

The Five Books

חֲמֵשׁ מִגִּילוֹת

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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 קְדִישִׁין	umeimar kadishin,
with the biting snake.	בְּנֹחַשׁ 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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The Speaker's Book

קַהֲלָת

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	Divrei Kohelet
בֶּן־דָּוִד מֶלֶךְ בִּירוּשָׁלַם	ben David, melech blrushala'im.
הָבֵל הָבָלִים אָמַר קֹהֶלֶת	Havel havalim, amar Kohelet;
הָבֵל הָבָלִים הַכֹּל הָבֵל	havel havalim, hakol havel.
מַה־יִּתְרוֹן לָאָדָם	Mah yitron la'adam
בְּכָל־עֲמָלוֹ	bechol amalo
שֵׁי־עָמַל תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ	sheya'amol tachat hashamesh?
דּוֹר הֹלֵךְ וְדוֹר בָּא	Dor holech vedor bah,
וְהָאָרֶץ לְעוֹלָם עוֹמֶדֶת	veha'aretz le'olam omadet.
וְזָרַח הַשָּׁמֶשׁ וַיָּבֹא הַשָּׁמֶשׁ	Veزارach hashemesh uva hashemesh,
וְאֶל־מְקוֹמוֹ שׁוֹאֵף	ve'el mekomo sho'ef
זֹרֵחַ הוּא שָׁם	zore'ach hu sham.
הוֹלֵךְ אֶל־דָּרוֹם	Holech el darom
וְסוֹבֵב אֶל־צָפוֹן	vesovev el tzaфон,
סוֹבֵב וְסוֹבֵב הוֹלֵךְ הָרֹחַ	sovev, sovev, holech haru'ach,
וְעַל־סִבִּיבוֹתָיו שָׁב הָרֹחַ	ve'al sevivotav shav haru'ach.
כָּל־הַנְּחָלִים הֹלְכִים אֶל־הַיָּם	Kol han'chalim hol'chim el hayam
וְהַיָּם אֵינֶנּוּ מֵלֵא	vehayam einenu maleh;
אֶל־מְקוֹם שֶׁהַנְּחָלִים הֹלְכִים	el mekom shehan'chalim hol'chim,
שָׁם הֵם שׁוֹבִים לָלֶכֶת	sham hem shavim lalachet.

¹ The Hebrew word דְּבַר 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 הָבֵל 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־חֲדָבָרִים יָגֵעִים
לֹא־יֻחַל אִישׁ לְדַבֵּר
לֹא־תִשְׁבַּע עֵינָיו לִרְאוֹת
וְלֹא־תִמְלֹא אָזְנוֹ מִשְׁמָע
מִה־שִּׁהְיָה הוּא שִׁיעָשֶׂה
וּמִה־שִּׁנְעָשֶׂה הוּא שִׁיעָשֶׂה
וְאֵין כָּל־חֲדָשׁ תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ
יֵשׁ דָּבָר שִׁיאוֹמַר
רְאֵה־זֶה חֲדָשׁ הוּא
כְּבָר הָיָה לְעֹלָמִים
אֲשֶׁר הָיָה מִלְּפָנֵינוּ
אֵין זִכְרוֹן לִרְאשֹׁנִים
וְגַם לְאַחֲרֹנִים שִׁיעִיָּהוּ
לֹא־יִהְיֶה לָהֶם זִכְרוֹן
עִם שִׁיעִיָּהוּ לְאַחֲרָנָה
פ

אֲנִי קֹהֶלֶת
הָיִיתִי מֶלֶךְ עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל
בִּירוּשָׁלַם
וְנָתַתִּי אֶת־לִבִּי
לִדְרוֹשׁ וּלְתוֹר בַּחֲכָמָה
עַל כָּל־אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשֶׂה
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.”
Kever 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

וְרֵעוֹת רוּחַ

מֵעֻז לֹא־יֻכָּל לִתְקֹן

וְחֶסְרוֹן לֹא־יֻכָּל לִהְיוֹת

דִּבַּרְתִּי אֲנִי עִם־לִבִּי לֵאמֹר

אֲנִי הִנֵּה הִגְדַּלְתִּי

וְהוֹסַפְתִּי חֲכָמָה

עַל כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־הָיָה לִפְנֵי

עַל־יְרוּשָׁלָּם

וּלְבִי רָאָה

הַרְבֵּה חֲכָמָה וְדַעַת

וְאַתְנָה לִבִּי לִדְעַת

חֲכָמָה וְדַעַת

הוֹלָלוֹת וְשִׁכְלוֹת

יָדַעְתִּי שֶׁגַּם־זֶה הוּא

רָעיוֹן 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
vehosafתי 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 בְּלִבִּי

לְכַהֵן נָא אֲנִסְכָּה בְּשִׂמְחָה

וּרְאֵה בְּטוֹב

וְהִנֵּה גַם־הוּא הָבֵל

לְשִׁחּוֹק אֲמַרְתִּי מְהוֹלָל

וּלְשִׂמְחָה מַה־זֶּה עֲשֵׂה

תַּרְתִּי בְּלִבִּי

לְמִשְׁחֹךְ בַּיַּיִן אֶת־בִּשְׂרִי

וּלְבִי נֹהֵג בַּחֲכָמָה

וּלְאִחֲזוֹ בְּסִכְלוֹת

עַד אֲשֶׁר־אֶרְאֶה

אִי־זֶה טוֹב לִבְנֵי הָאָדָם

אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשׂוּ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם

מִסָּפַר יְמֵי חַיֵּיהֶם

הִגִּדְלִי מַעֲשֵׂי

בְּנִיתִי לִי בָתִּים

נִטַּעְתִּי לִי כֶרָמִים

עָשִׂיתִי לִי גִנּוֹת וּפְרָדֵסִים

וְנִטַּעְתִּי בָהֶם עֵץ כָּל־פְּרִי

עָשִׂיתִי לִי בְּרִכּוֹת מַיִם

לְהִשְׁקוֹת 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 תָּנִה לִי

גַּם מִקְנֶה בָּקָר וצֹאן

הַרְבֵּה תָנִה לִי

מִכֹּל שֶׁהָיָה 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-חֲכָמָתִי עָמְדָה לִי

וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר שָׁאַלְוּ עֵינַי

לֹא אֲצַלְתִּי מֵהֶם

לֹא-מָנַעְתִּי אֶת-לִבִּי מִכָּל-שִׂמְחָה

כִּי-לִבִּי שִׂמַּח מִכָּל-עֲמָלִי

וְזֶה-הָיָה חֶלְקִי מִכָּל-עֲמָלִי

וּפָנִיתִי אֲנִי

בְּכָל-מַעֲשֵׂי שֹׁעֲשׂוֹ יָדַי

וּבְעָמַל שֹׁעַמְלָתִי לַעֲשׂוֹת

וְהִנֵּה הַכֹּל הֶבֶל וְרֵעוֹת רוּחַ

וְאֵין יִתְרוֹן תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ

Kaniti avadim ushefachot,

uveneivayit 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 לְרֹאוֹת
חֹכְמָה וְהוֹלָלוֹת וְסִכְלּוֹת
כִּי מֶה הָאָדָם
שֶׁיָּבֹא אַחֲרַי הַמֶּלֶךְ
אֶת אֲשֶׁר-כָּבַד עָשִׂיהוּ
וְרָאִיתִי אֲנִי שֶׁיֵּשׁ יִטְרוֹן
לְחֹכְמָה מִן-הַסִּכְלּוֹת
כִּי יִטְרוֹן הָאוֹר מִן-הַחֹשֶׁךְ
הֶחָכָם עֵינָיו בְּרֹאוֹשׁוֹ
וְהַפֶּסֶל בַּחֹשֶׁךְ הוֹלֵךְ
וַיַּדְבַּרְתִּי גַם-אֲנִי שֶׁמִּכְרֵה אֶחָד
יִכְרֶה אֶת-כֻּלָּם
וְאָמַרְתִּי אֲנִי בִלְבִי
כִּמְכִּרֵה הַפֶּסֶל
גַּם-אֲנִי יִכְרֵנִי
וְלָמָּה חֲכַמְתִּי אֲנִי אִם יוֹתֵר
וְדִבַּרְתִּי בִלְבִי שֶׁגַּם-זֶה הַכֹּל
כִּי אֵין זִכְרוֹן לְחֹכָם
עַם-הַפֶּסֶל לְעוֹלָם
בְּשֶׁכָּבֶד הַיָּמִים הַבָּאִים
הַכֹּל נִשְׁכַּח
וְאִידָּה יָמוּת הֶחָכָם עַם-הַפֶּסֶל
וְשָׁנַאתִי אֶת-חַיִּים
כִּי רָע עָלַי הַמַּעֲשֶׂה
שֶׁנַּעֲשֶׂה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ
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 beroshu,
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
וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ

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

הַחֶחֱכָם יִהְיֶה אוֹ סָכָל
וְיִשְׁלַט בְּכָל־עַמְלִי
שֶׁעֲמַלְתִּי וְשֶׁחֲכַמְתִּי
תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ
גַּם־זֶה הָבֵל

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

וְסָבֹתִי אֲנִי לֵיָאֵשׁ אֶת־לִבִּי
עַל כָּל־הָעֵמֶל שֶׁעֲמַלְתִּי
תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ

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

כִּי־יֵשׁ אָדָם שֶׁעֲמָלוֹ
בְּחֶחֱמָה וּבְרַעַת 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 amal o uverayon libo
shehu amel tachat hashamesh?

כִּי כָל־יָמָיו מַכְאוֹבִים
וְכַעַס עֲנִיָּו

Ki chol yamav machovim,
vacha'as inyano;

גַּם־בַּלַּיְלָה לֹא־שָׁכַב לְבוֹ²

gam balaylah lo shachav libo.

גַּם־זֶה הָבֵל

Gam zeh hevel hu.

הוּא

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
חֹזֵץ מִמֶּנִּי
כִּי לְאָדָם שֶׁטוֹב לִפְנֵי
נָתַן חֲכָמָה וְדַעַת וְשִׂמְחָה
וְלַחֲוֹטָא נָתַן עֲנָן
לְאֶסּוֹף וּלְכַנּוֹס
לָתֵת לְטוֹב לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים
גַּם־זֶה הֶבֱל וְרַעוּת 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 לִטְעַת 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.

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 יִּתְרוֹן הָעוֹשֶׂה בְּאִשֶּׁר הוּא עֹמֵל
 רָאִיתִי אֶת-הָעֵינָן
 אֲשֶׁר נָתַן אֱלֹהִים לִבְנֵי הָאָדָם
 לְעֹנֹת בּוֹ
 אֶת-הַכֹּל עָשָׂה
 יָפֵה בְּעֵתוֹ
 גַּם אֶת-הָעֹלָם
 נָתַן בְּלִבָּם
 מִבְּלִי אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יִמְצָא הָאָדָם
 אֶת-הַמַּעֲשֶׂה אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה הָאֱלֹהִים
 מִרֵּאשׁ וְעַד-סוֹף
 יָדַעְתִּי כִּי אֵין טוֹב בָּם
 כִּי אִם-לְשִׂמּוֹחַ
 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 כָּל-הָאָדָם
שֵׁיאוֹכַל וְשָׂתָה
וְרָאָה טוֹב בְּכָל-עֲמָלוֹ
מַתַּת אֱלֹהִים הִיא

Vegam kol ha'adam

sheyochal veshatah

vera'ah tov bechol amalō—

matat Elohim hi.

יָדַעְתִּי
כִּי כָל-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.

מַה שֶׁהָיָה כְּבָר הוּא
וְאֲשֶׁר לִהְיוֹת כְּבָר הִנֵּה
וְהָאֱלֹהִים יִבְקֹשׁ אֶת-נִרְדָּף
וְעוֹד רָאִיתִי תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ

Mah shehayah, k'var hu;

va'asher liheyot, k'var hu;

veha'Elohim yevakesh et nirdaf.

Ve'od ra'iti tachat hashamesh

מֶקוֹם הַמִּשְׁפָּט
שָׁמָּה הָרָשָׁע
וּמֶקוֹם הַצֶּדֶק
שָׁמָּה הָרָשָׁע

mekom hamishpat—

shamah hareshah—

umekom hatzedek:

shamah harashah.

אָמַרְתִּי אֲנִי בִלְבִי
אֶת-הַצַּדִּיק וְאֶת-הָרָשָׁע
יִשְׁפֹּט הָאֱלֹהִים

Amarti ani belibi:

Et hatzadik ve'et harashah

yishpot ha'Elohim,

ki et lechol chefetz,

ve'al kol hama'aseh sham.

כִּי-עֵת לְכָל-חֶפֶץ

וְעַל כָּל-הַמַּעֲשֶׂה שָׁם

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 מִקְרֵה בְנֵי־הָאָדָם

וּמִקְרֵה הַבְּהֵמָה

וּמִקְרֵה אֶחָד לָהֶם

כְּמוֹת זֶה כֵּן מוֹת זֶה

וְרוּחַ אֶחָד לָכֹל

וּמוֹתָר הָאָדָם מִן־הַבְּהֵמָה אֵין

כִּי הַכֹּל הָבֵל

הַכֹּל הוֹלֵךְ אֶל־מָקוֹם אֶחָד

הַכֹּל הָיָה מִן־הָעָפָר

וְהַכֹּל שָׁב אֶל־הָעָפָר

מִי יוֹדַע רוּחַ בְּנֵי הָאָדָם

הַעֹלָה הִיא לְמַעַלָּה

וְרוּחַ הַבְּהֵמָה הַיּוֹרֶדֶת הִיא

לְמַטָּה לָאָרֶץ

וְרָאִיתִי כִּי אֵין טוֹב

מֵאֲשֶׁר יִשְׁמַח הָאָדָם בְּמַעֲשָׁיו

כִּי־הוּא חֶלְקוֹ

כִּי מִי יֵבִיאֵנוּ לִרְאוֹת

בְּמָה שְׁיִהְיֶה 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 hakol 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 וְאֶרְאֶה

אֶת־כָּל־הָעֲשֻׁקִים

אֲשֶׁר נֹעֲשִׂים תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ

וְהִנֵּה | דִּמְעַת הָעֲשֻׁקִים

וְאֵין לָהֶם מְנַחֵם

וּמִיָּד עֹשְׁקֵיהֶם כֹּחַ

וְאֵין לָהֶם מְנַחֵם

וְשָׁבַח אֲנִי אֶת־הַמֵּתִים

שֶׁכְּבָר מֶתוּ מִן־הַחַיִּים

אֲשֶׁר הֵמָּה חַיִּים עֲדָנָה

וְטוֹב מִשְׁנֵיהֶם

אֶת אֲשֶׁר־עָדוּ לֹא הָיָה

אֲשֶׁר לֹא־רָאָה אֶת־הַמַּעֲשֶׂה הָרָע

אֲשֶׁר נֹעֲשֶׂה תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ

וְרָאִיתִי אֲנִי אֶת־כָּל־עֵמָל

וְאֵת כָּל־כִּשְׁרוֹן הַמַּעֲשֶׂה

כִּי הִיא קִנְיַת־אִישׁ מִרַעְיוֹ

גַּם־זֶה הֶבֶל וְרַעוּת רוּחַ

הַכֹּסֶל חֹבֵק אֶת־יָדָיו

וְאָכַל אֶת־בֶּשָׂרוֹ

טוֹב מֶלֶא כָּף נָחַת

מִמְלֹא חוֹפְנָיִם עֵמָל וְרַעוּת רוּחַ

וְשָׁבְתִי אֲנִי וְאֶרְאֶה

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 *sleepers* 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 לוֹ, gam ben va’ach ein lo,
וְאֵין קֵץ לְכָל-עֲמָלוֹ. ve’ein ketz lechol amalo.
גַּם-עֵינָיו² לֹא-תִשְׂבַּע עֹשֶׁר. Gam eino lo tisbah osher.
וְלִמִּי אֲנִי עֹמֵל “Ulemi ani amel
וּמִחֹסֶר אֶת-נַפְשִׁי מִטוֹבָה umechaser et nafshi mitovah?”
גַּם-זֶה הֶבֶל וְעֵינָיו רָע הוּא. Gam zeh hevel, ve’inyan rah hu.

טוֹבִים הַשְּׁנָיִם 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,
וְאִילוֹ הָאֶחָד שֵׁיפֹל ve’ilu ha’echad sheyipol
וְאֵין שֵׁנִי לַחֲקִימוֹ. ve’ein sheni lahakimo.

גַּם יִם-יִשְׁכְּבוּ שְׁנָיִם, Gam im yishkevu shnayim,
וְחֵם לָהֶם; vecham lahem;
וְלָאֶחָד אֵיךְ יַחֵם? ule’echad eich yecham?

וְאִם-יִתְקַפֵּל הָאֶחָד, Ve’im yitkefo ha’echad,
הַשְּׁנָיִם יַעֲמִדוּ נַגְדּוֹ; hashnayim ya’amdu negdo;
וְהַחֹטַם הַמְּשֻׁלָּשׁ vehachut hamshulash
לֹא בִמְהֵרָה יִנָּתֵק. lo vimherah yinatek.

