּוֹ וַיַּצִּיבֵנִי Darach kashto vayatzivenu
כַּמְטָרָה לַחֵץ kamatarah lachetz.
הֵבִי בִּכְלִיּוֹתַי Hevi bechilyotai
בְּנֵי אֲשָׁפָתוֹ benei ashpatu.
הָיִיתִי שֶׁחֹק לְכֹל-עַמִּי Hayiti sechok lechol ami,
נִגְיַנָּתָם כָּל-הַיּוֹם neginatam kol hayom.

¹ Or, “like the dead *people* of the world” or “like *people who are* dead forever/eternally.”

² We assume that שָׂתַם and שָׂתַם mean the same: close off, or stop up.

³ “My paths did *God* twist.”

⁴ A manuscript text would read אֲרִי, another word for lion.

⁵ “My ways *does God* turn aside (or turn into, enter)”; as if the lion suddenly appears to block the way.

⁶ “*God* has set me as a ravaged one.”

⁷ “*God* brought into my guts the ‘children’ of *God's* quiver.”

⁸ “I became the *object* of laughter for all my people, their song all day.”

¹⁵ God stuffed me with bitter *agonies*,
soaked me in sour *grief*,

¹⁶ chipped my teeth on gravel,
buried me in ashes,

¹⁷ banished me from peace
so that I have forgotten *all* goodness.

¹⁸ I said, “My strength is gone,
and so is my hope *of help* from God.”

¹⁹ Remember my humiliation and persecution,
poison and bitterness.

²⁰ Remember, you must remember;
I’m so depressed.¹

²¹ But I’ll bring this back to my mind,
and so I’ll have hope:

²² God’s kindnesses are not finished,
God’s mercies are not at an end.³

²³ They’re renewed each morning—
God, you are very reliable!⁴

²⁴ “God is all I have,” that’s what I say,⁵
and so I’ll place my hope in God.

²⁵ God is good to those who hope in God,
to the person who seeks God.

²⁶ It’s good to wait in silence⁶
for God’s salvation.

הִשְׁבִּיעַנִי בַמְרוֹרִים Hisbi’ani vamrorim,
הִרְוֵנִי לַעֲנָה hirvani la’anah,
וַיַּאֲרֶס בְּחֶצֶץ שָׁנַי vayagress bechatzatz shinai,
הִכְפִּישָׁנִי בָאֶפֶר hichpishani ba’efer.
וַתִּזְנַח מִשְׁלֹם נַפְשִׁי vatiznach mishalom nafshi,
נָשִׁיתִי טוֹבָה nasiti tovah.

וַאֲמַר אֶבְדַּ נְצָחִי Va’omar, “Avad nitzchi
וַתַּחֲלִתֵּי מִיְּהוָה vetochalti me’Adonai.”

זָכֹר-עֲנִי וּמְרוּדִי Zechor onyi umerudi,
לַעֲנָה וְרָאֵשׁ la’anah varosh.

זָכֹר תִּזְכֹּר Zachor, tizkor,
וּתְשׁוּחַ עָלַי נַפְשִׁי vetasho’ach alai nafshi.

זֹאת אֲשִׁיב אֶל-לִבִּי Zot ashiv el libi,
עַל-כֵּן אוֹחִיל al ken ochil:

חֲסֵדֵי יְהוָה כִּי לֹא-תֵמָּנוּ Chasdei Adonai, ki lo tamnu,
כִּי לֹא-כָלוּ רַחֲמָיו ki lo chalu rachamav.

חֲדָשִׁים לַבִּקְרִים Chadashim labkarim,
רַבָּה אֱמוּנָתֶךָ rabah emunatecha!

חֶלְכִּי יְהוָה אִמְרָה נַפְשִׁי “Chelki Adonai,” amrah nafshi,
עַל-כֵּן אוֹחִיל לוֹ al ken ochil lo.

טוֹב יְהוָה לְקֹנֹוּ Tov Adonai lekovav,
לְנֶפֶשׁ תִּדְרֶשֶׁנּוּ lenefesh tidreshenu.

טוֹב וַיַּחֲלִי וְדוּמָם Tov veyachil vedumam
לִתְשׁוּעַת יְהוָה lit’shu’at Adonai.

¹ “Remembering, remembers and-is-bowed-down for-me my-soul/personhood.”

² A manuscript text would read ותשיח.

³ This is the reason for hope: “When it comes to God’s kindnesses, I know that they are not finished, that God’s mercies are not at an end.”

⁴ “Your faithfulness/reliability is great”; we can rely on God’s assurances.

⁵ “‘My-portion is God,’ has-said my-self/soul.” Translating “my portion” as “all I have” recalls the idea that Levites didn’t get any land; instead, their “portion” was God (Deut 10:12 and other places).

²⁷ *It's* good for a man
to suffer when young.¹

²⁸ Let a *person* sit alone and stay silent
for *God* has lifted the load.

²⁹ Let a *person* place his mouth in the dust;
perhaps there is *reason* for hope.

³⁰ Turn the *other* cheek when someone hits you
so *the attacker* will earn a full measure of blame.²

³¹ For *God* does not spurn *you* forever.

³² If *God* brings grief, *God* brings comfort,
in keeping with *God's* abundant mercies.

³³ For *God* does not bring trouble willingly
bringing grief to humanity,⁴

³⁴ crushing underfoot
all those who are confined to the world,

³⁵ twisting human justice
despite the presence of the High One,⁵

³⁶ cheating someone in a conflict;
God doesn't approve *of such behavior*.

³⁷ Who can speak and make *something* happen
if God hasn't ordered *it*?

טוֹב לַנָּעֹר	Tov lagever
כִּי־יִשָּׂא עַל בִּנְעוּרָיו	ki yisah ol bin'urav.
יֵשֵׁב בְּדָד וַיִּדֹּם	Yeshev badad veyidom,
כִּי נָטַל עָלָיו	ki natal alav.
יִתֵּן בְּעַפְרֵי פִיהוּ	Yiten be'afar pihu;
אוּלַי יֵשֶׁתֶּקְוָה	ulai yesh tikvah.
יִתֵּן לְמַכְהוּ לְחִי	Yiten lemakehu lechi,
יִשְׁבַּח בְּחֶרְפָּה	yisbah becherpah.
כִּי לֹא יִזְנַח לְעוֹלָם אֲדֹנָי	Ki lo yiznach le'olam Adonai.
כִּי אִם־הוֹנִיחַ וְרָחַם	Ki im hogah vericham,
בְּרֹב חֲסָדָיו ³	kerov chasadav.
כִּי לֹא עֲנָה מִלְּבֹ	Ki lo inah milibo
וַיִּגַּח בְּנִי־אִישׁ	vayageh venei ish.
לְדַכָּא תַּחַת רַגְלָיו	ledakeh tachat raglav
כָּל אֲסִירֵי אֶרֶץ	kol asirei aretz,
לְהַטּוֹת מִשְׁפַּט־נֶגֶד	lehatot mishpat gaver
נֶגֶד פְּנֵי עֲלִיּוֹן	neged penei Elyon,
לְעֹוֶת אָדָם בְּרִיבֹ	le'avet adam berivo;
אֲדֹנָי לֹא רָאָה	Adonai lo ra'ah.
מִי זֶה אָמַר וַתְּהִי	Mi zeh amar vatehi,
אֲדֹנָי לֹא צִוָּה	Adonai lo tzivah?

⁶ The grammar is not obvious. “Good and-he-shall-wait/hope and-silent/silently”; perhaps we could translate “*It's* best *if* one waits and stays silent ...”

¹ “Bear a yoke,” or carry a burden like a tamed beast. “Suffer” is from the Latin sub (under) and ferre (to bear). Modern ideas of childrearing, fortunately, have improved.

² “Let *him* turn to the hitter a cheek; *the hitter* will be sated in reproach.” This could mean that the sufferer keeps his dignity by standing up to the blow and taking more, so that the attacker is more to blame, or it could mean that the sufferer can't resist the attack and loses all dignity.

³ A manuscript text would read חסדיו

⁴ “The sons of men,” i.e., human beings.

⁵ “To remove/stretch/bend judgement of a man (human judgement or a particular person's sentence) against the presence of the high one.”

³⁸ Don't they come at the High One's command,¹
both troubles and good?

³⁹ Why should a living man complain,
a person *complain* at his *own* sins?

⁴⁰ Let's search our conduct and probe *it*,
then return to God!

⁴¹ Let's lift our hearts toward our *upraised* hands
Toward God up in the sky.

⁴² We sinned and rebelled;
you have not pardoned.

⁴³ Wrapped in anger, you have chased us,
killed *us* without mercy.³

⁴⁴ You wrapped *yourself* in *dense* cloud
so prayer could not pass through.

⁴⁵ You've made us *like* slops and muck
among the *other* nations.

⁴⁶ They spout *slander* against us,⁴
all our enemies.

⁴⁷ Alarm and collapse are upon us,
ruin and wreckage.

⁴⁸ My eye drops streams of tears
at the ruin of my people's town.⁵

⁴⁹ My eye drops *tears* and won't stop,
without a break,

⁵⁰ Until God will look *down* and see
from *up* in the sky.