טוֹב יָלֵד מִסְכֵּן וְחָכָם Tov yeled miskhen vechacham
מִמֶּלֶךְ זָקֵן וְכִסְיִל mimelech zaken uchesil,
אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדָע לְהִזָּהֵר עוֹד. asher lo yadah lehizaher od.

כִּי-מִבֵּית הַסּוּרִים יֵצֵא לִמְלֹךְ, Ki mibeit hasurim yatzah limloch,
כִּי גַם בְּמַלְכוּתוֹ נוֹלַד רָשׁ. ki gam bermal’chuto nolak 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 הַבַּיִת הַסּוּרִים, “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־חַיִּים

הַמְהַלְכִים תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ

עִם הַיָּלֵד הַשֵּׁנִי

אֲשֶׁר יַעֲמֹד תַּחְתָּיו

אֵין־קֶץ לְכָל־הָעָם

לְכָל אֲשֶׁר־הָיָה לִפְנֵיהֶם

גַּם הָאֲחֵרֹנִים לֹא יִשְׁמְחוּ־בּוֹ

כִּי־גַם־זֶה הֶבֶל וַרְעִיּוֹן רוּחַ

שְׁמֹר רַגְלְךָ, כְּאֲשֶׁר תֵּלֵךְ

אֶל־בֵּית הָאֱלֹהִים

וּקְרֹב לִשְׁמֹעַ

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

אֶל־תִּבְהַל עַל־פִּיךָ

וְלִבְךָ אֶל־יִמְתָּר לְהוֹצִיא דְבָר

לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים

כִּי הָאֱלֹהִים בַּשָּׁמַיִם

וְאַתָּה עַל־הָאָרֶץ

עַל־כֵּן יִהְיֶה דְבָרְךָ־יָ

מְעֻטִּים

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 שְׁלֵם
טוֹב אֲשֶׁר לֹא-תִדּוֹר
מִשְׁתִּידוֹר וְלֹא
תִשְׁלֵם

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.

אַל-תִּתֵּן אֶת-פִּיךָ
לַחֲטִיא אֶת-בְּשׂוּרְךָ
וְאַל-תֹּאמַר לִפְנֵי הַמַּלְאָךְ
כִּי שִׁגְגָה הִיא
לִמָּחָ יִקְצֹף הָאֱלֹהִים
עַל-קוֹלְךָ
וַחֲבַל אֶת-מַעֲשֵׂה יָדֶיךָ
כִּי בְּרֹב חֲלָמוֹת וְהַבָּלִים
וּדְבָרִים הַרְבֵּה
כִּי אֶת-הָאֱלֹהִים יִרְאֶה
אִם-עֹשֶׂק רָשׁ
וְגִזֹּל מִשְׁפָּט וְצֹדֵק
תִּרְאֶה בְּמִדִּינָה
אַל-תִּתְמַח עַל-הַחֶפֶץ
כִּי גָבוֹה מֵעַל גָּבוֹה שׁוֹמֵר
וְגִבּוֹהִים
עֲלֵיהֶם

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 בְּהֶמְוֶן

לֹא תִבְוָאָה

גַּם־זֶה הָבֵל

בִּרְבוֹת הַטּוֹבָה

רַבּוּ אוֹחְלֶהָ,

וּמִה־כִּשְׁרוֹן לִיב'אַלֶּהָ

כִּי אִם־רְאוּתִי עֵינָיו

מֵתוּקָה שְׁנַת הָעֵבֶד

אִם־מָעֵט וְאִם־הַרְבֵּה יֶאֱכֹל

וְהַשָּׂבַע לְעָשִׁיר

אֵינֶנּוּ מְנִיחַ לִזְלִישׁוֹן

יֵשׁ רָעָה חוֹלָה רְאִיתִי

תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ

עוֹשֶׁר שָׁמֹר לִיב'עָלָיו לְרָעָתוֹ

וְאֶבֶד הָעוֹשֶׁר הֵהוּא בְּעֵינָיו רָע

וְהוֹלִיד בֶּן וְאִין בִּידּוֹ מְאוּמָה

כְּאֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא מִבֶּטֶן אִמּוֹ

עָרוֹם יָשׁוּב לְלֶכֶת כְּשֶׁבָא

וּמְאוּמָה לֹא־יִשָּׂא בְּעַמְלּוֹ

שִׁילָה בִּידּוֹ

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 יִתְרוֹן; a masculine noun that takes the feminine plural (יִתְרוֹנוֹת). 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 רִאִית.

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 כֵּן יֵלֵךְ

וּמַה יִּתְּרוֹן לוֹ

שֶׁיַּעֲמַל לָרוּחַ

גַּם כָּל־יָמָיו בַּחֹשֶׁךְ יֵאָכֵל

וְכַעַס הַרְבֵּה וְחִלּוֹ וְקִצְצָה

הִנֵּה אֲשֶׁר־רָאִיתִי אָנִי

טוֹב אֲשֶׁר־יָפֵה לֶאֱכֹל־וְלִשְׁתּוֹת

וְלִרְאוֹת טוֹבָה בְּכָל־עֲמָלוֹ

שֶׁיַּעֲמַל תַּחַת־הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ

מִסְפָּר יְמֵי־חַיָּיו

אֲשֶׁר־נָתַן־לּוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים

כִּי־הוּא חֶלְקוֹ

גַּם כָּל־הָאָדָם

אֲשֶׁר נָתַן־לּוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים

עוֹשֶׁר וְנִכְסִים

וְהִשְׁלִיטוֹ לֶאֱכֹל מִמֶּנּוּ

וְלִשְׁאֵת אֶת־חֶלְקוֹ

וְלִשְׂמֹחַ 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-לּוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים
עֹשֶׁר וְנִכְסִים וְכָבוֹד
וְאֵינֶנּוּ חֹסֵר לְנַפְשׁוֹ
מִכֹּל אֲשֶׁר-יִתְּאָוֶה
וְלֹא-יִשְׁלִיטֵנּוּ הָאֱלֹהִים
לֶ'עֵחֹל מִמֶּנּוּ
כִּי אִישׁ נֹכְרִי יֹאכֲלֵנּוּ
זֶה הֶבֶל וְחֹלִי רֶעַ הוּא
אִם-יֹלִיד אִישׁ מֵאָה
וְשָׁנִים רַבּוֹת יִחְיֶה
וְרַב שְׁיֵהֶיּוּ יְמֵי-שָׁנָיו
וְנַפְשׁוֹ לֹא-תִשְׁבַּע מִן-הַטּוֹבָה
וְנִם-קִבְרָהּ 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 kevurah 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?

וְאִלּוּ חַיָּה אֶלֶף שָׁנִים
פַּעַמַּיִם

וְשִׁוְכָה לֹא רָאָה
הֲלֹא אֶל־מָקוֹם אֶחָד הַכֹּל הוֹלֵךְ

כָּל־עֵמֶל הָאָדָם לְפִיָּהּ
וְגַם־הַנֶּפֶשׁ לֹא תִמְלָא

כִּי מִהַיּוֹתֵר לַחֲכָם מִן־הַכָּסִיל
מִהַלְעָנִי

יֹדֵעַ לַהֲלֹךְ נֶגֶד הַחַיִּים
טוֹב מֵרֹאֶה עֵינַיִם

מִהַלְלֵךְ נַפֶּשׁ
גַּם־זֶה הֶבֶל וְרֻעוֹת רוּחַ

מִהַשְׁהַיָּה כְּבָר נִקְרָא שְׁמוֹ
וְנוֹדַע אֲשֶׁר־הוּא אָדָם

וְלֹא־יִכָּל לָדִין
עַם שֶׁתַּקִּיף מִמֶּנּוּ

כִּי יֵשֶׁדְבָרִים תִּרְבֶּה
מִרְבִּים הֶבֶל

מִהַיּוֹתֵר לָאָדָם
כִּי מִי־יֹדֵעַ מִהַטּוֹב לָאָדָם

בַּחַיִּים מִסְפָּר יְמֵי־חַיָּי הֶבֶל
וַיַּעֲשֶׂם כְּצֶל

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

טוֹב שֵׁם מִשְׁמֶן טוֹב
וַיּוֹם הַמָּוֶת מִיּוֹם הַיּוֹלָדוֹ
טוֹב לָלֶכֶת אֶל-בֵּית-אֲבֵל
מִלָּכֶת אֶל-בֵּית מִשְׁתֶּה
בְּאֲשֶׁר הוּא סוֹף כָּל-הָאָדָם
וְהַחַי יִתֵּן אֶל-לִבּוֹ

טוֹב כַּעַס מִשְׂחֹק
כִּי-בִרְעַ פָּנִים יִיטֵב לֵב
לֵב חֲכָמִים בְּבֵית אֲבֵל
וְלֵב כְּסִילִים בְּבֵית שִׂמְחָה
טוֹב לִשְׁמֹעַ נֶעֱרַת חָכָם
מֵאִישׁ שֹׁמֵעַ שִׁיר כְּסִילִים

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

טוֹב אַחֲרִית דָּבָר מֵרֵאשִׁיתוֹ
טוֹב 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 הִיָּה שְׁהַיָּמִים הָרָאשִׁימִים

הָיוּ טוֹבִים מֵאֵלֶּה

כִּי לֹא מֵחֹכְמָה שְׁאַלְתָּ עַל-זֶה

טוֹבָה חֹכְמָה עִם-נַחֲלָה

וַיֹּתֵר לְרֹאֵי הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ

כִּי בִצֵּל הַחֹכְמָה

בִּצֵּל הַכֶּסֶף

וַיִּתְּרוֹן דַּעַת הַחֹכְמָה

תַּחְיָה בְּעָלֶיהָ

רְאֵה אֶת-מַעֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים

כִּי מִי יוּכַל לִתְקֹן אֶת אֲשֶׁר עָוְתוּ

בְּיוֹם טוֹבָה הִיָּה כְּטוֹב

וּבְיוֹם רָעָה

רְאֵה גַם אֶת-זֶה לְעִמְתּוֹ

עָשָׂה הָאֱלֹהִים

עַל-דִּבְרַת שְׁלֹא יִמְצֵא הָאָדָם

אֲחֲרָיו מֵאוּמָה

אֶת-הַכֹּל רָאִיתִי בִּימֵי הַבְּלִי

יֵשׁ צַדִּיק אֹבֵד בְּצִדְקוֹ

וַיֵּשׁ רָשָׁע מְאֹרֵךְ בְּרָעוֹתָיו

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 hakasef,

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־תַּחֲכֹּם יוֹתֵר

לָמָּה תִּשְׁוֹמֶם?

אַל־תִּרְשָׁע הַרְבֵּה

וְאַל־תְּהִי סָכָל

לָמָּה תָּמוּת בִּלְאֵ עֵתָּה

טוֹב אֲשֶׁר תִּעְחֹז בָּזֶה

וְנִמְצָא אֶל־תַּנַּח אֶת־יָדְךָ

כִּי־יִרֶחַ אֱלֹהִים

יֵצֵא אֶת־כָּלָם

הַחֲכָמָה תִּעֹז לַחֲכָם

מֵעֲשָׂרָה שְׁלִיטִים אֲשֶׁר חַיֵּי בָּעִיר

כִּי אָדָם אֵין צַדִּיק בָּאָרֶץ

אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה טוֹב וְלֹא יִחָטָא

גַּם לְכָל־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר יִדְבְּרוּ

אֶל־תִּתֵּן לִבְּךָ

אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תִשְׁמָח

אֶת־עַבְדְּךָ מִקַּלְלֶךָ

כִּי גַם־פְּעָמִים רַבּוֹת יֵדַע לִבְּךָ

אֲשֶׁר גַּם־אַתָּה קָלַלְתָּ אֲחֵרִים

כָּל־זֶה נִסִּיתִי בַּחֲכָמָה

אֲמַרְתִּי אֲחֻכָּמָה

וְהִיא רְחוּקָה מִמֶּנִּי

רְחוּק מִחַ־שְׁהַיָּה וְעָמוֹק אֶמֹֿק

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

וְלַתּוֹר וּבִקֵּשׁ חֲכָמָה וְחֶשְׁבֹּן

וְלַדַּעַת רָשָׁע כָּסֹל

וְהַסְכְּלוֹת הוֹלֵלוֹת

וּמוֹצֵזָה אֲנִי מֵרַר מִמָּוֶת אֶת־הָאִשָּׁה

אֲשֶׁר־הִיא מִצְדִּידִים וְחֶרְמִים לְבָהּ

אֲסוּרִים יְדֶיהָ טוֹב

לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים יִמְלֹט מִמֶּנָּה

וְחוֹטֵא יִלְכָּד בָּהּ

רֵאָה זֶה מָצָאתִי אִמְרָה קְהֵלֶת

אֶחָת לְאֶחָת לְמֵצָא חֶשְׁבֹּן

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 בִּקְשׁוּ חֲשִׁבֹנוֹת רַבִּים

Saboti ani velibi lada'at

velatur uvakesh chochma vecheshbon

velada'at resha kesel

vehasichlut holelot.

Umozeh 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 (קְהֵלֶת) 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 כִהְחָחָם

וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ פֶּשֶׁר דָּבָר

חֹכְמַת אָדָם תְּאִיר פָּנָיו

וְעַז פָּנָיו יִשְׁנֶה

אֲנִי פִי מֶלֶךְ שֶׁמֹּר

וְעַל דְּבַר־תְּשׁוּבָת אֱלֹהִים

אַל-תִּבְהַל מִפְּנֵי תִלָּךְ

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-אֵינָנוּ יוֹדֵעַ מַה-שְּׂיֵהֶיָּהּ

כִּי כָאֲשֶׁר 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 רֶשֶׁע אֶת־בְּעָלָיו

אֶת־כָּל־זֶה רָאִיתִי וְנָתַן אֶת־לִבִּי

לְכָל־מַעֲשֵׂה אֲשֶׁר נָאֵשָׂה

תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ

עַתָּה אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַט הָאָדָם בָּאָדָם

לְרַע לוֹ

וּבְכֹן רָאִיתִי רְשָׁעִים קִבְּרִים

וְנָבְאוּ וּמִמְקוֹם קָדוֹשׁ יִהְיֶיכוּ

וַיִּשְׁתַּכְּחוּ בְעִיר

אֲשֶׁר כֵּן־עָשׂוּ

גַּם־זֶה הַכֵּל

אֲשֶׁר אֵין־נִעְשֶׂה פִּתְגָם

מַעֲשֵׂה הָרָעָה מְהֵרָה

עַל־כֵּן מָלֵא לֵב בְּנֵי־הָאָדָם בָּהֶם

לַעֲשׂוֹת רָע

אֲשֶׁר חֹטֵא עֹשֶׂה רָע מֵאֵת

וּמֵאֲרִיֵּךְ 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 כַּצֶּל
אֲשֶׁר אֵינָנו יָרֵא מִלִּפְנֵי אֱלֹהִים
יֶשֶׁהֶבֶל אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשֶׂה עַל־הָאָרֶץ
אֲשֶׁר יֵשׁ צַדִּיקִים
אֲשֶׁר מַגִּיעַ אֲלֵהֶם
כְּמַעֲשֵׂה הָרָשָׁעִים
וְיֵשׁ רְשָׁעִים
שֶׁמַּגִּיעַ אֲלֵהֶם
כְּמַעֲשֵׂה הַצַּדִּיקִים
אֲמַרְתִּי שֶׁגַּם־זֶה הֶבֶל
וְשִׁבַּחְתִּי אֲנִי אֶת־הַשִּׁמְחָה
אֲשֶׁר אֵין־טוֹב לָאָדָם
תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ
כִּי אִם־לֶאֱכֹל וְלִשְׁתּוֹת וְלִשְׂמֹחַ
וְהוּא יִלְוֶנוּ בְּעַמְלֹ
יָמֵי חַיָּיו
אֲשֶׁר־נָתַן־לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים
תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ
כַּאֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי אֶת־לִבִּי
לְדַעַת חִכְמָה
וְלִרְאוֹת אֶת־הָעֲנָן
אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשֶׂה עַל־הָאָרֶץ
כִּי גַם בַּיּוֹם וּבַלַּיְלָה
שְׁנָה בְּעֵינָיו אֵינָנו רֹאֶה

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.
Veshibachtu 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 לֵדַעַת
לֹא יוּכַל לִמְצֹא

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
וּלְבַוֵּר אֶת־כָּל־זֶה
אֲשֶׁר הַצַּדִּיקִים וְהַחֲכָמִים
וְעַבְדֵי־הֶם
בְּיַד הָאֱלֹהִים
גַּם־אַהֲבָה גַּם־שִׂנְאָה
אֵין יוֹדֵעַ הָאָדָם הַכֹּל לִפְנֵיהֶם
הַכֹּל כַּאֲשֶׁר לִכְל מִקְרֶה אֶחָד
לַצַּדִּיק וְלָרָשָׁע
לַטוֹב וְלַטְהוֹר וְלַטָּמֵא
וְלַזֵּבֵחַ
וְלָאֲשֶׁר אֵינֶנּוּ זִבְחִי
כַּטּוֹב 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 lifneiheim.
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-מִקְרֵה אֶחָד 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 אָבְדָה

וְחֵלֶק אֵין-לָהֶם עוֹד לְעוֹלָם

בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר-נַעֲשֶׂה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ

לֶךְ אֲכַל בְּשִׂמְחָה לַחֲמֹץ

וּשְׁתֵּה בְּלֶב-טוֹב יִינֹךְ

כִּי כִבְר רָצָה הָאֱלֹהִים

אֶת-מַעֲשֶׂיךָ

בְּכָל-עֵת יְהִי בְּנִדְיָךְ לְבָנִים

וּשְׁמֶן עַל-רֹאשְׁךָ אֶל-יַחֲסֹר

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'ain 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.

רֵאָה חַיִּים עִם־אִשָּׁה Re'eh chayim im ishah
אֲשֶׁר־אָהַבְתָּ asher ahavta
כָּל־יְמֵי חַיֵּי הִבְלָךְ kol yemei chayei hevlecha
אֲשֶׁר נָתַן־לְךָ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ asher natan lecha tachat hashemesh,
כָּל יְמֵי הִבְלָךְ kol yemei hevlecha—
כִּי הוּא חֶלְכֶּךָ בַּחַיִּים ki hu chelkecha bachayim
וּבְעֵמָלְךָ אֲשֶׁר־אַתָּה עֹמֵל uva'amal'cha asher atah amel
תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ tachat hashamesh.
כֹּל אֲשֶׁר תִּמְצָא יָדְךָ Kol asher timtza yadcha
לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּכֹחַ עֲשֵׂה la'asot bechochacha, aseh;
כִּי־אֵין מַעֲשֵׂה וְחִשְׁבּוֹן ki ein ma'aseh vecheshbon
וְדַעַת וְחִכְמָה בְּשֹׁאֹל veda'at vechochmah biShe'ol
אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה הֹלֵךְ שָׁמָּה asher atah holech shamah.

ס

שָׁבֹתִי וָרָאָה תַּחַת־הַשָּׁמֶשׁ Shavti vera'oh tachat hashemesh
כִּי לֹא לַקְלִים הַמְרוֹץ ki lo lakalim hamerotz
וְלֹא לַגְּבוּרִים הַמִּלְחָמָה velo lagiborim hamil'chamah
וְגַם לֹא לַחֲכָמִים לֶחֶם vegam lo lachachamim lechem
וְגַם לַנְּבוֹנִים עֹשֶׁר vegam lo lanvonim osher
וְגַם לַיֹּדְעִים חֵן vegam lo layodim chen;
כִּי־עַתָּה וְפָנֵעַ יִקְרֶה אֶת־כָּלָם ki et vafegah yikreh et kulam.

¹ שֹׁאֹל 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 יֻקְשִׁים בְּנֵי הָאָדָם
לְעֵת רָעָה

כֶּשֶׁת־פִּיטוֹל עָלֵיהֶם פִּתְאֹם.
גַּם־זֶה רָאִיתִי חֹכְמָה
תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ
וְגִדּוּלָהּ הִיא אֵלַי

עִיר קְטַנָּה וְאֲנָשִׁים בָּהּ מְעַט;
וּבֹא־אֵלֶיהָ מֶלֶךְ גָּדוֹל וְסָבַב אֹתָהּ
וּבָנָה עָלֶיהָ מִצְדוֹתִים גְּדֹלִים
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 brain¹² is missing

so anyone can tell he's a fool.³

זְבוּוּעֵי מוֹת יִבְאִישׁ

יָבִיעַ שֶׁמֶן רוֹקַח

יָקָר מִחֲכָמָה מִכְבוֹד

סִכְלוֹת מַעַט

לֵב חָכָם לִימִינוֹ

וְלֵב פֶּסִיל לְשִׁמְלוֹ

וְגַם בַּדֶּרֶךְ פֶּשַׁכָּל הוֹלֵךְ⁴

לִבּוֹ חָסֵר

וְאָמַר לִכְל סָכָל

הוּא

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.

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.

אִם-רוּחַ הַמוֹשֵׁל תַּעֲלֶה עָלֶיךָ

מִקוֹמְךָ אַל-תִּנָּח

כִּי מַרְפֵּא יָנִיחַ חַטָּאִים גְּדוֹלִים

יֵשׁ רָעָה רְאִיתִי

תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ

כִּשְׁגָּגָה שֶׁיּוֹצֵא

מִלִּפְנֵי הַשָּׂלִיט

נִתֵּן הַסֶּכֶל בַּמְרוֹמִים רַבִּים

וַעֲשִׂירִים בַּשְּׁפֵל יֵשְׁבוּ

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.

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 כִּשְׁהִסָּכָל.

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).

⁷ I've seen servants on horseback
while leaders walk like servants
on the ground.

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

⁹ Someone who picks up rocks
will be hurt by them;
someone who chops trees
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?

רָאִיתִי עֲבָדִים עַל־סוּסִים
וְשָׂרִים הֹלְכִים כַּעֲבָדִים
עַל־הָאָרֶץ

חֹפֶר גּוּמָץ בּוֹ יִפּוֹל
וּפֹרֵץ גָּדֵר
יִשְׁכְּנֵנוּ נָחָשׁ.

מָסִיעַ אֲבָנִים
יַעֲזֹב בָּהֶם
בּוֹקֵעַ עֵצִים
יִסָּכֵן בָּם

אִם־קִהָה הַבְּרֹזֶל
וְהוּא לֹא־פָנִים קִלְקַל
וַחֲיָלִים יִגְבֹּר
וַיִּתְרוֹן הַכֶּשֶׁר²
חֲכָמָה

אִם־יִשְׁחַד הַנָּחָשׁ בְּלֹא־לֶחֶשׁ
וְאֵין יִתְרוֹן לְבַעַל הַלָּשׁוֹן

דִּבְרֵי פִי־חָכָם חֵן
וְשִׁפְתוֹת כֶּסֶל תִּבְלֶנּוּ

תְּהִילַת דִּבְרֵי־פִיהוּ סִכְלוֹת
וְאַחֲרֵית פִּיהוּ הוֹלְלוֹת רָעָה

וְהַסָּכָל יִרְבֶּה דְּבָרִים
לֹא־יָדַע הָאָדָם מַה־שְּׂיֵהְיֶה
וְאֲשֶׁר יֵהְיֶה מֵאַחֲרָיו
מִי יַגִּיד לוֹ

Ra'iti avadim al susim,
vesarim hol'chim ka'avadim
al ha'aretz.

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.

Im yishoch hanachash belo lachash
ve'ein yitron leva'al halashon.

Divrei fi chacham chen
vesifsot kesil tevalenu.

Tehilat divrei fihu sichlut
ve'acharit pihu holelut ra'ah.

Vehasachal yarbeh devarim;
lo yedah ha'adam mah sheyiheyeh;
va'asher yiheyeh me'acharav,
mi yagid lo?

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.”

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

עֲמַל הַכְּסִילִים תִּיגָעוּ
אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדָע
לָלֶכֶת אֶל-עִיר

Amal haksilim teyagenu,
asher lo yadah
lalechet el ir.

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

אֵי-לָךְ אֶרֶץ שְׂמַלְכֶךָ נָעַר
וְשָׂרָיִךְ בִּבְכֹר יֹאכְלוּ
אֲשֶׁרֶךְ אֶרֶץ

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.

שְׂמַלְכֶךָ בְּנֵי-חֹרִים
וְשָׂרָיִךְ בְּעֵת יֹאכְלוּ
בְּגִבּוּרָה 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.

בַּעֲזָלָתַיִם יִפּוֹךְ הַמִּקְרָה
וּבִשְׁפִלּוֹת 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*.

לִשְׂחֹק 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 בַּמַּדְעָה מֶלֶךְ אֶל-תִּקְלָל
וּבַחֲדָרַי מִשְׁכָּבְךָ
אֶל-תִּקְלָל עֲשִׂיר

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 יוֹלִיךְ אֶת-הַקּוֹל
וּבַעֲלֵי כַנָּפַיִם יַגִּיד דְּבָר

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 לַחֲמֶךָ עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם
כִּי-בִרְבַּב הַיָּמִים תִּמְצָאֶנּוּ

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

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

² וּבִשְׁפִלּוֹת 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 הכנפים, "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.

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

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.

תֵּן-לֶחֶם לְשִׁבְעָה Ten lechem leshivah
וְגַם לְשִׁמּוֹנָה vegam lishmonah
כִּי לֹא יָדַע מַה-יְהִיֶּה רָעָה ki lo tedah mah yiheyeh ra'ah
עַל-הָאָרֶץ al ha'aretz.
אִם-יִמְלֹאוּ הָעָבִים גֶּשֶׁם, Im yimalu he'avim geshem,
עַל-הָאָרֶץ יָרִיקוּ al ha'aretz yariku;
וְאִם-יִפֹּל עֵץ בְּדָרוֹם ve'im yipol etz badarom
וְאִם בְּצָפוֹן ve'im batzafon,
מְקוֹם שֶׁיִּפֹּל הָעֵץ שָׁם יִהְיֶה mekom sheyipol ha'etz, sham yehu.
שׁוֹמֵר רוּחַ לֹא יִזְרַע, Shomer ru'ach lo yizrah,
וְרֹאֶה בְּעָבִים לֹא יִקְצֹר. vero'eh be'avim lo yiktzor.
כַּאֲשֶׁר אֵינָהּ יוֹדֵעַ Ka'asher eincha yode'ah
מַה-דֶּרֶךְ הָרוּחַ mah derech haru'ach,
כַּעֲצָמִים בִּבְטֶן הַמְּלָאָה ka'atzamim beveten hamle'ah,
כֹּכָה לֹא יָדַע kacha lo tedah
אֶת-מַעֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים et ma'aseh ha'Elohim
אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה אֶת-הַכֹּל asher ya'aseh et hakol.
בַּבֹּקֶר זֶרַע אֶת-זֶרְעָהּ Baboker zerah et zarecha,
וּלְעֶרֶב אֶל-תִּנַּחַד יָדָהּ vela'erev al tanach yadecha,
כִּי אֵינָהּ יוֹדֵעַ ki eincha yode'ah
אִי זֶה יִכְשָׁר ei zeh yichshar,
הַזֶּה אוֹ-זֶה hazeh oh zeh,
וְאִם-שְׁנֵיהֶם כְּאֶחָד טוֹבִים ve'im shneiheim ke'echad tovim.
וּמַתּוֹק הָאוֹר Umatok ha'or;
וְטוֹב לַעֵינַיִם לִירֹת אֶת-הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ vetov la'einayim lirot et hashamesh.

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 יוֹדֵעַ, not יוֹדֵעַ.

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.

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.

כִּי אִם־שָׁנִים הַרְבֵּה יִחְיֶה הָאָדָם
בְּכֻלָּם יִשְׂמַח
וַיִּזְכֹּר אֶת־יָמָיו הַחֹשֶׁךְ
כִּי־הַרְבֵּה יִהְיוּ
כָּל־שָׂבָא הָבֵל
שִׂמְחָ בָּחֹר בְּיָלְדוּתוֹ
וַיִּשְׂבַּח לִבָּהּ בִּיָּמָיו בַּחֹרֹתָהּ
וְהִלָּךְ בְּדַרְכֵי לִבָּהּ
וּבְמַרְאֵי עֵינָיו
וְדָע כִּי עַל־כָּל־אֵלֶּה
יְבִיאָהּ הָאֱלֹהִים בַּמִּשְׁפָּט
וְהָסֵר כָּעַס מִלְּבָבָהּ
וְהִעֲבֵר רָעָה מִבְּשָׂרָהּ
כִּי־הַיָּלְדוּת וְהַשְׁחָרוּת הָבֵל

Ki im shanim harbeh yichyeh ha'adam,
bechulam yismach
veyizkor et yemei hachoshech
(ki harbeh yiheyu);
kol shebah havel.
Semach bachur beyaldutecha,
vitivcha lib'cha bimeiv echurotecha,
vehalech bedar'chei lib'cha
uvemarei einecha,
vedah ki al kol eleh
yevi'acha ha'Elohim bamishpat.
Vehaser ka'as milibechea,
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

וַיִּזְכֹּר אֶת־בּוֹרְאָיָהּ
בִּיָּמָיו בַּחֹרֹתָיָהּ
עַד אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָבֹאוּ יָמֵי הָרָעָה
וְהִגִּיעוּ שָׁנִים אֲשֶׁר תֹּאמַר
אֵין־לִי בָהֶם חֶפֶץ
עַד אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תִחְשַׁךְ הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ
וְהָאוֹר וְהַיָּרֵחַ וְהַכּוֹכָבִים
וְשָׁבוּ הָעָבִים אַחַר הַגֶּשֶׁם

Uzechor et borecha
bimeiv echurotecha
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.”

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.

³ On the day when the house guards tremble, the heroes bow <i>in fear</i> , the molars have fallen out and are useless ¹ and women who peer through windows go dark, ⁴ and the market gates are closed as the noise of the mill ² fades away; then one rises to the rooster's crowing ³ and all the song-girls are depressed. ⁴ ⁵ They'll be afraid from a height, <i>fearing</i> terrors along the path; the almond has blossomed the grasshopper grown heavy ⁵ and appetite has failed, as the person goes to his eternal place. But mourners ⁶ roam in the market	בַּיּוֹם שֶׁיִּזְעוּ שֹׁמְרֵי הַבַּיִת וְהִתְעוּתוּ אַנְשֵׁי הַחַיִּל וּבָטְלוּ הַטְּחָנוֹת כִּי מַעֲטוּ וַחֲשָׁכוּ הָרְאוֹת בְּאַרְבוֹת וּסְגְרוּ דִלְתַּיִם בַּשּׁוּק בִּשְׁפַל קוֹל הַטְּחָנָה וַיָּקוּם לְקוֹל הַצִּפּוֹר וַיִּשְׁחוּ כָל-בְּנוֹת הַשִּׁיר גַּם מִגְבֹּה יִרְאוּ וַחֲתָחִיִּים בְּדֶרֶךְ וַיִּנְאֹץ הַשֶּׁקֶד וַיִּסְתַּבֵּל הַחֲגָב וַתִּפֹּר הָאַבְיוֹנָה כִּי-הִלֵּךְ הָאָדָם אֶל-בֵּית עוֹלָמוֹ וַסִּבְּבוּ בַּשּׁוּק הַסּוֹפְדִים	Bayom sheyazu'u shomrei habayit, vehitavtu anshei hechayil uvatlu hatochanot ki mi'etu vechashchu haro'ot ba'arubot. 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.
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¹ “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 השיניים, which might mean the teeth; שנים טוחנות (grinding teeth) means molars.

² 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.

³ “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.

⁴ “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.”

⁵ 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.

⁶ Or “eulogizers,” perhaps professionals who deliver funeral orations.

⁶ as long as the silver cord is not frayed,	עַד אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִרְתֵּק חֵבֶל הַכֶּסֶף,	ad asher lo yeratek chevel hakesef
nor the golden bowl broken	וְתִרְצַן גִּלְתֵּי הַזָּהָב	vetarutz gulat hazahav
nor the pitcher broken at the fountain	וְתִשָּׁבֵר כַּד עַל־הַמְּבֹועַ	vetishaver kad al hamabu'ah
nor the cover ¹ cracked at the cistern	וְנִרְצָן הַגִּלְגָּל אֶל־הַבּוֹר	venarotz hagalgel el habor
⁷ nor dust returned to the earth	וַיֵּשֶׁב הָעָפָר עַל־הָאָרֶץ	veyashov he'afar al ha'aretz
as it used to be	כְּשֶׁהָיָה	keshehayah
nor the spirit returned to God	וְהָרִיחַ תָּשׁוּב אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים	veharu'ach tashuv el ha'Elohim
who gave it. ³	אֲשֶׁר נָתַן	asher netanah.
⁸ Pointless, pointless, said Speaker, ⁴	הֶבֶל הַבָּלִים אָמַר הַקֹּהֶלֶת	Havel havalim, amar haKohelet,
it's all pointless.	הַכֹּל הֶבֶל	hakol havel.
⁹ And more, since Speaker was wise	וַיֹּתֵר שֶׁהָיָה קֹהֶלֶת חָכָם	Veyoter, shehayah Kohelet chacham
he kept teaching knowledge to the people;	עוֹד לְמַד־דַּעַת אֶת־הָעָם	od limad da'at et ha'am
he listened and probed	וַאֲזַן וַחֲקַר	ve'izen vechiker,
and prepared many proverbs.	תִּקֵּן מִשְׁלִים הַרְבֵּה	tiken meshalim harbeh.
¹⁰ Speaker sought to find	בִּקֵּשׁ קֹהֶלֶת לְמִצָּא	Bikesh Kohelet limtzoh
acceptable words—	דִּבְרֵי־חֶפֶץ	divrei chefetz—
honest writing, words of truth.	וְכָתוּב יֹשֶׁר דִּבְרֵי אֱמֶת	vechaturv yosher, divrei emet.
¹¹ The words of the wise are like goads,	דִּבְרֵי חָכָמִים כַּדְרֵי־בָנוֹת	Divrei chachamim kadarvonot
like spikes pounded in <i>to stir the audience</i> , ⁵	וְכִמְשְׁמֵרוֹת נְטוּעִים	uchemasmerot netu'im
<i>such orators are people who manage crowds,</i>	בְּעֵלֵי אֲסֻפּוֹת	ba'alei asufot
provided by a single leader. ⁶	נִתְּנוּ מִרְעָה אֶחָד	nitnu mer'oeh echad.