מִפִּי עֲלִיּוֹן לֹא תִצָּא

הַרְעוֹת וְהַטּוֹב

מִהַיִּתְאוֹנֵן אָדָם חַי

גֹּבֵר עַל-חַטָּאוֹ?²

נַחֲפֶשֶׁה דְרָכֵינוּ וְנַחֲקֹרָה

וְנָשׁוּבָה עַד-יְהוָה

נִשָּׂא לִבֵּנוּ אֶל-כַּפָּיִם

אֶל-אֵל בִּשְׁמָיִם

נַחֲנוּ פָשַׁעְנוּ וּמָרִינוּ

אַתָּה לֹא סָלַחְתָּ

סָכַתָּה בְּאַף וּתְרִדְפָנוּ

הַרְגַתָּ לֹא חָמַלְתָּ

סָכַתָּה בְּעָנָן לֹךְ

מֵעֶבֶר תִּפְלָה

סֶחִי וּמְאוֹס תִּשְׁמִינִי

בְּקֶרֶב הָעַמִּים

פָּצוּ עָלֵינוּ פִּיהֶם

כָּל-אֲבִינִי

פָּחַד וּפִחַת הָיָה לָנוּ

הַשָּׂאת וְהַשְׁבֵּר

פָּלְגֵי-מַיִם תִּרְדַּ עֵינֵי

עַל-שֶׁבֶר בַּת-עַמִּי

עֵינֵי נִגְרָה וְלֹא תִדְמֶה

מֵעֵין הַפִּגּוֹת

עַד-יִשְׁקִיף וְיֵרָא יְהוָה

מִשְׁמָיִם

Mipi Elyon lo tetzeh

hara'ot vehatov?

Mah yitonen adam chay,

gever al chata'av?

Nachpesah deracheinu venachkorah,

venashuvah ad Adonai.

Nisah levavenu el kapayim,

el El bashamayim.

Nachno fashanu umarinu;

atah lo salachtah.

Sakotah va'af vatirdefenu,

haragtah, lo chamaltah.

Sakotah ve'anan lach

me'avor tefillah.

Sechi uma'os tesimeinu

bekerev ha'amim.

Patzu aleinu pihem,

kol oyveinu.

Pachad vafachat hayah lanu,

hashet vehashaver.

Palgei mayim terad eini

al shever bat ami.

Eini nigrah velo tidmeh,

me'ein hafugot,

ad yashkif veyereh Adonai

mishamayim.

¹ "Mouth."

² A manuscript text would read חטאו.

³ "You covered/wrapped *yourself* in anger, you killed and you did not have mercy."

⁴ "They have burst open their mouths against us."

⁵ Or "my people's daughter."

⁵¹ My eye hurts me more than all the suburbs of my city. ¹	עֵינִי עוֹלֵלָה לְנַפְשִׁי מִכָּל בְּנוֹת עִירִי	Eini olelah lenafshi mikol benot iri.
⁵² They trapped me like a bird, my enemies, for no reason.	צָדָה צָדוּנִי כַצִּפּוֹר אֵיבֵי חֲנָם	Tzod tzaduni katzipor, oyvai, chinom.
⁵³ They ended my life <i>by tossing me</i> into a pit and threw a rock down on to me.	צָמְתִּי בַּבּוֹר חַיִּי וַיִּדְדוּ-אֶבֶן בִּי	Tzamtu vabor chayai vayadu even bi.
⁵⁴ Water flowed above my head. I thought I was done for. ²	צָפוּ-מַיִם עַל-רֹאשִׁי אִמַּרְתִּי נִגְזַרְתִּי	Tzafu mayim al roshi, amarti, “Nigzarti.”
⁵⁵ I called out your name, God, from the depths of the pit. ³	קָרָאתִי שְׁמֶךָ יְהוָה מִבּוֹר תַּחְתִּיּוֹת	Karati shimcha, Adonai, mibor tachtiyot.
⁵⁶ You heard me. Don’t cover your ears. But release me at my cry. ⁴	קוֹלִי שָׁמַעְתָּ אֶל-תַּעֲלֵם אָזְנוֹךָ לְרוֹחַחִי לְשׁוֹעָתִי	Koli shamata. Al ta’lem oznecha leravchati, leshavati.
⁵⁷ You approached <i>me</i> on the day I called for you <i>and</i> said, “Don’t be afraid.”	קָרַבְתָּ בְּיוֹם אֶקְרָאָךָ אִמַּרְתָּ אֶל-תִּירָא	Karavta beyom ekra’eka, amarta, “Al tirah.”
⁵⁸ O God, you championed all my disputes, you saved my life.	רָבַתְּ אֲדֹנָי רִיבֵי נַפְשִׁי נִאֲלַתְּ חַיִּי	Ravta, Adonai, rivei nafshi, ga’alta chayai.
⁵⁹ You have seen, O God, how I suffer; judge my case!	רָאִיתָה יְהוָה עֲוֹנֹתַי שִׁפְטָה מִשְׁפָּטִי	Ra’itah, Adonai, avatati; shoftah mishpati.
⁶⁰ You have seen all their spitefulness, all their plots against me.	רָאִיתָה כָּל-נִקְמָתָם כָּל-מַחֲשֻׁבֹּתַי לִי	Ra’itah kol nikmatam, kol machshevotam li.
⁶¹ You’ve heard their taunts, God, all their plans against me.	שָׁמַעְתָּ חֶרְפָּתָם יְהוָה כָּל-מַחֲשֻׁבֹּתַי עָלַי	Shamatah cherpatam, Adonai, kol machshevotam alai.
⁶² My attackers’ speech and thoughts <i>are</i> against me all day <i>long</i> .	שִׁפְתֵי קָמִי וְהִגְיוֹנָם עָלַי כָּל-הַיּוֹם	Siftei kamai vehegyonam alai kol hayom.
⁶³ Whether they sit or stand, take a look: I’m their <i>constant</i> refrain.	שִׁבְתָּם וְקִימָתָם הִבִּיטָה אֲנִי מִנְּיִנָתָם	Shivtam vekimatam habitah; ani manginatam.