¹ גִּלְגָּל 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.

² A manuscript version has the word ירחק.

³ 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.

⁴ The word for Speaker looks grammatically feminine but uses masculine verbs and adjectives.

⁵ For those of us unfamiliar with a goad (דַּרְבֵּן), it's something you sharpen with a file (1 Samuel 13:21), and then you poke your animal to get it moving. מִשְׁמֵר or מִסְמֵר (the ש sounds like ס) is often translated nail, but I presume it could be like a tent spike, “planted” (נְטוּעִים) or pounded into the ground. No doubt ancient orators brought their audiences to tears, one way or another. Ouch!

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.

וַיֹּתֵר מִהֶמָּה בְּנֵי הַזֶּהָר
עֲשׂוֹת סִפְרִים הַרְבֵּה אֵין קֵץ
וְלַהֲגֹ הַרְבֵּה יַגִּיעַת בָּשָׂר
סוֹף דָּבָר הַכֹּל נִשְׁמָח
אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים יִרָא
וְאֶת־מִצְוֹתָיו שְׁמֹר
כִּי־זֶה כֹל־הָאָדָם
כִּי אֶת־כָּל־מַעֲשֵׂה
הָאֱלֹהִים יָבֵא בְּמִשְׁפָּט
עַל כָּל־נֶעְלָם
אִם־טוֹב וְאִם־רָע

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.

⁶ 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.

The Book of Ester

אֶסְתֵּר

SPS Sample

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.

וַיְהִי בִימֵי אַחַשְׁוֶרוֹשׁ
הוּא אַחַשְׁוֶרוֹשׁ הַמֶּלֶךְ
מְהוּדוּ וְעַד-כּוּשׁ
שֶׁבַע וְעֶשְׂרִים וּמֵאָה מְדִינָה

Vayehi bimei Achashverosh,
hu Achashverosh hamolech
meHodu ve'ad Kush,
sheva ve'esrim ume'ah medinah.

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

בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם
כִּשְׁבֶּת הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֶרוֹשׁ
עַל כִּסֵּא מַלְכוּתוֹ
אֲשֶׁר בְּשׁוּשַׁן הַבִּירָה
בִּשְׁנַת שְׁלוֹשׁ לְמָלְכוֹ
עֲשֵׂה מִשְׁתֶּה
לְכָל-שָׂרָיו וְעַבְדָּיו
חֵיל פָּרָס וּמָדַי
חֲפָרְתִּימִים וְשָׂרֵי הַמְּדִינֹת
לְפָנָיו

Bayamim hahem,
keshevet hamelech 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 תִּפְעָלָת גְּדוּלָתוֹ
יָמִים רַבִּים
שְׁמוֹנִים וּמֵאָת יוֹם
וּבְמִלּוֹאֵת הַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה
עָשָׂה הַמֶּלֶךְ לְכָל-הָעָם
הַנִּמְצָאִים בְּשׁוּשָׁן הַבִּירָה
לְמִגְדוֹל וְעַד-קָטָן
מִשְׁתֶּה שִׁבַּת יָמִים
בַּחֲצָר גִּינַת בֵּיתֵן הַמֶּלֶךְ
חֹר | בְּרֶפֶס וּתְכֵלֶת
אָחוֹז בַּחֲבִלֵי-בֹיץ וְאַדְמָן
עַל-גִּלְיֵי כֶסֶף
וְעַמּוּדֵי שֵׁשׁ
מִטּוֹת | זָהָב וְכֶסֶף
עַל רִצֵּץ בַּהֲטָוֶשֶׁשׁ
וְדָר וְסוּחָרֶת
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.

וְהַשְׁתִּיָּה כֹדֶת
אֵין אָנֶס
כִּי־כֵן יִסַּד הַמֶּלֶךְ
עַל כָּל־רַב בֵּיתוֹ
לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּרָצוֹן אִישׁ־נָאִישׁ
גַּם וַשְׁתִּי הַמַּלְכָּה
עֲשָׂתָה מִשְׁתֶּה נָשִׁים
בֵּית הַמַּלְכוּת
אֲשֶׁר לַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֶרוֹשׁ

ס
בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי
כְּטוֹב לֵב־הַמֶּלֶךְ בַּיּוֹם
אָמַר לִמְהוּמָן בִּזְטָא כַּרְבוֹנָא
בִּגְטָא וַאֲבַגְטָא זֶטֶר וְכַרְקָס
שִׁבְתַּת הַסָּרִיסִים
הַמְשָׁרְתִּים אֶת־פָּנֵי
הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֶרוֹשׁ
לְהָבִיא אֶת־וַשְׁתִּי הַמַּלְכָּה
לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּכֶתֶר מַלְכוּת
לְהַרְאוֹת הָעַמִּים וְהַשָּׂרִים
אֶת־יּוֹפִיָּה כִּי־טוֹבַת מַרְאֶה הִיא

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 סריס 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 בֵּינֵי 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־עָשְׂתָהּ

אֶת־מֵאֲמַר הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֶרֶשׁ

בֵּינֵי 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 וַשְׁתִּי 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 אַחַשְׁוֶרוֹשׁ 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 אַחַשְׁוֶרוֹשׁ אָמַר ‘Hamelech Achashverosh amar
לְהָבִיא אֶת-וַשְׁתִּי הַמַּלְכָּה לִפְנָיו lehavi et Vashti hamalkah lefanav,
וְלֹא-בָאָה velo va’ah.’

וְהַיּוֹם הַזֶּה תֹּאמְרֵנָה Vehayom hazeh tomarnah
שָׂרוֹת פָּרַס-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 פָּרַס-וּמַדַּי veyikatev bedatei Faras uMadai,
וְלֹא יֵעָבֹר ve’lo ya’avor,
אֲשֶׁר לֹא-תָבֹא וַשְׁתִּי asher lo tavo Vashti
לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֶרוֹשׁ 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
וַיֵּיטֵב הַדָּבָר
בְּעֵינֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַשָּׂרִים
וַיַּעַשׂ הַמֶּלֶךְ כְּדִבְרֵי מִמּוּכָן
וַיִּשְׁלַח סְפָרִים
אֶל-כָּל-מְדִינֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ
אֶל-מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה כִּכְתָּבָהּ
וְאֶל-עַם וְעַם כְּלִשְׁוֹנוֹ
לְהֵיוֹת 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
כְּשֶׁךְ חָמַת
הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֶרוֹשׁ
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.”	וַיֹּאמְרוּ נְעָרֵי-הַמֶּלֶךְ מִשְׁחָרְתָּו וַיִּבְקְשׁוּ לַמֶּלֶךְ נְעָרוֹת בְּתוּלוֹת טוֹבוֹת מַרְאֶה וַיִּפְקֹד הַמֶּלֶךְ פְּקִידִים בְּכָל-מְדִינוֹת מַלְכוּתוֹ וַיִּקְבְּצוּ אֶת-כָּל-נְעָרֵה-בְּתוּלָה טוֹבַת מַרְאֶה אֶל-שׁוּשַׁן הַבִּירָה אֶל-בֵּית הַנָּשִׁים אֶל-יַד הֶגֶה סֶרִיס הַמֶּלֶךְ שֹׁמֵר הַנָּשִׁים וַנָּתֹן תַּמְרוּקֵיהֶן וְהַנְּעָרָה אֲשֶׁר תִּיטֵב בְּעֵינֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ תִּמְלֹךְ תַּחַת וַשְׁתִּי	Vayomru na'arei hamelech, meshartav, “Yevakshu lamelech ne'arot betulot tovoṯ mareh, veyafked hamelech pekidim bechol medinot mal'chuto veyikbetzu et kol na'arah vetulah tovat 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.”
This plan pleased the king, so that's what he did.	וַיִּיטֵב הַדָּבָר בְּעֵינֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיַּעַשׂ כֵּן ס	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 עִם־הַגּוֹלָה אֲשֶׁר הִגְלָתָהּ עִם 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־דּוֹדוֹ כִּי אֵין לָהּ אָב וְאֵם וַהֲנַעְרָה יָפַת־תֵּאֵר וְשׁוֹבַת 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 מֹרְדֳּכַי צִוָּה עָלֶיהָ
אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תִגִּיד
וּבְכָל־יּוֹם וָיוֹם
מֹרְדֳּכַי 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 יִמְלֹא
יְמֵי מְרוּקֵיהֶן
שִׁשִּׁיחַ חֳדָשִׁים בִּשְׁמֵן הַמֹּר
וְשִׁשִּׁיחַ חֳדָשִׁים בַּבִּשְׁמִים
וּבִתְמֻרְקֵי הַנָּשִׁים
וּבַזֶּה הַנְּעָרָה
בָּאָה אֶל-הַמֶּלֶךְ
אֶת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר תֹּאמַר
יִנָּתֵן לָהּ לָבֹא עִמָּהּ
מִבֵּית הַנָּשִׁים עַד-בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ
בָּעֶרֶב הִיא בָּאָה
וּבַבֹּקֶר הִיא שָׁבָה
אֶל-בֵּית הַנָּשִׁים שְׁנִי
אֶל-יַד שַׁעֲשָׁז
סֶרִיס הַמֶּלֶךְ
שֹׁמֵר הַפִּילָגְשִׁים
לֹא תָבוֹא עוֹד אֶל-הַמֶּלֶךְ
כִּי אִם-חֹפֶץ 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־רֹאֵיהָ

וַתִּלְקַח אֶסְתֵּר

אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֶרֶשׁ

אֶל־בֵּית מַלְכוּתוֹ

בַּחֹדֶשׁ הָעֲשִׂירִי

הוֹאֲחֶדֶשׁ טֵבֵת

בִּשְׁנַת־שֶׁבַע לְמַלְכוּתוֹ

וַיֶּאֱהָב הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת־אֶסְתֵּר

מִכָּל־הַנָּשִׁים

וַתִּשָּׂא־חַן וַחֲסֵד לְפָנָיו

מִכָּל־הַבְּתוּלוֹת

וַיָּשֶׂם כֶּתֶר־מַלְכוּת בְּרֹאשָׁהּ

וַיַּמְלִיכֶהָ תַּחַת וַשְׁתִּי

וַיַּעַשׂ הַמֶּלֶךְ מִשְׁתֶּה גָדוֹל

לְכָל־שָׂרָיו וְעַבְדָּיו

אֶת מִשְׁתֵּה אֶסְתֵּר

וַהֲנַחֲהָ לַמַּדִּינוֹת עֹשָׂה

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'eha.

Vatilakach Ester

el hamelech Achashverosh

el beit mal'chuto

bachodesh ha'asiri,

hu chodesh Tevet,

bshnat sheva lemal'chuto.

Vaye'ehav 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

מִלְאֲדָתָהּ וְאֶת-עַמָּהּ

כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה עָלֶיהָ מֶרְדֳּכַי

וְאֶת-מַאֲמַר מֶרְדֳּכַי אֶסְתֵּר עָשָׂה

כַּאֲשֶׁר 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

וַיִּבְקְשׁוּ 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.

וַיִּבְקַשׁ הַדָּבָר וַיִּמָּצֵא

וַיִּתְּלוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם עַל-עֵץ

וַיִּכְתֹּב בְּסֵפֶר דִּבְרֵי הַיָּמִים

לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ

Vayevukash hadavar vayimatze,

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 אָתָּו

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

מַדּוּעַ אַתָּה עוֹבֵר

אֶת מִצְוַת הַמֶּלֶךְ

וַיְהִי כִּאֲמֹרָם אֵלָיו יוֹם

וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֲלֵיהֶם

וַיַּגִּידוּ לְהָמָן

לִרְאוֹת

הַיַּעֲמֻדֵי דְבַרֵי 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

וַיִּבֹז בְּעֵינָיו לְשַׁלַּח יָד

בְּמֶרְדֳּכָי לְבַדּוֹ

כִּי־הִגִּידוּ לוֹ אֶת־עַם מֶרְדֳּכָי

וַיִּבְקֹשׁ 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 Achashverosh,

am Mordochai.

Bachodesh harishon,

hu chodesh Nisan,

bishnat shteim esreh

lamelech Achashverosh,

hipil Pur (hu hagonal)

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

יֵשְׁנוּ 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 לְאַבְדָּם

וְעֲשֶׂרֶת אֲלָפִים כֶּכֶר-כֶּסֶף

אֶשְׁקֹל

עַל-יְדֵי עֹשֵׂי הַמְּלָאכָה

לְהָבִיא אֶל-גִּנְזֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ

וַיִּסֶּר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת-טַבַּעְתּוֹ מֵעַל יָדוֹ

וַיִּתְּנָהּ לְהָמָן בֶּן-הַמְּדַתָּא

הָאֲגָגִי צָרָר 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
בִּשְׁלוֹשָׁה עָשָׂר יוֹם בּוֹ
וַיִּכְתֹּב כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּה הָמָן
אֶל־אֲחַשְׁדָּרְפֵּנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ
וְאֶל־הַפָּחוֹת
אֲשֶׁר ׀ עַל־מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה
וְאֶל־שָׂרֵי עַם וְעַם
מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה כִּי־תָבֹא
וְעַם וְעַם כָּל־שׁוֹנוֹ
בְּשֵׁם הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֶרֶשׁ
נִכְתָּב וְנִחְתָּם בְּטַבַּעַת הַמֶּלֶךְ
וְנִשְׁלְחוּ סִפְרִים בְּיַד הָרָצִים
אֶל־כָּל־מְדִינֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ
לְהַשְׁמִיד לַהֲרֹג וּלְאַבֵּד
אֶת־כָּל־הַיְּהוּדִים
מִנָּעַר וְעַד־זָקֵן טָף וְנָשִׁים
בְּיוֹם אֶחָד בִּשְׁלוֹשָׁה עָשָׂר
לְחֹדֶשׁ שְׁנֵים־עָשָׂר
הוּא־חֹדֶשׁ אָדָר
וּשְׁלָלָם לָבוֹז
פַּתְשֵׁגֶן הַכֶּתֶב
לְהִנָּתֵן דָּת
כָּל־מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה
גָּלוּי לְכָל־הָעַמִּים
לְהִיּוֹת אֲתִידִים לַיּוֹם הַהוּא
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

הַרְצִיִּים יָצְאוּ דְחוּפִים
בְּדַבַּר הַמֶּלֶךְ
וְהַדָּת נִתְּנָה
בְּשׁוּשָׁן הַבִּירָה
וְהַמֶּלֶךְ וְהָמָן יָשְׁבוּ לִשְׂתוֹת
וְהָעִיר שׁוּשָׁן נְבוּחָה.

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 וָאֵפֶר
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 מֵנִיעַ
אֶבֶל גָּדוֹל לַיהוּדִים
וְצוֹם וּבְכִי וּמִסְפָּד
שָׂק וָאֵפֶר יֻצַּע לָרַבִּים.

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

² The word נְבוּכָה 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 מִסְפָּד 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 נַעֲרוֹת אֶסְתֵּר
וְסָרִיסֶיהָ וַיַּגִּידוּ לָהּ
וַתִּתְחַלְחַל הַמַּלְכָּה מְאֹד
וַתִּשְׁלַח בְּגָדִים
לְהַלְבִּישׁ אֶת-מֶרְדֳּכָי
וּלְהַסִּיר שָׁקוֹ מֵעָלָיו
וְלֹא קָבַל
וַתִּקְרָא אֶסְתֵּר לַהַתָּךְ
מִסָּרִיסֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ
אֲשֶׁר הָעֵמִיד לִפְנֶיהָ
וַתְּצַוֶּהוּ עַל-מֶרְדֳּכָי
לֵדַעַת מַה-זֶּה וְעַל-מַה-זֶּה
וַיֵּצֵא הַתָּךְ אֶל-מֶרְדֳּכָי
אֶל-רֶחֳב הָעִיר
אֲשֶׁר לִפְנֵי שַׁעַר-הַמֶּלֶךְ
וַיַּגֵּד-לוֹ מֶרְדֳּכָי
אֵת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר קָרָהוּ
וְאֵת אֶת-פְּרִשַׁת 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,
velo 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 rechov 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 עָלֶיהָ
לָבוֹא אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ לְהַתְחַנֵּן־לוֹ
וּלְבַקֵּשׁ מִלְּפָנָיו עַל־עַמָּהּ
וַיָּבֹא הָתֵד וַיַּגִּד לְאֶסְתֵּר
אֶת דִּבְרֵי מֶרְדֳּכָי
וַתֹּמֶר אֶסְתֵּר לְהָתֵד
וַתְּצַוֶּהוּ אֶל־מֶרְדֳּכָי
כָּל־עַבְדֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ
וְעַם־מְדִינֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ
יֹדְעִים אֲשֶׁר כָּל־אִישׁ וְאִשָּׁה
אֲשֶׁר יָבֹא־אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ
אֶל־הַחֹצֵר הַפְּנִימִית
אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִקְרָא
אֲחַת דָּתוֹ לְהָמִית
לְבַד מֵאֲשֶׁר יוֹשִׁיט־לוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ
אֶת־שֶׁרֶבִיט הַזָּהָב וְחַיָּהּ
וְאֲנִי לֹא נִקְרָאתִי
לָבוֹא אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ
זֶה שְׁלוֹשִׁים יוֹם
וַיַּגִּידוּ לְמֶרְדֳּכָי
אֶת דִּבְרֵי אֶסְתֵּר

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
לְהַשִּׁיב אֶל-אֶסְתֵּר
אֶל-תְּדָמִי בִנְפֹשֶׁךְ
לְהִמָּלֵט בֵּית-הַמֶּלֶךְ
מִכָּל-הַיְּהוּדִים
כִּי אִם-חַחֲרֵשׁ תַּחֲרִישִׁי
בְּעֵת הַזֹּאת
רִנָּח וְהַצָּלָה
יֵעָמֹד לַיְּהוּדִים
מִמָּקוֹם אֲחֵר
וְאֵת וּבֵית-אָבִיךָ תֵּאבְדוּ
וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ
אִם-לָעֵת כִּזֹּאת
הִגַּעְתָּ לַמָּלְכוּת
וַתֹּמֶר אֶסְתֵּר לְהַשִּׁיב אֶל-מֶרְדֳּכָי
לֵךְ כְּנוֹס אֶת-כָּל-הַיְּהוּדִים
הַנִּמְצְאִים בְּשׁוּשָׁן
וְצִוּמוּ עָלַי
וְאֶל-תֹּאכְלוּ וְאֶל-תִּשְׁתּוּ
שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים לַיְלָה וַיּוֹם
גַּם-אֲנִי וְנַעֲרֹתַי אֲצִוּם כֵּן
וּבִכְן אָבוֹא אֶל-הַמֶּלֶךְ
אֲשֶׁר לֹא-כֵדָת
וְכֹאֲשֶׁר אָבִדְתִּי אָבִדְתִּי
וַיַּעֲבֹר מֶרְדֳּכָי נִיעֵשׁ
כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר-צִוְתָהּ עָלָיו אֶסְתֵּר

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-שֶׁרֶבִיט הַזָּהָב אֲשֶׁר בְּיָדוֹ

וַתִּקְרַב אֶסְתֵּר

וַתִּגַּע בְּרֹאשׁ הַשֶּׁרֶבִיט

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'ainav,

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 hamishteh asher 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
 מַהֲרֵנוּ אֶת־הַמֶּן
 לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־דְּבַר אֶסְתֵּר
 וַיָּבֹא הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַמֶּן
 אֶל־הַמִּשְׁתֶּה
 אֲשֶׁר־עֲשִׂתָּה אֶסְתֵּר
 וַיֹּמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְאֶסְתֵּר
 בְּמִשְׁתֵּה הַיַּיִן
 מַה־שָּׂאלָתְךָ וַיִּנָּתֶן לָךְ
 וּמַה־בִּקְשָׁתְךָ
 עַד־חֲצִי הַמַּלְכוּת וְהַעֲשֵׂה
 וַתֵּעַן אֶסְתֵּר וַתֹּאמֶר
 שְׂאֵלָתִי וּבִקְשָׁתִי
 אִם־מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ
 וְאִם־עַל־הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב
 לָתֵת אֶת־שְׂאֵלָתִי
 וּלַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־בִּקְשָׁתִי
 יָבֹא הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַמֶּן
 אֶל־הַמִּשְׁתֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֶעֱשֶׂה לָּהֶם
 וּמָחָר אֶעֱשֶׂה כְּדִבַּר הַמֶּלֶךְ
 וַיַּצֵּא הַמֶּן בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא
 שִׂמְחָה וְטוֹב לֵב
 וּכְרָאוֹת הַמֶּן אֶת־מָרְדֳּכָי
 בַּשַּׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ
 וְלֹא־קָם וְלֹא־זָע מִמֶּנּוּ
 וַיִּמָּלֵא הַמֶּן
 עַל־מָרְדֳּכָי חֲמָה

Vayomer hamelech,
 “Maharu et Haman
 la’asot et devar Ester.”
 Vayavo hamelech veHaman
 el hamishteh
 asher astah Ester.
 Vayomer hamelech le’Ester
 bemishteh hayayin,
 “Mah she’elatech veyinaten lach,
 umah bakashatech?
 Ad chatzi hamal’chut vete’as!”
 Vata’an Ester vatomar,
 “She’elati uvakashati:
 Im matzati chen be’einei hamelech
 ve’im al hamelech tov
 latet et she’elati
 vela’asot et bakashati,
 yavo hamelech veHaman
 el hamishteh asher e’eseh lahem,
 umachar e’eseh kidvar hamelech.”
 Vayetze Haman bayom hahu
 same’ach vetov lev;
 vechirot Haman et Mordochai
 besha’ar hamelech,
 velo kam velo zah mimenu,
 vayimaleh Haman
 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; וַיִּתְאַפֵּק הָמָן וַיָּבוֹא אֶל-בֵּיתוֹ Vayit'apek Haman vayavo el beito;
 he sent *servants* to bring his friends וַיִּשְׁלַח וַיָּבֵא אֶת-אֹהֲבָיו vayishlach, vayaveh et ohavav
 and Zeresh, his wife; וְאֶת-זֶרֶשׁ אִשְׁתּוֹ ve'et Zeresh ishto,
¹¹ Haman reported to them וַיַּעֲסֹפֶר לָהֶם הָמָן vayasaper lahem Haman
 the glory of his wealth and number of his sons, אֶת-כְּבוֹד עֲשָׂרוֹ וְרֹב בָּנָיו et kevod oshro verov banav,
 all about how the king had promoted him וְאֵת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר גִּדְּלוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ ve'et kol asher gidlo hamelech
 and raised him above *other* chiefs וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר נִשְׂאוֹ עַל-הַשָּׂרִים ve'et asher niso al hasarim
 and royal servants. וְעַבְדֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ ve'avdei hamelech.
¹² And Haman said, וַיֹּאמֶר הָמָן Vayomer Haman,
 “But Queen Ester didn’t invite *anyone* אַף לֹא-הִבִּי'אָה אֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה “Af lo hevi'ah Ester hamalkah
 with the king to the drinking binge עַם-הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל-הַמִּשְׁתֶּה im hamelech el hamishteh
 she made, except only me. אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂתָה כִּי אִם-אִתִּי asher asatah ki im oti.
 Tomorrow, too, I’m invited to visit her וְגַם-לְמָחָר אֲנִי קָרוּא-לָהּ Vegam lemachar ani karu lah
 with the king. עַם-הַמֶּלֶךְ im hamelech.
¹³ But none of this means anything to me¹ וְכָל-זֶה אֵינֶנּוּ שׁוֹפֵה לִּי Vechol zeh einenu shoveh li
 whenever I see בְּכָל-עֵת אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי רֹאֶה bechol et asher ani ro'eh
 that Jew Mordochai אֶת-מֶרְדֳּכָי הַיְּהוּדִי at Mordochai haYehudi
 stationed at the palace gate.” יוֹשֵׁב בִּשְׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ yoshev besha'ar hamelech.

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

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.¹
Go to the drinking binge with the king
cheerfully.”
Haman thought this was a good idea
so he made the gallows.

וַתֹּאמֶר לוֹ זֶרֶשׁ אִשְׁתּוֹ
וְכָל-אֶחָיו
יַעֲשׂוּ-עֵץ גָּבוֹהַ חֲמִישִׁים אַמָּה
וּבבֹקֶר | אָמַר לַמֶּלֶךְ
וַיִּתְּלוּ אֶת-מָרְדֳּכָי עָלָיו
וּבא-עִם-הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל הַמִּשְׁתֶּה
שָׂמֵחַ
וַיֵּיטֵב הַדָּבָר לִפְנֵי הָמָן
וַיַּעַשׂ הָעֵץ
פ

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 ha’etz.

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.²
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.

בַּלַּיְלָה הַהוּא נִדְרָה שְׁנַת הַמֶּלֶךְ
וַיֹּאמֶר לְהָבִיא אֶת-סֵפֶר הַזִּכְרֹנוֹת
דִּבְרֵי הַיָּמִים
וַיִּהְיוּ נִקְרָאִים לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ
וַיִּמָּצֵא כָתוּב
אֲשֶׁר הִגִּיד מָרְדֳּכָי
עַל-בִּגְתָּנָא וְתֶרֶשׁ
שְׁנֵי סָרִיסֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ
מִשְׁמֹרֵי הַסֶּף
אֲשֶׁר בִּקְשׁוּ לִשְׁלַח יָד
בַּמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֶרֶשׁ

Balaila hahu naded 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

¹ “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 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.

² “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.”

³ The king said, “What has been done,
of value and dignity¹

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!”

⁶ Haman entered and the king asked him,

“What’s to be done for the man

whom the king values dearly?”²

Haman said to himself,

“Whom would the king cherish,

to show *his* esteem, more than me?”

⁷ Haman told the king,

“Someone whom the king values dearly,

⁸ let there be brought royal garments

that the king *himself* has worn,

and a horse the king has ridden

with the royal crest on its headdress,³

⁹ and the garments and horse delivered

וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ מַה־נַּעֲשָׂה

יֵקָר וְגִדּוּלָהּ

לְמֹרְדֹכַי עַל־זֶה

וַיֹּאמְרוּ נַעֲרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ מִשְׁחַרְתֵּי

לֹא־נַעֲשָׂה עִמּוֹ דָּבָר

וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ מִי בַחֲצֵר

וְהָמָן בָּא

לְחֲצֵר בֵּית־הַמֶּלֶךְ הַחִיצוֹנָה

לֵאמֹר לְמֶלֶךְ לְתִלּוֹת אֶת־מֹרְדֹכַי

עַל־הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר־הֵכִין לוֹ

וַיֹּאמְרוּ נַעֲרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֵלָיו

הִנֵּה הָמָן עֹמֵד בַּחֲצֵר

וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ יָבוֹא

וַיָּבֹא הָמָן וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ

מַה־לַּעֲשׂוֹת בָּאִישׁ

אֲשֶׁר הַמֶּלֶךְ חָפֵץ בִּיקָרוֹ

וַיֹּאמֶר הָמָן בְּלִבּוֹ

לְמִי יַחֲפֹץ הַמֶּלֶךְ

לַעֲשׂוֹת יֵקָר וְיֹתֵר מִמֶּנִּי

וַיֹּאמֶר הָמָן אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ

אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הַמֶּלֶךְ חָפֵץ בִּיקָרוֹ

יָבִיאוּ לְבוּשׁ מַלְכוּת

אֲשֶׁר לְבַשָּׁבוּ הַמֶּלֶךְ

וְסוּס אֲשֶׁר רָכַב עָלָיו הַמֶּלֶךְ

וְאֲשֶׁר נָתַן כֶּתֶר מַלְכוּת בְּרֹאשׁוֹ

וְנָתַן הַלְבוּשׁ וְהַסּוּס

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.”

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

¹ Or “dearness and greatness.”

² Or, “cherishes for his value/cherishes in his estimation.”

³ 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.

by one of the king's top chiefs;
let the man be dressed

(whom the king values dearly)
and placed on the horse, to ride
through the town,¹

with cryers before him,²

“This is done for the man
whom the king values dearly.”

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 hurried³ home in misery,
ashamed to show his face.⁴

עַל־יַד־אִישׁ מִשָּׂרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ הַפְּרָתֵמִים

וְהִלְבִּישׁוּ אֶת־הָאִישׁ

אֲשֶׁר הַמֶּלֶךְ חָפֵץ בִּיקָרוֹ

וְהִרְכִּיבֵהוּ עַל־הַסּוּס

בִּרְחוֹב הָעִיר

וַיִּקְרְאוּ לִפְנָיו

כָּכָה יַעֲשֶׂה לָאִישׁ

אֲשֶׁר הַמֶּלֶךְ חָפֵץ בִּיקָרוֹ

וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְהַמֵּן מָהֶר

קַח אֶת־הַלְּבוּשׁ וְאֶת־הַסּוּס

כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ

וַעֲשֵׂה־כֹּל לְמֹרְדֹכַי הַיְּהוּדִי

הַיּוֹשֵׁב בְּשַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ

אֶל־תַּפֵּל דָּבָר

מִכֹּל אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ

וַיִּקַּח הָמָן

אֶת־הַלְּבוּשׁ וְאֶת־הַסּוּס

וַיַּלְבֵּשׁ אֶת־מֹרְדֹכַי

וַיַּרְכִּיבֵהוּ בִּרְחוֹב הָעִיר

וַיִּקְרְאוּ לִפְנָיו

כָּכָה יַעֲשֶׂה לָאִישׁ

אֲשֶׁר הַמֶּלֶךְ חָפֵץ בִּיקָרוֹ

וַיָּשָׁב מֹרְדֹכַי

אֶל־שַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ

וְהָמָן נִדְחַף אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ אָבֵל

וְחַפְזֵי רֹאשׁ

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.”

Vayomer hamelech leHaman, “Maher!

kach et halevush ve'et hasus

ka'asher dibarta,

va'aseh chen leMordochai haYehudi

hayoshev besh'a'ar hamelech.

Al tapel davar

mikol asher dibarta.”

Vayikach Haman

et halevush ve'et hasus

vayalbish 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.

¹ “Through the width/street/open space of the town/city.”

² “And let them cry out before him”

³ “Haman was hurried”; the verb is passive, so perhaps people pushed him around since he'd been humiliated.

⁴ “And covered of head,” with his head covered—presumably so people wouldn't see his humiliation.

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.”

¹⁴ They were still speaking to him

when the king’s eunuchs arrived

and rushed Haman off¹

to the drinking binge that Ester made.

וַיֹּסֶפֶר הָמָן לְזֶרֶשׁ אִשְׁתּוֹ

וּלְכָל־אֶחָיו

אֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר קָרָהוּ

וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ חַכְמָיו וְזֶרֶשׁ אִשְׁתּוֹ

אִם מִזְרַע הַיְּהוּדִים מְרִדָּכִי

אֲשֶׁר הַחִלּוֹת לִנְפֹל לִפְנֵי

לֹא־תוּכַל לוֹ,

כִּי־נָפֹל תִּפּוֹל לִפְנֵי

עוֹדִם מְדַבְרִים עִמּוֹ

וְסָרִיסֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ הִגִּיעוּ

וַיַּבְחִלוּ לְהַבִּיא אֶת־הָמָן

אֶל־הַמִּשְׁתֶּה אֲשֶׁר־עָשְׂתָה אֶסְתֵּר

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.”

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!”

³ In response, Queen Ester said:

“If you would grant me a favor,

king,

and if the king approves—

let my life be granted me when I ask *for it*

and my people at my request.

⁴ For we’ve been sold, I and my people,

to be destroyed, murdered and annihilated.

וַיָּבֹא הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהָמָן

לִשְׁתּוֹת עִם־אֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה

וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְאֶסְתֵּר גַּם

בַּיּוֹם הַשֵּׁנִי בְּמִשְׁתֵּה הַיַּיִן

מִה־שְּׁאֵלָתְךָ אֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה

וְתַנְתֵּן לִּי וּמִה־בִּקְשָׁתְךָ

עַד־חֲצֵי הַמַּלְכוּת וְתַעַשׂ

וְתַעַן אֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה וְתֹאמַר

אִם־מַצָּאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ

הַמֶּלֶךְ

וְאִם־עַל־הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב

תִּנָּתֶן־לִי נַפְשִׁי בִּשְׁאֵלָתִי

וְעַמִּי בְּבִקְשָׁתִי

כִּי נִמְכַּרְנוּ אֲנִי וְעַמִּי

לְהַשְׁמִיד לַהֲרֹג וּלְאַבֵּד

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,

ve’im al hamelech tov,

tinaten li nafshi bish’elati

ve’ami bevakashati.

Ki nimkarnu, ani ve’ami,

lehashmid, laharog ule’abed.

¹ “Hurried to bring Haman.”

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.¹

וְאִלּוּ לְעַבְדִּים וְלַשְׁפָּחוֹת
נִמְכַּרְנוּ
הֵחֵרַשְׁתִּי
כִּי אֵין הַצָּר שׁוֹוֶה
בְּנֹזֶק הַמֶּלֶךְ
ס

Ve'ilu la'avadim velishfachot
nimkarnu
hecherashti,
ki ein hatzar shoveh
benezek hamelech.

⁵ King Achashverosh said—
he said to Queen Ester—
“Who is it, where is he
who has determined² to do this?”

וַיֹּמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֶרוֹשׁ
וַיֹּמֶר לְאַסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה
מִי הוּא זֶה וְאֵי-זֶה הוּא
אֲשֶׁר-מִלְאוּ לְבוֹ לַעֲשׂוֹת כֵּן
וַתֹּאמֶר-אַסְתֵּר אִישׁ צָר וְאוֹיֵב
הָמֵן הָרַע הַזֶּה

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!”

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

Then Haman felt terrified
before the king and queen.