¹ “My eye brings pain to my self/soul more-than/because-of all the daughters/suburbs of my city.”

² “I said, ‘I have been cut off.’”

³ Or, “the pit of depths.”

⁴ “My voice/noise you heard; do not hide/conceal your ear; *for the sake of* my relief *in response* to my cry.”

⁶⁴ Pay them back as they deserve, God,
with all your power!¹

⁶⁵ Let them have their hard hearts
so they'll earn your curse!²

⁶⁶ Pursue *them* with anger and destroy them
from beneath God's sky.

תָּשִׁיב לָהֶם גְּמוּלַּ יְהוָה
כְּמַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵיהֶם
תִּתֵּן לָהֶם מִגִּנַּת־לֵב
תִּאֲלָתֶךָ לָהֶם
תִּרְדֹּף בְּאַף וְתַשְׁמִידֵם
מִתַּחַת שְׁמַי יְהוָה
Tashiv lahem gemul, Adonai,
kema'asch yedeihem.
Titen lahem meginat lev,
ta'alat'cha lahem.
Tirdof be'af vetashmidem
mitachat shemei Adonai.

Chapter 4

¹ How the gold has become dull,
the fine treasure looks different,
the holy stones are spilled
at the top of each courtyard.

² Treasured children of Zion,
worth their weight³ in fine gold,
are now valued like *cheap* earthenware jars,
the work of a potter.

³ Even jackals offer the breast
and suckle their young,
but my people's daughter has become as cruel
as ostriches in the desert.⁴

⁴ The infant's tongue sticks
to its cheek for thirst;
children ask for food
but there's no one to hand it out to them.

אֵיכָה יוּ'עַם זָהָב
יִשְׁנֶה הַכֶּתֶם הַטּוֹב
תִּשְׁתַּפְּכְנָה אַבְנֵי־קֹדֶשׁ
בְּרֹאשׁ כָּל־חֻצּוֹת
בְּנֵי צִיּוֹן הַיֶּקָּרִים
הַמְּסֻלָּאִים בַּפֹּז
אֵיכָה נִחְשְׁבּוּ לְנִבְלֵי־חֶרֶשׁ
מַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵי יוֹצֵר
גַּם־תַּנִּים חֹלְצוּ שָׂדַי
הַיִּנְקִי גוּרֵיהֶן
בַּת־עַמִּי לְאַחְזָר
כִּי־עֲנִים בַּמִּדְבָּר
דָּבַק לְשׁוֹן יוֹנֵק
אֶל־חִיקוֹ בַּצֶּמָּא
עוֹלָלִים שְׂאֵלוּ לֶחֶם
פָּרֶשׁ אֵין לָהֶם
Eicha yu'am zahav,
yishneh haketem hatov,
tishtapechnah avnei kodesh
berosh kol chutzot.
Benei Tziyon hayekarim,
hamsula'im bapaz,
eicha nechshevu lenivlei cheres,
ma'asch yedei yotzer.
Gam tanim chaltzu shad,
heniku gureihen;
bat ami le'achzar
kay'enim bamidbar.
Davak leshon yonek
el chiko, batzamah;
olalim sha'alu lechem;
pores ein lahem.

¹ "You will return to them payment, God, according to the work/performance of your hands/power."

² "You will give them covering/shield of heart, your curse to/for them."

³ The root of הַמְּסֻלָּאִים, סלא, suggests weighing something in a balance—the children would counterpoise gold.

⁴ In biblical folklore, ostriches are rotten parents; see Job 39:13-19.

⁵ A manuscript version would read תנין, sea-monster instead of jackals, but the plural verb asks for a plural subject—jackals instead of a single sea-monster. "Jackals" is masculine plural, so is "they suckle," but "their young" is feminine plural; so perhaps the traditional emendation is wrong, or perhaps the writer wavers between masculine and feminine.

⁶ A manuscript version would read כי ענים. You might almost translate this as "for *they* are poor."

⁵ Those who used to eat sweets
are devastated, in the courtyards;
those raised in *luxurious* scarlet clothing
now cling to dumpsters.