וְהָמֵן נִבְעַת
מִלִּפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַמַּלְכָּה
וְהַמֶּלֶךְ קָם בַּחֲמָתוֹ
מִמִּשְׁתַּח הַיַּיִן
אֶל-גִּיטַת הַבֵּיתָן

VeHaman nivat
milifnei hamelech vehamalkah.
Vehamelech kam bachamato
mimishteh hayayin
el ginat habitan,

⁷ In his anger, the king 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.³

וְהָמֵן עָמַד לְבַקֵּשׁ עַל-נַפְשׁוֹ
מֵאַסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה
כִּי רָאָה
כִּי-כֹלְתָה אֵלָיו הָרָעָה
מֵאֵת הַמֶּלֶךְ

veHaman amad levakesh al nafsho
me'Ester hamalkah,
ki ra'ah
ki chaltah elav hara'ah
me'et hamelech.

¹ “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.

² “Who filled his heart,” so he’d do it whole-heartedly.

³ “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.

⁸ The king came back from the palace garden
to the wine party.

Haman had collapsed on the couch¹
where Ester was.

The king said,

“Would you even force the queen
with me *standing right* here?”²

The words came from the king’s mouth
so they covered Haman’s face.

וְהַמֶּלֶךְ שָׁב מִגִּנַּת הַבַּיִת
אֶל-בֵּית מִשְׁתֵּה הַיַּיִן
וְהָמָן נָפַל עַל-הַמִּטָּה
אֲשֶׁר אֶסְתֵּר עָלֶיהָ
וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ
הֲגַם לִכְבוֹשׁ אֶת-הַמַּלְכָּה
עִמִּי בַּבַּיִת
הַדָּבָר יֵצֵא מִפִּי הַמֶּלֶךְ
וּפְנֵי הָמָן חָפּוּ

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.

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
נִבְחָה חֲמִשִּׁים אַמָּה
וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ תִּלְהוּ עָלָיו
וַיִּתְּלוּ אֶת-הָמָן עַל-הָעֵץ
אֲשֶׁר-הֵכִין לְמֹרְדֳּכָי
וַחֲמַת הַמֶּלֶךְ שָׁכָחָה

Vayomer Charvonah,
echad min hasarisim lifnei hamelech,
“Gam hinch ha’etz
asher asah Haman leMordochai,
asher diber tov al hamelech,
omed bebeit Haman,
gavo’ah chamishim amah.”
Vayomer hamelech, “Teluhu alav.”
Vayitlu et Haman al ha’etz
asher hechin leMordochai,
vachamat hamelech shachachah.

¹ The ancients ate and drank in a reclining position (you can try this at home in your own recliner).

² “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.

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.

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.

בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא
נָתַן הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶחָשְׁוֶרוֹשׁ
לְאֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה אֶת־בֵּית הָמָן
צֹרֵר הַיְּהוּדִים²
וּמֹרְדֹכַי בָּא
לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ
כִּי־הִגִּידָה אֶסְתֵּר מַה הוּא־לָּהּ
וַיָּסֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת־טַבַּעְתּוֹ
אֲשֶׁר הָעֵבִיר מֵהָמָן
וַיִּתְּנָהּ לְמֹרְדֹכַי
וַתָּשֶׂם אֶסְתֵּר אֶת־מֹרְדֹכַי
עַל־בֵּית הָמָן
פ

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.

¹ "What he was to her."

² A manuscript reads **יהודיים**

³ To Haman, in 3:10.

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

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.

וַתֹּמֶר אֶל-הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב
וְאִם-מָצָאתִי חֵן לְפָנָיו
וְכִשֶּׁר הַדָּבָר לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ
וְטוֹבָה אֲנִי בְעֵינָיו
יִכְתֹּב לְהָשִׁיב אֶת-הַסְּפָרִים
מַחֲשֶׁבֶת הָמָן
בֶּן-חַמְדָּתָא הָאֲגָגִי
אֲשֶׁר כָּתַב לְאַבֵּד אֶת-הַיְּהוּדִים
אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל-מְדִינֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ
כִּי אֵיכָכָה אוּכַל
וְרֵאִיתִי בָרָעָה
אֲשֶׁר-יִמְצָא אֶת-עַמִּי
וְאֵיכָכָה אוּכַל
וְרֵאִיתִי בְּאוֹדָן מוֹלַדְתִּי
ס
וַיֹּמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶחָשְׁוֶרֶשׁ
לְאֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה
וּלְמֹרְדֳּכָי הַיְּהוּדִי
הִנֵּה בֵּית-הָמָן נִתְּתִי לְאֶסְתֵּר
וְאֶתוֹ תִּלְוִי עַל-הָעֵץ
עַל אֲשֶׁר-שָׁלַח יָדוֹ בַּיְּהוּדִים

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?”
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.

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.”

⁴ A manuscript spells this word in an unusual manner, ביהודיים.

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.¹

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,²
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.

וְאַתֶּם כְּתֹבוּ עַל־הַיְּהוּדִים
כְּטוֹב בְּעֵינֵיכֶם
בְּשֵׁם הַמֶּלֶךְ
וְחִתְמוּ בְּטַבַּעַת הַמֶּלֶךְ
כִּי־כֶתָב אֲשֶׁר־נִכְתָּב
בְּשֵׁם הַמֶּלֶךְ
וְנִחְתָּמוֹ בְּטַבַּעַת הַמֶּלֶךְ
אֵין לְהַשִּׁיב
וַיִּקְרְאוּ סֹפְרֵי־הַמֶּלֶךְ
בְּעֵת־הַהִיא בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁלִישִׁי
הוּא־חֹדֶשׁ סִינָן
בִּשְׁלוֹשָׁה וְעֶשְׂרִים בּוֹ
וַיִּכְתֹּב כָּכָל־אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּה מֶרְדֳּכָי
אֶל־הַיְּהוּדִים
וְאֶל־הָאֲחַשְׁדָּרְפָּנִים וְהַפָּחוֹת
וְשָׂרֵי הַמְּדִינֹת
אֲשֶׁר ׀ מֵהוּדוּ וְעַד־כּוּשׁ
שֶׁבַע וְעֶשְׂרִים וּמֵאָה מְדִינָה
מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה כְּכֹתְבָהּ
וְעַם וְעַם כָּל־שָׁנָה
וְאֶל־הַיְּהוּדִים
כְּכֹתְבָם וְכִלְשֹׁנָם

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.
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.

¹ 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.

² “And there was written according to all that Mordochai instructed”

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 mares¹

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 homes² 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.³

וַיַּכְתֹּב בְּשֵׁם

הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֶרֶשׁ

וַיַּחְתֹּם בְּטַבַּעַת הַמֶּלֶךְ

וַיִּשְׁלַח סְפָרִים

בְּיַד הָרָצִים בְּסוּסִים

רֹכְבֵי הָרֶכֶשׁ הָאַחַשְׁתֵּרָנִים

בְּנֵי הָרָמָכִים

אֲשֶׁר נָתַן הַמֶּלֶךְ לַיהוּדִים

אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל-עִיר-וָעִיר

לְהִקָּהֵל וְלָעֲמֹד עַל-נַפְשָׁם

לְהַשְׁמִיד וְלַהֲרֹג וּלְאַבֵּד

אֶת-כָּל-חַיִּל עַם וּמְדִינָה

הַצָּרִים אֹתָם טָף וְנָשִׁים

וּשְׁלָלָם לְבוֹז

בְּיוֹם אֶחָד

בְּכָל-מְדִינָה

הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֶרֶשׁ

בְּשִׁלּוּשָׁה עָשָׂר

לְחֹדֶשׁ שְׁנַיִם-עָשָׂר

הוּא חֹדֶשׁ אָדָר

Vayichtov beshem

hamelech Achashverosh

vayachtom betaba'at hamelech.

Vayishlach sfarim

beyad haratzim basusim,

rochvei harechesh ha'achashteranim

benei haramachim

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.

¹ 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).

² "To ransack them"; now the Jews had permission to kill their enemies and take their stuff. Cf.3:13.

³ 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.)

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.

¹⁴ The couriers, riding swift steeds
from the royal stables,
galloped off at top speed³
on the king's mission,
and the *new* law was proclaimed
in the town of Shushan.

פִּתְשֵׁגֶן הַכָּתָב
לְהִנָּתֵן דָּת
בְּכָל־מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה
גָּלוּי לְכָל־הָעַמִּים
וְלִהְיוֹת הַיְּהוּדִים עֲתִידִים²
לַיּוֹם הַזֶּה
לְהִנָּקֵם מֵאֹיְבֵיהֶם
הָרָצִים רֹכְבֵי הָרֶכֶשׁ
הָאֲחַשְׁתְּרָנִים
יָצְאוּ מִבְּהָלִים וְדַחְּפִים
בְּדַבַּר הַמֶּלֶךְ
וְהָדַת נִתְּנָה
בְּשׁוּשָׁן הַבִּירָה

Patshegen haktav
lehinaten dat
bechol medinah umedinah
galui lechol ha'amim,
veliheyot haYehudim atidim
layom hazeh,
lehinakem me'oyveihem.
Haratzim, rochvei harechesh
ha'achashteranim,
yatzu mevohalim udechufim
bidvar hamelech,
vehadat nitnah
beShushan habirah.

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,⁴
while the town of Shushan
was relieved and joyful.

וּמֹרְדֳּכַי יָצָא
מִלִּפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ
בִּלְבוּשׁ מַלְכוּת תְּכֵלֶת וְחֹזֶר
וְעֹטֶרֶת זָהָב גְּדוֹלָה
וְתַכְרִיךְ בּוּץ וְאַרְגָּמָן
וְהָעִיר שׁוּשָׁן
צִוְּחָה 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

לַיְּהוּדִים הָיְתָה
אוֹרָה וְשִׁמְחָה וְשִׂשְׁוֹן וִיקָר

LaYehudim hayta
orah vesimchah vesason vikar.

¹ A manuscript has the unusual spelling היהודיים.

² A manuscript has the unusual spelling עתודים.

³ “Went out in haste and driven hard”

⁴ 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.

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,¹

because fear of the Jews fell upon them.

וּבְכָל-מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה
וּבְכָל-עִיר וְעִיר מְקוֹם אֲשֶׁר
דִּבְרַתְהֶמֶלֶךְ וְדָתוֹ מֵיָּנֵעַ
שִׂמְחָה וְשִׂשׂוֹן לַיהוּדִים
מִשְׁתֶּה וַיּוֹם טוֹב
וְרַבִּים מֵעַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ
מִתְיַהֲדִים
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.

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,
when the Jews' enemies expected
to have *the Jews* in their power—
but *their plan* was overturned

as the Jews had their enemies in their power,
hating them—

² the Jews gathered in their towns
in all the provinces
of King Achashverosh
to attack those who sought their harm,
and no one could withstand them
because fear of *the Jews* fell
on all the peoples.

וּבִשְׁנֵים עָשָׂר חֹדֶשׁ
הוּא-חֹדֶשׁ אָדָר
בִּשְׁלוֹשָׁה עָשָׂר יוֹם בּוֹ
אֲשֶׁר הִיגִיעַ
דִּבְרַתְהֶמֶלֶךְ וְדָתוֹ לְהַעֲשׂוֹת
בַּיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר שִׁבְרוּ אוֹיְבֵי הַיְּהוּדִים
לְשַׁלּוֹת בָּהֶם
וְנִהְפֹךְ הוּא
אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁלֹטוּ הַיְּהוּדִים הַמָּה
בְּשִׁנְאֵיהֶם
נִקְהָלוּ הַיְּהוּדִים בְּעָרֵיהֶם
בְּכָל-מְדִינוֹת
הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֶרוֹשׁ
לְשַׁלַּח יָד בַּמִּבְקָשִׁי רָעָתָם
וְאִישׁ לֹא-עָמַד לִפְנֵיהֶם
כִּי-נָפַל פַּחַדָּם
עַל-כָּל-הָעַמִּים

Uvishneim asar chodesh,
hu chodesh Adar,
bishlosa asar yom bo,
asher higi'ah
devar hamelech vedato lehe'asot,
bayom asher sibru oyvei haYehudim
lishlot bahem,
venahafoch hu,
asher yishletu haYehudim hemah
besoneihem—
nikhalu haYehudim be'areihem
bechol medinot
hamelech Achashverosh
lishlo'ach yad bimvakshei ra'atam,
ve'ish lo amad lifneihem
ki nafal pachdam
al kol ha'amim.

¹ The root of this word is יהד, related to יהודי, Judean or Jew. The word is reflexive so it signifies making oneself Jewish or becoming Jewish.

³ All the provincial leaders,
premiers and governors
and officers of the king's regime
supported the Jews
out of fear of Mordochai¹

⁴ since Mordochai was influential
in the king's household
and his reputation reached every province
and this man Mordochai
became more and more influential.

וְכָל־שָׂרֵי הַמְּדִינֹת
וְהָאֲחַשְׁדָּרְפָּנִים וְהַפָּחוֹת
וְעֹשֵׂי הַמְּלָאכָה אֲשֶׁר לַמֶּלֶךְ
מִנַּשִּׁים אֶת־הַיְּהוּדִים
כִּי־נָפַל פַּחַד־מֹרְדֳּכָי עֲלֵיהֶם
כִּי־גָדוֹל מֹרְדֳּכָי
בְּבֵית הַמֶּלֶךְ
וְשִׁמְעוֹ הוֹלֵךְ בְּכָל־הַמְּדִינֹת
כִּי־הָיָה מֹרְדֳּכָי
הוֹלֵךְ וְגָדוֹל.

Vechol sarei hamedinot
vaha'achashdarpenim vehapachot
ve'osei hamlachah asher lamelech
menasim et haYehudim
ki nafal pachad Mordochai aleihem
ki gadol Mordochai
beveit hamelech
veshamo holech bechol hamdinot
ki ha'ish Mordochai
holech vegadol.

⁵ The Jews struck all their enemies
with sword strokes, death and destruction
and dealt with their enemies
as they wished.²

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

וַיַּכּוּ הַיְּהוּדִים בְּכָל־אֹיְבֵיהֶם
מַכַּת־חֶרֶב וְהֵרֵגוּ וְאַבְדָּן
וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כְּשִׁנְאֵיהֶם
כְּרִצּוֹנָם.
וּבְשׁוּשָׁן הַבִּירָה
הֲרָגוּ הַיְּהוּדִים וְאַבְדָּן
חֲמֵשׁ מֵאוֹת אִישׁ.
וְאֵת | פַּרְשָׁנְדָּתָא
וְאֵת | דַּלְפֹּן
וְאֵת | אֲסַפְתָּא
וְאֵת | פּוֹרָתָא
וְאֵת | אַדְלָיָא
וְאֵת | אַרִידָתָא
וְאֵת | פַּרְמַשְׁתָּא
וְאֵת | אַרִיסַי
וְאֵת | אַרִידַי
וְאֵת | נִיזְזָתָא

Vayaku haYehudim bechol oyveiheim
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

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

² As the enemies wanted to treat the Jews or as the Jews wished to treat their enemies, or both.

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.

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.

עֲשֶׂרֶת בְּנֵי הָמָן בֶּן־הַמְּדָתָא
צָרָר הַיְּהוּדִים הָרָגוּ
וּבְבִזָּה לֹא שָׁלְחוּ אֶת־יָדָם
בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא בָּא מִסְפָּר
הַחֲרוּגִים בְּשׁוּשָׁן הַבִּירָה
לְפָנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ

ס

וַיֹּמַר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְאֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה
בְּשׁוּשָׁן הַבִּירָה
הָרָגוּ הַיְּהוּדִים וְאַבָּד
חֲמֵשׁ מֵאוֹת אִישׁ
וְאֵת עֲשֶׂרֶת בְּנֵי־הָמָן
בִּשְׁאָר מְדִינֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ
מֶה אֲשׁוּ?

וּמַה־שֵּׂאלָתְךָ וַיַּתֵּן לָךְ
וּמַה־בִּקְשָׁתְךָ עוֹד וְתַעֲשֶׂה

וַתֹּמַר אֶסְתֵּר אֶם־עַל־הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב
יִתֵּן גַּם־מָחָר
לַיְּהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר בְּשׁוּשָׁן
לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּדַת הַיּוֹם
וְאֵת עֲשֶׂרֶת בְּנֵי־הָמָן
יִתְּלוּ עַל־הָעֵץ

וַיֹּמַר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְהַעֲשׂוֹת כֵּן
וַתֵּתֶן דָּת בְּשׁוּשָׁן
וְאֵת עֲשֶׂרֶת בְּנֵי־הָמָן תָּלוּ

aseret benei Haman ben Hamdata,
tzorer haYehudim, haragu,
uvabizah lo shal'chu et yadam.
Bayom hahu bah mispar
haharugim beShushan habirah
lifnei hamelech.

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.

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).

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.

¹⁶ The rest of the Jews

in the king's provinces

assembled for their own defense²

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.³

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.