⁶ The sin of my people's daughter has grown
greater than the sin of Sodom,
which was toppled in an instant,
and nobody reached *helping* hands to her.

⁷ Her Nazirites¹ were *once* purer than snow,
whiter than milk,
their bodies redder than coral,²
their frames *more shapely* than lapis lazuli.³

⁸ Now their appearance is darker than black,
unidentifiable in the courtyards;
their skin clings to their bones;
it's become dry as wood.

⁹ Those who died by the sword were better off
than those who died of famine—
pierced through, they bleed, *but that's better*
than starving for lack of agricultural produce.

¹⁰ Women's caring hands
cooked their children,
which became servings of food for them
when my people's town was destroyed.

הָאֲחִלִּים לְמַעַד נִשְׁמוּ בַּחוּצוֹת	Ha' ochlim lema' adanim nashamu bachutzot;
הָאֲמוּנִים עָלֵי תוֹלַע חִבְקוּ אֲשַׁפּוֹת	ha'emunim alei tolah chibku ashpatot.
וַיִּגְדַּל עֲוֹן בַּת-עַמִּי מִחַטַּאת סֹדֶם	Vayigdal avon bat ami mechatat Sedom,
הַהִפּוּכָה כְּמוֹ-רָגַע וְלֹא-חָלוּ בָּהּ יָדַיִם	hahafuchah chemo ragah, velo chalu vah yadayim.
זָכוּ נְזִירֶיהָ מִשֶּׁלֶג צָחוּ מִחֶלֶב	Zaku nezireha misheleg, tzachu mechalav.
אָדְמוּ עֲצָם מִפְּנִינִים סָפִיר גִּזְרָתָם	Admu etzem mipninim, sapir gizratam.
חָשַׁח מִשְׁחֹר תְּאֹרָם לֹא נִכְרוּ בַּחוּצוֹת	Chashach mishchor ta'oram, lo nikru bachutzot;
צָפַד עוֹרָם עַל-עֲצָמָם יָבֵשׁ הָיָה כָּעֵץ	tzafad oram al atzmam, yavesh hayah ka'etz.
טוֹבִים הָיוּ חַלְלֵי-חֶרֶב מִחַלְלֵי רָעַב	Tovim hayu chalelei cherev mechalelei ra'av,
שֶׁהֵם יִזְבּוּ מְדֻקָּרִים מִתְּנוּבַת שָׂדֵי	shehem yazuvu medukarim, mitnuvot sadai.
יְדֵי נָשִׁים רַחֲמָנִיּוֹת בִּשְׁלוּ יַלְדֵיהֶן	Yedei nashim rachamaniyot bishlu yaldeihen;
הָיוּ לְבָרוֹת לָמוֹ בְּשֶׁבֶר בַּת-עַמִּי	hayu levarot lamo beshever bat ami.

¹ Nazirites dedicated themselves to a life without booze or haircuts, drawing admiration from some quarters (but leaving Samson nothing but women and rowdiness for distraction).

² “Their bodies redder than coral” is literally “Their bone redder/more-ruddy than corals/pearls”—the bony parts of the body support the flesh and give it its shape, so maybe the poet is thinking of bodies. Some think it's about a ruddy complexion, which society sometimes considers healthy and attractive, and other times considers coarse and repulsive.

³ “Sapphire *was* their cutting,” they had a build as well shaped as a carved precious stone. Sapphire and lapis lazuli are both blue, though today sapphire is far more costly.

¹¹ God has fulfilled *God's* fury,
poured out *God's* anger,
sent fire against Zion
and consumed its foundations.

¹² The rulers of the earth wouldn't believe,
all *those* who live on earth,
that trouble and foe would come
to Jerusalem's gates ...

¹³ ... because of the sins of her prophets,
the crimes of her priests,
who spill within *the city*
the blood of the righteous.

¹⁴ Blind, they wandered in the courtyards,
soiled with the blood,
so that *people*² could not
touch their garments.

¹⁵ "Move aside! Unclean!" they warned,³
"Move aside, move aside, don't touch,"
as they ran off and wandered;
Other nations said, "They can't stay *here*."⁴

¹⁶ God's presence has scattered them;
God no longer looks at them.
They ignored the priests⁵
and rejected the elders.