וַיִּקְהָלוּ הַיְּהוּדִים

אֲשֶׁר בְּשׁוּשָׁן

גַּם בְּיוֹם אַרְבַּעַת עָשָׂר

לְחֹדֶשׁ אָדָר

וַיַּהַרְגוּ בְּשׁוּשָׁן

שְׁלוֹשׁ מֵאוֹת אִישׁ

וּבְבִזָּה לֹא שָׁלְחוּ אֶת־יָדָם

וּשְׁאֵר הַיְּהוּדִים

אֲשֶׁר בְּמִדְיָנוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ

נִקְהָלוּ וְעָמְדוּ עַל־נַפְשָׁם

וְנוֹחַ מֵאֵיבֵיהֶם

וַהֲרֹג בְּשֹׁנְאֵיהֶם

חֲמִשָּׁה וּשְׁבַעִים אֶלֶף

וּבְבִזָּה לֹא שָׁלְחוּ אֶת־יָדָם

בְּיוֹם־שְׁלוֹשָׁה עָשָׂר לְחֹדֶשׁ אָדָר

וְנוֹחַ בְּאַרְבַּעַת עָשָׂר בּוֹ

וַעֲשֵׂה אֹתוֹ יוֹם מִשְׁתֶּה וְשִׂמְחָה

וְהַיְּהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר בְּשׁוּשָׁן

נִקְהָלוּ בְּשְׁלוֹשָׁה עָשָׂר בּוֹ

וּבְאַרְבַּעַת עָשָׂר בּוֹ

וְנוֹחַ בְּחֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר בּוֹ

וַעֲשֵׂה אֹתוֹ יוֹם מִשְׁתֶּה וְשִׂמְחָה

Vayikhalu haYehudim

asher beShushan

gam beyom arba'ah asar

lechodesh Adar

vayahargu veShushan

shelosh me'ot ish,

uvabizah lo shal'chu et yadam.

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 shloshe 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.

¹ A manuscript would have the unusual spelling היהודיים.

² “*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.”

³ Only in Shushan were the Jews allowed to continue the killing, as Ester requested in verse 13..

⁴ A manuscript would have the unusual spelling והיהודיים.

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.¹

עַל־כֵּן הַיְּהוּדִים הַפְּרֻזִּים² Al ken haYehudim haprazim
הַיּוֹשְׁבִים בְּעָרֵי הַפְּרָזוֹת hayoshvim be'arei haprazot
עֹשִׂים אֶת יוֹם אַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר osim et yom arba'ah asar
לְחֹדֶשׁ אָדָר lechodesh Adar
שִׂמְחָה וּמִשְׁתָּה וַיּוֹם טוֹב simchah umishteh veyom tov
וּמִשְׁלֹחַ מַנּוֹת אִישׁ לִרְעֵהוּ umishlo'ach manot ish lere'ehu.

פ

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

וַיִּכְתֹּב מֵרֹדְכָי Vayichtov Mordochai
אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה et hadvarim ha'eleh
וַיִּשְׁלַח סְפָרִים vayishlach sfarim
אֶל־כָּל־הַיְּהוּדִים el kol haYehudim
אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל־מְדִינֹת asher bechol medinot
הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֶרוֹשׁ hamelech Achashverosh,
הַקְּרוֹבִים וְהַרְחוֹקִים hakrovim veharechokim,
לֵקַיֶּם אֲלֵיהֶם לִהְיוֹת עֹשִׂים lekayem aleihem liheyot osim
אֶת יוֹם אַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר לְחֹדֶשׁ אָדָר et yom arba'ah asar lechodesh Adar
וְאֶת יוֹם־חֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר בּוֹ ve'et yom chamishah asar bo
בְּכָל־שָׁנָה וְשָׁנָה bechol shana veshana

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.

כַּיָּמִים אֲשֶׁר־נָחוּ בָהֶם kayamim asher nachu vahem
הַיְּהוּדִים מֵאוֹיְבֵיהֶם haYehudim me'oyveiheim
וְהַחֹדֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר נִהְפָּךְ לָהֶם vehachodesh asher nehpach lahem
מִיָּגוֹן לְשִׂמְחָה miyagon lesimchah
וּמֵאֵבֶל לַיּוֹם טוֹב ume'evel leyom tov;
לַעֲשׂוֹת אוֹתָם la'asot otam
יָמֵי מִשְׁתָּה וּשְׂמִיחָה yemei mishteh vesimchah
וּמִשְׁלֹחַ מַנּוֹת אִישׁ לִרְעֵהוּ umishlo'ach manot ish lere'ehu
וּמַתָּנוֹת לָאֲבִיּוֹנִים umatanot la'evyonim.

¹ “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.

² A manuscript would have the unusual spelling פֶּרְרוּזִים.

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,

²⁵ but when *Ester* came² 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,

וְקִבֵּל יְהוּדִים

אֶת אֲשֶׁר־הֶחֱלוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת

וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר־כָּתַב מֶרְדֳּכַי אֲלֵיהֶם

כִּי הָמָן בֶּן־חַמְדָּתָא הָאֲגָגִי

צֹרֵר כָּל־יְהוּדִים

חָשַׁב עַל־יְהוּדִים לְאַבְדָּם

וְהָפִיל פּוּר הוּא הַגּוֹרָל

לְהָמָם וּלְאַבְדָּם

וּבְבֹאֶה לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ

אָמַר עַם־הַסֵּפֶר

יָשׁוּב מַחֲשָׁבְתּוֹ הָרָעָה

אֲשֶׁר־חָשַׁב עַל־יְהוּדִים

עַל־רֹשׁוֹ

וְתָלוּ אוֹתוֹ וְאֶת־בָּנָיו

עַל־הָעֵץ

עַל־כֵּן קָרְאוּ לַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה

פּוּרִים עַל־שֵׁם הַפּוּר

עַל־כֵּן עַל־כָּל־דִּבְרֵי

הָאִגֶּרֶת הַזֹּאת

וּמָה־רָאוּ עַל־כָּכָה

וּמָה־הִגִּיעַ אֲלֵיהֶם

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,

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

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 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.

² The Hebrew says “and when she came” without mentioning Ester by name, a rather surprising omission by modern standards of storytelling.

²⁷ the Jews established and accepted
for themselves and their descendants
and anyone who joined their community¹—
and this won't expire—
to spend²
these two days
as *the instructions* were written
and on the exact dates
every year.

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.

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

קִיְּמוּ וְקִבְּלוּ יְהוּדִים
עֲלֵיהֶם | וְעַל-זָרָעָם
וְעַל כָּל-הַנִּלְוִים עֲלֵיהֶם
וְלֹא יַעֲבוֹר
לְהַיּוֹת עוֹשִׁים
אֶת שְׁנֵי הַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה
כְּכַתְּבָם
וּכְזִמְנָם
בְּכָל-שָׁנָה וּשְׁנָה
וְהַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה
נִזְכָּרִים וְנַעֲשִׂים
בְּכָל-דּוֹר וָדוֹר
מִשְׁפָּחָהּ וּמִשְׁפָּחָהּ
מְדִינָהּ וּמְדִינָהּ
וְעִיר וָעִיר
וַיָּמֵי הַפּוּרִים הָאֵלֶּה
לֹא יַעֲבְרוּ
מִתּוֹךְ הַיְּהוּדִים
וְזִכְרָם
לֹא יִסּוּף מִזְרָעָם

kimu vekiblu haYehudim
aleiheim ve'al zaram
ve'al kol nilvum aleiheim,
velo ya'avor,
liheyot osim
et shnei hayamim ha'eleh
kich'tavam
vechizmanam
bechol shanah veshanah.
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.

ס
וַתִּכְתֹּב אֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה
בְּתֹאבִיחַיִל
וּמֹרְדֳּכַי הַיְּהוּדִי
אֶת-כָּל-תֹּקֶף לִקְוֶם
אֶת אִגֶּרֶת הַפּוּרִים הַזֹּאת הַשְּׁנִיית

Vatichtov Ester hamalkah
vat Avichayil
uMordochai haYehudi
et kol tokef, lekayem
et igeret haPurim hazot hashenit.

¹ “All who accompanied them.”

² “To be doing”

³ A manuscript has the reading וקבל, singular instead of plural, as in verse 23.

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
³² Ester's announcement confirmed
these matters of Purim,
and it was written in a book.²

וַיִּשְׁלַח סְפָרִים אֶל-כָּל-הַיְּהוּדִים
אֶל-שֶׁבַע וְעֶשְׂרִים וּמָאָה מְדִינָה
מַלְכוּת אַחַשְׁוֶרוֹשׁ
דִּבְרֵי שָׁלוֹם וְאֵמֶת
לְקַיֵּם אֶת-יְמֵי הַפּוּרִים הָאֵלֶּה
בְּיָמֵיהֶם
כְּאֲשֶׁר קִיָּם עֲלֵיהֶם
מֹרְדֳּכַי הַיְּהוּדִי
וְאֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה
וְכַאֲשֶׁר קִיָּמוּ
עַל-נַפְשָׁם וְעַל-זָרָעָם
דִּבְרֵי הַצְּמוֹת וְזַעֲקָתָם
וּמָאָר אֶסְתֵּר קִיָּם
דִּבְרֵי הַפּוּרִים הָאֵלֶּה
וְנִכְתָּב בַּסֵּפֶר
פ

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
bizmaneiheh,
ka'asher kiyam aleihem
Mordochai haYehudi
ve'Ester hamalkah,
vecha'asher kimu
al nafsham ve'al zaram,
divrei hatzomot veza'akatam.
Uma'amar Ester kiyam
divrei haPurim ha'eleh,
venichtav basefer.

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

² 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.

Chapter 10

¹ King Achashverosh imposed
a tax¹ 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?

וַיִּשֶׂם הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֶרֶשׁ²
מִסְ עַל-הָאָרֶץ וְאֵי הַיָּם
וְכָל-מַעֲשֵׂה
תִּקְפוֹ וְגִבּוּרָתוֹ
וּפְרָשַׁת גְּדֻלַּת מֶרְדֳּכָי
אֲשֶׁר גִּדְּלוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ
הַלּוֹא-הֵם כְּתוּבִים
עַל-סֵפֶר דְּבָרֵי 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 of³ his fellow-*Jews*,
seeking the welfare of his people
with a message of peace for all its members.⁴

כִּי מֶרְדֳּכָי הַיְּהוּדִי
מִשְׁנֶה לְמֶלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֶרֶשׁ
וְגָדוֹל לַיְּהוּדִים
וְרָצוּי לְרַב אֲחָיו
דּוֹרֵשׁ טוֹב לְעַמּוֹ
וְדֹבֵר שָׁלוֹם לְכָל-זֶרְעוֹ

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

¹ Did we mention taxation as one of the rules of government?

² A manuscript has the unusual spelling אַחַשְׁרֶשׁ.

³ Or “by the multitude of,” but “most of” seems more believable since eminence attracts detractors, even among us Jews.

⁴ “And speaking peace to all its (or his) seed/descendants.”

The Best Song

נְשִׁיר הַנְּשִׁירִים

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 לְשִׁלְמוֹהַ	Shir hashirim, asher liShlomo:
² Let him kiss me, kisses from his lips, since your love is better than wine.	יִשְׁקֶנִי מִנִּשְׁקוֹת פִּיהוּ כִּי־טוֹבִים הָדִיד מִיַּיִן	Yishakeni minshikot pihu ki tovim dodecha miyayin.
³ For fragrance your lotions are prized— <i>like</i> such a lotion, out pours your name— that’s why women desire you. ²	לְרִיחַ שְׁמָנֶיךָ טוֹבִים שֶׁמֶן תּוֹרַק 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— <i>he says</i> , “Let’s have fun & play with you.”) Let’s speak of your love more than wine; they love you honorably. ³	מָשַׁכְנִי אַחֲרֶיךָ נָרוּצָה הֵבִיאָנִי הַמֶּלֶךְ חֲדָרָיו נִגִּילָה וְנִשְׁמַחָה בָּךְ נִזְכִּירָה דְּדִיד מִיַּיִן מִישָׁרִים 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 קֶדָר כִּירֵעוֹת שְׁלֹמֹה	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.

⁶ Don'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.

⁷ Tell 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

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

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

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

¹¹ We shall make you golden ropes
with silver spangles,

אַל-תִּרְאִינִי שְׁאֲנִי שְׁחַרְחֹרֶת
שֶׁשְׁזַפְתָּנִי הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ

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

הַגִּידָה לִּי שָׂאֲהָבָה נַפְשִׁי
אֵיכָה תִרְעָה
אֵיכָה תִרְבִּיץ בַּצְּהָרִים
שְׁלָמָה אֶהְיֶה
כְּעֹטְיָה

עַל עֲדְרֵי חֲבֵרָיָה
אִם-לֹא תִדְעִי לָךְ

הַיָּפָה בַּנָּשִׁים
צֹאֵי-לָךְ בְּעֶקְבֵי הַצֹּאן

וְרַעֲיִי אֶת-גִּדְיֹתַיִךְ
עַל מִשְׁכְּנוֹת הָרָעִים

לְסִסְתִּי בְּרִכְבֵּי פָרֹעַ
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 פָרֹעַ 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 תּוֹר/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 תּוֹר/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 <i>of friends</i> , and my perfume yields its fragrance. ¹	עַד־שֶׁהַמֶּלֶךְ בְּמִסְבּוֹ נִרְדִּי נָתַן רִיחוֹ	Ad shehamelech bimsibo, nirdi natan reicho.
¹³ To me, my beloved is a bundle of myrrh, to spend the night between my breasts.	צִדּוֹר הַמָּר דּוּדִי לִי בֵּין שְׂדֵי יָלִין	Tzeror hamor dodi li; bein shadai yalin.
¹⁴ To me, my beloved is a cluster of henna ² in the vineyards of Ein Gedi. ³	אֶשְׁכּוֹל הַכֶּפֶר דּוּדִי לִי בְּכַרְמֵי עֵין גִּדִּי	Eshkol hakofer dodi li becharmei Ein Gedi.
¹⁵ You are beautiful, my love, beautiful with eyes that are doves. ⁴	הִנֵּךְ יָפָה רַעְיָתִי הִנֵּךְ יָפָה עֵינֶיךָ יוֹנִים	Hinach yafah, rayati; hinach yafah, einayich yonim.
¹⁶ You are beautiful and kind and our bed is luxuriantly green. ⁵	הִנֵּךְ יָפָה דּוּדִי אָף נָעִים אֶף־עֲרֻשָּׁנוּ רַעֲנָנָה	Hinach yafeh, dodi, af na'im; af arsenu ra'anana.
¹⁷ Cedar <i>trees</i> are the beams of our house, and our rafters are fir <i>trees</i> .	קִרּוֹת בָּתֵּינוּ אֲרָזִים רַהֲיֵטְנוּ בְּרוֹתִים	Korot bateinu arazim, rahiteinu betorim.

Chapter 2

¹ I am the rose of the Sharon <i>region</i> , lily of the valleys. ⁶	אֲנִי חַבְצֵלֶת הַשָּׁרוֹן שׁוֹשַׁנַּת הָעֲמָקִים	Ani chavatzelet haSharon, shoshanat ha'amakim.
² Like a lily among thorns, so is my beloved among the <i>other</i> girls.	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 fruit ¹ among the forest trees, so is my beloved among the boys. In his shade I took delight and found rest, and his fruit <i>was</i> sweet to my taste.	כְּתַפּוּחַ בְּעֵצֵי הָאֵר כֵּן דּוּדִי בֵּין הַנָּעִיִּם בְּצִלּוֹ חֲמַדְתִּי וַיִּשְׁבַּתִּי וּפְרִיּוֹ מְתוֹק לִחְכִּי	Ketapu'ach ba'atzei haya'ar, ken dodi bein habanim. Betzilo chimadti veyashavti, ufiryo matok lechiki.
⁴ He took me to the wine-bar, ² and his banner ³ above me was love.	הֵבִיאָנִי אֶל-בֵּית הַיַּיִן וְדָגְלוֹ עָלַי אַהֲבָה	Hevi'ani el beit hayayin, vediglo alai ahavah.
⁵ Revive me with fruit bars, ⁴ sustain me with fragrant fruit, ⁵ for I am languishing for love.	סַמְכֻנִי בַּאֲשִׁישׁוֹת רַפְּדֻנִי בַּתַּפּוּחִים כִּי-חֹלַת אַהֲבָה אָנִי	Sam'chuni ba'ashishot, rapduni batapuchim, ki cholat ahavah ani.
⁶ His left <i>hand</i> is beneath my head while his right <i>hand</i> embraces me.	שִׁמְאָלוֹ תַּחַת לְרֹאשִׁי וַיְמִינוֹ תַּחְבֵּקֵנִי	Semolo tachat leroshi vimino techabkeni.
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.	הִשְׁבַּעְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם בִּצְּבָאוֹת אוֹ בְּאַיִלֹת הַשָּׂדֶה אִם-תִּעְרְרוּ וְאִם-תִּעְרְרוּ אֶת-הָאַהֲבָה עַד שֶׁתַּחַפֵּץ	Hishbati et'chem, benot Yerushalayim, bitzva'ot o ve'aylot hasadeh, im ta'iru ve'im te'oreru et ha'ahavah ad shetechpatz!
⁸ The sound of my love; here he comes, leaping over the mountains, jumping over the hills.	קוֹל דּוּדִי הִנֵּה-זֶה בָּא מִדָּלֵג עַל-תְּהָרִים מִקַּפֵּץ עַל-הַגְּבָעוֹת	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 דֹּדִי לְצִבִּי

אוֹ לְעֹפֶר הָאֵיָלִים

הִנֵּה זֶה עֹמֵד אַחַר כְּתָלֵנוּ

מַשְׁגִּיחַ מִן־הַחַלּוֹנוֹת

מִצִּיץ מִן־הַחֲרָכִים

עָנָה דֹּדִי וְאָמַר לִי

קוּמִי לָךְ רַעֲיָתִי יָפָתִי וּלְכִי־לָךְ

כִּי־הִנֵּה הַסֵּתָיו עָבָר

הַגֶּשֶׁם חָלַף הַלֵּךְ לוֹ

הַנִּצָּנִים נִרְאוּ בָאָרֶץ

עַתָּה הַזְמִיר הִגִּיעַ

וְקוֹל הַתּוֹר נִשְׁמָע בָּאַרְצֵנוּ

הַתְּאֵנָה חֲנֻטָּה בְּפִיָּה

וְהַגָּפְנִים סִמְדָּר נִתְּנוּ רֵיחַ

קוּמִי לָךְ רַעֲיָתִי יָפָתִי וּלְכִי־לָךְ

יוֹנָתִי בְּחַנְיֵי הַסֶּלַע

בְּסֶתֶר הַמַּדְרֵגָה

הֲרַאֲנִי אֶת־מַרְאֶיךָ

הַשְּׁמִיעֵנִי אֶת־קוֹלֶךָ

כִּי־קוֹלֶךָ עֲרֵב

וּמַרְאֶיךָ נָאֻה

אֶחְזוּ־לָנוּ שׁוּעָלִים

שׁוּעָלִים קְטָנִים

מְחַבְּלִים כֶּרָמִים

וּכְרָמֵינוּ סִמְדָּר

דֹּדִי לִי וְאֲנִי לוֹ

הֲרֹעָה 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).