כִּלָּה יְהוָה אֶת-חֲמָתוֹ
שָׁפַךְ חֲרוֹן אַפּוֹ
וַיַּצֵּת אֵשׁ בְּצִיּוֹן
וַתֹּאכַל יְסוֹדֹתֶיהָ
לֹא הָאֱמִינוּ מַלְכֵי-אֶרֶץ
כָּל-יֹשְׁבֵי תֵבֶל,¹
כִּי יָבֹא צָר וְאוֹיֵב
בְּשַׁעֲרֵי יְרוּשָׁלַם
מִחַטָּאת נְבִיאֶיהָ
עֲוֹנוֹת כֹּהֲנֶיהָ
הַשֹּׁפְכִים בְּקִרְבָּהָ
דָם צַדִּיקִים
נָעוּ עִירִים בַּחֲצוֹצוֹת
נִנְאָלוּ בַדָּם
בֶּלֹא יוֹכְלוּ
יָגְעוּ בַלְבֻּשֵׁיהֶם
סוּרוּ טָמֵא קָרָאוּ לָמוֹ
סוּרוּ סוּרוּ אֶל-תִּנְעוּ
כִּי נָצוּ גַם-נָעוּ
אָמְרוּ בְּגוֹיִם לֹא יוֹסִיפוּ לָגוּר
פְּנֵי יְהוָה חִלְקָם
לֹא יוֹסִיף לְהִבִּיטָם
פְּנֵי כֹהָנִים לֹא נָשָׂאוּ
וּזְקֵנִים לֹא חָנְנוּ

Kilah Adonai et chamato,
shafach charon apo,
vayatzet esh beTziyon
vatochal yesodoteha.
Lo he'eminu malchei eretz,
kol yoshvei tevel,
ki yavo tzar ve'oyev
besha'arei Yerushala'yim ...
... mechatot nevi'cha,
avonot kohaneha,
hashofchim bekirbah
dam tzadikim.
Na'u ivrim bachutzot,
nego'alu badam
belo yuchlu
yig'u bilvusheiheh.
"Suru, tameh," karu lamo,
"suru, suru, al tigu,"
ki natzu gam na'u;
amru vagoyim, "Lo yosifu lagur."
Penei Adonai chilkam;
lo yosif lehabitam,
penei chohanim lo nasa'u
uzekenim lo chananu.

¹ A manuscript version would read וכל.

² Or "they"; perhaps the priests could not touch the bloody garments because human blood would make them unfit for Temple service, and perhaps other people could not touch the bloody garments because they were icky.

³ "They cried out, regarding themselves," or "*Other* people cried out, referring to them."

⁴ "They will not continue to dwell *with us*."

⁵ "The faces of the priests they did not raise." Raising the face is an idiom (in my humble opinion) for taking note of someone.

⁶ A manuscript version would read זקנים.

¹⁷ Still we strained our eyes
to see some help—but it was useless!
We searched from our watchtowers
for an ally, *but allies* could not save us.

¹⁸ They tracked our steps
so we could not move in our streets;
our end drew near, our days were done
for our end had arrived.

¹⁹ Our pursuers were swifter
than eagles in the sky;
they chased us on the hills,
ambushed us on the plain.

²⁰ Our *life's* breath,² God's anointed *priest*,
was captured in their dungeons;
of him we used to say,
“Under his protection, we can survive in exile.”³

²¹ Rejoice, be glad *now*, daughter of Edom
who lives in the land of Utz.
The *bitter* cup will come to you too:
you'll get drunk and throw up.⁴

עוֹדֵינוּ¹ תִּכְלִינָה עֵינֵינוּ
אֶל-עֲזֵרָתֵנוּ הָבֵל
בִּצְפִיָּאֲתֵנוּ צִיפִינוּ
אֶל-גּוֹי לֹא יוֹשֵׁעַ
צָדוּ צֵעֵדֵינוּ
מִלֶּכֶת בִּרְחֹבֵתֵינוּ
קָרַב קִצֵּינוּ מִלֵּאיוֹ יָמֵינוּ
כִּי־בָא קִצֵּינוּ
קָלִים הָיוּ רֹדְפֵינוּ
מִנִּישְׁרֵי שָׁמַיִם
עַל-הַהָרִים דִּלְקָנוּ
בַּמִּדְבָּר אָרְבוּ לָנוּ
רוּחַ אֶפְעֵינוּ מֵשִׁיחַ אֲדֹנָי
נִלְכַּד בִּשְׁחִיתוֹתָם
אֲשֶׁר אָמַרְנוּ
בְּצִלּוֹ נַחֲיָה בְּגוֹיִם
שִׁישִׁי וְשִׁמְחִי בַת-אֲדָוָה
יֹשֶׁבֶת⁵ בְּאֶרֶץ עוּץ
גַּם-עָלֶיךָ תֵּעָבֵר-כּוֹס
תִּשְׁכְּרִי וְתִתְעָרִי
Odenu tichlenah eineinu
el ezratenu—havel!
Betzipiyatenu tzipinu
el goy, lo yoshi'a.
Tzadu tze'adeinu
milechet bir'chovoteinu;
karav kitzeinu, malu yameinu
ki vah kitzeinu.
Kalim hayu rodfeinu
minishrei shamayim;
al heharim delakunu,
bamidbar arvu lanu.
Ru'ach apeinu, meshi'ach Adonai,
nilkad bishchitotam;
asher amarnu,
“Betzilo nichyeh vagoyim.”
Sisi vesim'chi, bat Edom
yoshevet be'erez Utz.
Gam alayich ta'avar kos:
tishkeri vetit'ari.

¹ A manuscript version would read עוֹדֵינוּ.

² “Spirit/wind/breath of our noses/nostrils.”

³ “Inspiration” is “the breath of our noses/nostrils,” i.e., our source of life and courage, without which we have the metaphorical wind knocked out of us; “their dungeons” can be translated “pits,” something far less elaborate than a dungeon, but I think it suggests a low location used to hold prisoners, just as Joseph was held in a pit; “in exile” is literally “among the nations,” and I take this to mean “in the foreign countries to which we will be transported as slaves after we lose our last battle”—had our anointed High Priest survived (the poet implies), we could have clung to some scrap of hope that we could restore our Temple service.

⁴ Or, “get naked”; the root (ערה) means pour out (hence empty oneself, maybe at both ends) or uncover (hence get naked and vulnerable). Either way, the fun will be short-lived. Utz is another name for Edom.

⁵ A manuscript version would read יוֹשֶׁבֶתִי.

²² Daughter of Zion, your sin is complete;
God will no more expose¹ you *to punishment*.
 Daughter of Edom, *God* knows your sin
and will expose your faults.

תָּם עֲוֹנֶךָ בַּת־צִיּוֹן
 לֹא יוֹסִיף לְהַגְלוֹתְךָ
 פָּקַד עֲוֹנֶךָ בַּת־עֲדוֹם
 גִּלָּה אֶל־חַטֹּאתַיִךְ

Tam avonech, bat Tziyon;
 lo yosif lehaglotech.
 Pakad avonech, bat Edom;
 gilah al chatotayich.

Chapter 5

¹ Remember, God, what happened to us;
 look and see our disgrace.

זָכֹר יְהוָה מַה־תִּהְיֶה לָּנוּ
 הַבִּיטָהּ² וּרְאֵה אֶת־חַרְפְּתָנוּ

Zechor, Adonai, meh hayah lanu;
 habitah ure'eh et cherpatenu.

² Our heritage is turned over to foreigners,
 our homes to strangers.

נָחַלְתָּנוּ נְהֻפְכָה לְזָרִים
 בָּתֵּינוּ לְנֹכְרִים

Nachalatenu nehef'chah lezarim,
 bateinu lenochrim.

³ We're like orphans, fatherless,
 and our mothers are widows.

יְתוּמִים הָייִנוּ וְאִין³ אֵב
 אִמֹּתֵינוּ כְּאַלְמָנוֹת

Yetomim hayinu ve'ein av;
 imoteinu ke'almanot.

⁴ We've had to pay for our drinking water;
 our wood comes at a price.

מֵימֵינוּ בְּכֶסֶף שָׁתִינוּ
 עֲצֵינוּ בְּמַחֲרִיר יָבֹאוּ

Meimeinu bekeseef shatinu;
 atzeinu bim'chir yavo'u.

⁵ We're hunted to death;⁴
 we're exhausted and get no rest.

עַל צוֹאֲרֵנוּ נִרְדַּפְנוּ
 יָגַעְנוּ וְלֹא⁵ הוּנַח לָנוּ

Al tzavarenu nirdafnu;
 yaganu velo hunach lanu.

⁶ We surrendered to Egypt⁶
and Assyria, to get enough food.

מִצְרַיִם נָתַנוּ יָד
 אַשּׁוּר לִשְׁבַע לָחֶם

Mitzrayim natanu yad,
 Ashur lisbo'ah lachem.

⁷ Our ancestors sinned and are gone
 while we bear their guilt.

אֲבֹתֵינוּ חָטְאוּ וְאִיֵּם
 וְאַנַּחְנוּ⁷ עֹנֵי־תִיָּהֶם סָבְלָנוּ

Avoteinu chatu ve'einam
 va'anachnu avonoteihem savalnu.

⁸ Servants give us orders;
 there's no one to save us from their power.

עֲבָדִים מְשֻׁלוּ בָנוּ
 פֶּרֶק אֵין מִיָּדָם

Avadim mashlu vanu;
 porek ein miyadam.

⁹ At the risk of our lives we get our food
 because of bandits in the wilds.⁸

בְּנַפְשֵׁנוּ נִבִּיא לַחֲמֵנוּ
 מִפְּנֵי חֲרֵב הַמִּדְבָּר

Benafshenu navi lachmenu
 mipnei cherev hamidbar.

¹ The root for “expose” can mean uncover (expose nakedness, remove protection, remove cover.)

² A manuscript version would read הִבִּיט.

³ A manuscript version would read אֵין.

⁴ “For/on/about our necks are we hunted”; presumably, the hunters want to cut off our heads at the neck.

⁵ A manuscript version would read לֹא.

⁶ “To Egypt we granted power *over us*.”

⁷ A manuscript version would read אִיֵּם אֲנַחְנוּ.

¹⁰ Our skin is burning like an oven
from *crop-killing* heat that brings famine.¹

¹¹ They humiliated the women in Zion,
the young women in the towns of Judah.

¹² Leaders in their power were hung;²
they showed no respect for the elders.

¹³ Young men carried millstones
and youths tottered under *heavy* logs.

¹⁴ Elders are gone from the gates,
young men from their music.

¹⁵ Our greatest pleasure³ is gone,
our dancing turned to mourning.

¹⁶ Our crown⁴ has fallen down—
alas for us, that we sinned!

¹⁷ Because of this, our heart has been aching;
because of these *disasters*, our eyes dim *with tears*.

¹⁸ Upon Mount Zion, which is desolate,
foxes roam.

¹⁹ You, God, will rule forever;
your throne *is secure* from age to age.

²⁰ Why will you forget us forever
or abandon us for years and years?⁵

עוֹרֵנוּ כְּתִנּוּר נִכְמָרוּ	Orenu ketanur nichmaru
מִפְנֵי זֶלַעְפוֹת רָעָב	mipnei zalafot ra'av.
נָשִׁים בְּצִיּוֹן עָנוּ	Nashim beTziyon inu,
בְּתִלּוֹת בְּעָרֵי יְהוּדָה	betulot be'arei Yehudah.
שָׂרִים בְּיָדָם נִתְּלוּ	Sarim beyadam nitlu;
פְּנֵי זִקְנִים לֹא נִהְדָּרוּ	penei zekenim lo nehbaru.
בַּחֲרוּרִים טָחוּן נָשְׂאוּ	Bachurim techon nasa'u
וְנָעָרִים בְּעֵץ כָּשָׁלוּ	une'arim ba'etz kashalu.
זִקְנִים מִשְׁעַר שַׁבָּתוֹ	Zekenim misha'ar shavatu,
בַּחֲרוּרִים מִנְּגִינָתָם	bachurim min'ginatam.
שַׁבָּת מִשׁוֹשׁ לִבֵּנוּ	Shabat mesos libenu,
נִהְפָּךְ לְעֵל מֵחֻלֵּנוּ	nehpach le'evel mecholenu.
נִפְּלָה עֲטֶרֶת רֹשֵׁנוּ	Naflah ateret roshenu;
אֵי-נָא לָנוּ כִּי חָטֵאנוּ	oy nah lanu ki chatanu.
עַל-זֶה הָיָה דָּוֶה לִבֵּנוּ	Al zeh hayah daveh libenu;
עַל-אֵלֶּה חָשַׁב עֵינֵינוּ	al eleh chash'chu eineinu.
עַל הָר-צִיּוֹן שֶׁשָּׁמֵם	Al Har Tziyon sheshamem
שׁוֹעֲלִים הִלְכּוּ-בּוֹ	shu'alim hil'chu vo.
אַתָּה יְהוָה לְעוֹלָם תִּשֶׁב	Atah, Adonai, le'olam teshev;
כִּסְאֶךָ לְדָר וָדוֹר	kis'acha ledor vador.
לָמָּה לְנֹצֵחַ תִּשְׁכַּחֲנוּ	Lamah lanetzach tishkachenu,
תַּעֲזֹבֵנוּ לְאֹרֶךְ יָמִים	ta'azvenu le'orech yamim?

⁸ “With our lives do we bring our food because of the sword of the wilderness”; i.e., we can’t get food in the market so we go foraging in the wilds, where we can be attacked by weapon-wielding bandits.

¹ “Our skin like an oven has become hot because of the heat of famine.” I’ve never found hunger to be a source of heat, but scorching weather can kill the crops and cause both famine and sunburn.

² Or, “hung up by their hands.”

³ “The joy of our heart.”

⁴ “The crown of our head.”

⁵ Or, “will you forget us for length of days.”

²¹ God, take us back; we'll no more stray. Take us back to the olden days!	הַשִּׁיבֵנוּ יְהוָה אֵלֶיךָ וְנָשׁוּבָה ¹ חֲדָשׁ יָמֵינוּ כְּקֶדֶם	Hashivenu, Adonai, elecha venashuva; chadesh yamenu kekedem.
²² Unless you despise us entirely, as furious at us as can be.	כִּי אִם-מָאֵס מְאֹדָנוּ קִצְפָתָ עָלֵינוּ עַד-מְאֹד	Ki im ma'os me'astanu, katzafta aleinu ad me'od.
²¹ God, take us back; we'll no more stray. Take us back to the olden days!	הַשִּׁיבֵנוּ יְהוָה אֵלֶיךָ וְנָשׁוּבָה חֲדָשׁ יָמֵינוּ כְּקֶדֶם	Hashivenu, Adonai, elecha venashuva; chadesh yamenu kekedem.

¹ A manuscript version would read ונשוב.