¹⁷ Until day comes
and shadows flee,
turn, be like a gazelle, my love,
or *like* a young deer
on the ridge.¹

עַד שִׁיבוֹת הַיּוֹם Ad sheyafu'ach hayom
וְנָסוּ הַצִּלְלִים venasu hatzلالim,
סֹב דִּמְהַלְכָּה דוֹדִי לִיטְזִי sov, demeh lecha, dodi, litzvi
אוֹ לְעֹפֶר הָאֵיָלִים o le'ofar ha'ayalim
עַל־הָרֵי בָּתָר al harei vater.

Chapter 3

¹ On my bed at night
I sought him whom I love;
I sought him but did not find him.
² Let 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 וְאֶסֹבֶבָה 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.

³ The guards found me—
they go around town.
“Have you seen him whom I love?”

מִצְאוּנֵי הַשְּׂמֹרִים Metz'auni hashomrim
הַסֹּבְבִים בְּעִיר hasovevim ba'ir.
אֶת שְׁאֲהָבָה נַפְשִׁי רְאִיתָם “Et she'ahavah nafshi re'item?”

⁴ I 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 שֶׁמָצָאתִי אֶת שְׁאֲהָבָה נַפְשִׁי ad shematzati et she'ahavah nafshi.
אֲחַזְתִּיו וְלֹא אֲרַפְּנוּ Achaztiv velo arpenu
עַד־שֶׁהֵבִיאתִיו אֶל־בֵּית אִמִּי ad shehavitiv el bet imi
וְאֶל־חֶדֶר הוֹרָתִי ve'el cheder horati.

⁵ I'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,
בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם benot Yerushalayim,
בִּיטְזָאוֹת אוֹ בְּאֵי־לוֹת הַשָּׂדֶה bitzva'ot o be'aylot hasadeh,
אִם־תִּעְרְרוּ | וְאִם־תִּעְזְרוּ im ta'iru ve'im te'oreru
אֶת־הָאֲהָבָה עַד שֶׁתַּחַפֵּץ 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.

⁶ Who is this, coming up from the desert looking like columns of smoke but perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, more <i>fragrant</i> than all merchants' powders.	מִי זֹאת עֹלָה מִן־הַמִּדְבָּר כְּתִימָרוֹת עָשָׁן מְקַטְרֶת מֹר וּלְבוֹנָה מִכָּל אַבְקַת רוֹחֵל	Mi zot olah min hamidbar ketimarot ashan, mekuteret mor ulevonah mikol avkat rochel.
⁷ Look at his bed, <i>as fine as</i> Solomon's, surrounded by sixty warriors, <i>chosen</i> from the warriors of Israel.	הִנֵּה מִטָּתוֹ שֶׁל־שְׁלֹמֹה שִׁשִּׁים גִּבּוֹרִים סָבִיב לָהּ מִגִּבּוֹרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל	Hineh mitato sheliShelomo: shishim giborim saviv lah migiborei Yisra'el.
⁸ They all grasp their swords, schooled in war, each with his sword at the ready! ¹ for night-terrors. ²	כָּל־ם אֲחֻזֵּי חֶרֶב מִלְמַדֵּי מִלְחָמָה אִישׁ חָרְבוֹ עַל־יָרְכוֹ מִפְּחַד בַּלִּילוֹת	Kulam achuzei cherev, melumdei mil'chamah; ish charbo al yerecho mipachad baleilot.
⁹ King Solomon made himself a litter of Lebanon wood.	אֲפִרְיֹן עָשָׂה לֹו הַמֶּלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה מֵעֵצֵי הַלְבָּנוֹן	Apiryon asah lo hamelech Shelomoh me'atzei haLevanon.
¹⁰ Its uprights he made of silver, its base of gold, its throne of purple, its interior tiled with love from the daughters of Jerusalem.	עֲמוּדָיו עָשָׂה כֶּסֶף רִפִּידָתוֹ זָהָב מִרְכָּבוֹ אֲרָגָמָן תּוֹכוֹ רָצוּף אַהֲבָה מִבְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלָּם	Amudav asah kesef, refidato zahav, merkavo argaman, tocho ratzuf ahavah mibnot Yerushalayim.
¹¹ Daughters 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	צִיּוֹנָה וְרֵאֵינָה בְּנוֹת צִיּוֹן בַּמֶּלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה בַּעֲטָרָה שֶׁעָטְרָהּ לֹו אָמוֹ בְּיוֹם חַתֻּנָּתוֹ וּבְיוֹם שִׂמְחַת לִבּוֹ	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

הֲנִיךְ יָפָה רַעֲיָתִי הֲנִיךְ יָפָה

עֵינֶיךָ יוֹנוֹת

מִבַּעַד לְצַמְחָתְךָ

שַׁרֵּחַךְ כְּעֵדֶר הָעִזִּים

שֶׁגַלְשׁוּ מִהַר גִּלָּד

שִׁנַּיִךְ כְּעֵדֶר הַקְּצִיבוֹת

שֶׁעָלוּ מִן־הַר־חֲצָה

שֶׁכֻּלָּם מֵתַיִמוֹת

וְשֶׁכֻּלָּהּ אֵין בָּהֶם

כְּחוּט הַשָּׁנִי שֶׁפִּתְיָיִךְ

וּמִדְּבָרֶיךָ נָאוֶה

כְּפֶלַח הָרִמּוֹן רִקְתָּךְ

מִבַּעַד לְצַמְחָתְךָ

כְּמִגְדַּל דָּוִד צִוְּאַרְךָ

בָּנוּי לְתַלְפִּיּוֹת

אֶלֶף הַמָּגֶן תִּלְוִי עָלָיו

כָּל שִׁלְטֵי הַגִּבּוֹרִים

שְׁנֵי שֹׁדֶיךָ כְּשְׁנֵי עֶפְרַיִם

תְּאוֹמֵי צִבְיָה

הָרוֹעִים בְּשׁוֹשָׁנִים

עַד שֶׁיִּפּוּחַ הַיּוֹם

וְנָסוּ הַצִּלְלִים

אֶלֶךְ לִי אֶל־הַר הָמוֹר

וְאֶל־גִּבְעַת הַלְּבֹנָה

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 tavoï;
תַּשְׁוִּירִי אֶמְנָה	tashuri merosh Amanah
מֵרֹאשׁ שְׁנִיר וְחֶרְמוֹן	merosh Snir veChermon,
מִמֶּנּוֹת אֲרָיוֹת	mimonot arayot,
מֵהָרָרֵי נִמְרִים	meharerei nemerim.
לִבְבָתִּי אַחֹתִי כָלָה	Libavtini, achoti, chalah,
לִבְבָתִּי בְּאַחַת מֵעֵינַיִךְ	libavtini be'achat me'enayich,
בְּאַחַד עֵקֶב מִצַּוְרוֹנַיִךְ	be'achad anak mitzavronayich.
מַה יָּפִי דֹדַיִךְ	Mah yafu dodayich,
אַחֹתִי כָלָה	achoti chalah,
מַה טּוֹב דֹּדַיִךְ מִיַּיִן	mah tovu dodayich miyayin
וְרֵיחַ שְׁמָנַיִךְ	verei'ach shmanayich
מִכָּל־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.

גֵּן | נְעוּלַת אַחֲתִי כְּלָה
גֵּל נְעוּלַת מַעַן חָתוּם
שֶׁלֶחַיִּיךְ פָּרְדֵּס רִמּוֹנִים
עִם פְּרֵי מְגָדִים
כִּפְּרִים עִם נֶרָדִים
נֶהְרָד | וְכַרְכֹּם
קָנֶה וְקִנְמֹן
עִם כָּל־עֵצֵי לִבְנָה
מֹר וְאַהֲלוֹת
עִם כָּל־רָאשֵׁי וְשָׁמִים
מַעַן גָּנִים בְּאֵר מַיִם חַיִּים
וְנֹזְלִים מִן־לִבְנוֹן
עוֹרֵי צָפוֹן וּבֹאֵי תֵימָן
הַפִּיחִי גָנִי
יִזְלֻ בְּשָׁמָיו
יָבֹא דוֹדִי לִגְנוֹ
וַיֹּאכַל פְּרֵי מְגָדָיו

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 גֵּל 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 אַחֲתִי כָלָה
אַרִּיתִי מוֹרִי עִם-בִּשְׁמִי
אֶכְלֹתִי יַעְרִי עִם-דְּבָשִׁי
שָׁתִיתִי יַיִן עִם-חֶלְבִי
אֶכְלוּ רֵעִים
שְׁתוּ וְשִׁכְרוּ דוֹדִים
אֲנִי יֶשֶׁנָּה וְלִבִּי עֹר
קוֹל דוֹדִי דוֹפֵק
פִּתְחִי-לִי אַחֲתִי רַעֲיָתִי
יוֹנָתִי תַמָּתִי
שֶׁרֹאשִׁי נִמְלֵא-טָל
קִוְצוֹתַי רִסְסֵי לַיְלָה

Pashat'ti et kutanti;
eichecha elbashenhah?
Rachatzti et raglai;
eichecha atanfem?
Dodi shalach yado
min hachor
ume'ai hamu alav.
Kamti ani lifto'ach ledodi;
veyadai natfu mor,
ve'etbbe'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." מַעֵי/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)."

⁶ I 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.

⁷ The guards found me—
they go around town.
They struck me, wounded me;
they lifted my veil,
the wall-guards.

⁸ I'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

¹⁰ My love is bright and red;
he stands out in a crowd.³

¹¹ His head is gleaming gold,⁴
his locks *are* curly,
black like a raven.

פָּתַחְתִּי אֲנִי לְדוּדִי Patachti anu ledodi,
וְדוּדִי חָמַק עָבָר vedodi chamak avar.
נַפְשִׁי יָצָאָה בְּדַבְרוֹ Nafshi yatzah vedabro;
בִּקְשָׁתִּיחוּ וְלֹא מָצָאתִיחוּ bikashtihu velo metzatihi,
קָרָאתִיו וְלֹא עָנָנִי kerativ velo anani.
מִצָּאֵנִי הַשְּׂמֹרִים Metza'uni hashomrim
הַסֹּבְבִים בָּעִיר 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 יְרוּשָׁלַם benot Yerushalayim,
אִם־תִּמְצְאוּ אֶת־דוּדִי im timtze'u et dodi,
מַה־תִּגִּידוּ לוֹ? mah tagidu lo?
שְׁחֹלַת אַהֲבָה אֲנִי Shecholat ahavah ani.
מַה־דוּדְךָ מִדּוֹד "Mah dodech midod,
הֵיפָּהּ בְּנָשִׁים hayafah banashim?
מַה־דוּדְךָ מִדּוֹד Mah dodech midod,
שֶׁכָּכָה הִשְׁבַּעְתָּנוּ shekachah hishbatanu?"
דוּדִי צָח וְאֲדוֹם Dodi tzach ve'adom,
דָּגוּל מִרֵּבְבָה dagul merevevah.
רֹשׁוֹ כֶּתֶם פָּז Rosho ketem paz,
קוֹצוֹתָיו 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־מִלֵּאת

לְחַיָּו כְּעֲרוּגַת הַבֹּשֶׂם

מִגְדֵּלוֹת מֶרְקָחִים שִׁפְתוֹתָיו

שֹׁשָׁנִים נֹטְפוֹת מֹר עֹבֵר

יָדָיו גִּלְגִּילֵי זָהָב

מִמּוּלָאִים בַּתַּרְשִׁישׁ

מִעֵו עֶשֶׂת שֵׁן

מִעֻלֶּפֶת סַפִּירִים

שׁוֹקָו עַמּוּדֵי שֵׁשׁ

מִיּוֹסָדִים עַל־אֲדָנִיָּפִז

מִרְאֵהוּ כַּלְבָּנוֹן

בַּחֹר כְּאַרְזִים

חֵכוֹ מִמְּתָקִים

וְכֻלּוֹ מִחֻמָּדִים

זֶה דוֹדִי וְזֶה רֵעִי

בָּנוֹת

יְרוּשָׁלָּיִם

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 פִּז 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 מִחֻמָּדִים 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 Gilad,

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.

אָנָה הָלַךְ דֹּדֶךָ
הַיָּפָה בְּנָשִׁים
אָנָה פָּנָה דֹּדֶךָ
וְנִבְקָשְׁנוּ עִמָּךְ
דֹּדִי יָרַד לִגְנוֹ
לְעֲרוּגוֹת הַבָּשָׂם
לְרֹעוֹת בְּגָנִים
וּלְלֶקֶט שׁוֹשָׁנִים
אֲנִי לְדֹדִי וְדֹדִי לִי
הָרֹעָה בְּשׁוֹשָׁנִים
Anah halach dodech,
hayafah banashim,
anah panah dodech?
Unevakshenu imach.
Dodi yarad legano,
la'arugot habosem,
lir'ot baganim
velilkot shoshanim.
Ani ledodi, vedodi li,
haro'eh bashoshanim.

יָפָה אַתְּ רַעֲיָתִי כְּתִירְצָה
נָאֵה כִּירוּשָׁלַיִם
אַיְמָה כְּנִדְגָלוֹת
חֲסִבִּי עֵינַיִךְ מִנִּגְדִּי
שֶׁהֶם הִרְחִיבוּ
שָׁרֵךְ כְּעֵדֶר הָעִזִּים
שֶׁגָּלְשׁוּ מִן־
הַגִּלְעָד
שִׁנַּיִךְ כְּעֵדֶר הָרְחֵלִים
שֶׁעָלוּ מִן־הָרַחֲצָה
שֶׁקֻּלָּם מִתַּיִמוֹת
וְשֶׁכֻּלָּה אֵין בָּהֶם
כֶּפֶלַח חֲרִמּוֹן רַקָּתֶךָ
מִבָּאֵד לְצַמָּתֶךָ
Yafah, at rayati ketirtzah,
navah kIrushala'im,
ayumah kanigdalot.
Hasebi einayich minegdi,
shehem hirhivuni.
Sarech ke'eder ha'izim
shegalshu min haGilad,
hagilead
shinayich ke'eder har'chelim
she'alu min harachtzah,
shekulam matimot
veshakulah ein bahem.
kefelach harimon rakatech
miba'ad letzamatech.

¹ Or, "as Tirzah." This is the name of one of Zelofehad's daughters (Num 27:1-11), notable for character, not appearance.

² כְּנִדְגָלוֹת, "like females who are flagged," i.e., women equipped with flags or banners.

⁸ Sixty they are, *all* queens,
and eighty mistresses,
and damsels beyond number—¹

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!²

שִׁשִּׁים הֵמָּה מַלְכוֹת
וּשְׁמוֹנִים פִּילָגְשִׁים
וְעֲלָמוֹת אֵין מִסְפָּר
אֶחָת הִיא יוֹנָתִי תַמָּתִי
אֶחָת הִיא לְאִמָּהּ
בָּרָה הִיא לְיוֹלֶדֶתָהּ
רָאוּהָ בָנוֹת וַיִּשְׁרְוּהָ
מַלְכוֹת וּפִילָגְשִׁים וַיְהַלְלוּהָ
מִי־זֹאת הַנִּשְׁכָּפָה כְּמוֹ־שַׁחַר
יָפָה כָּל־בְּנוֹת בָּרָה כַחֲמָה
אֵימָה כַנִּידָלוֹת
אֶל־גִּינַת עֵגוֹז יָרַדְתִּי
לִרְאוֹת בָּאֵבִי הַנֶּחָל
לִרְאוֹת הַפָּרָחַת הַגִּפְּזוֹן
הִנֵּצְוּ הָרִמּוֹנִים
לֹא יָדַעְתִּי נַפְשִׁי שָׁמַתְנִי
מִרְכָּבוֹת עַמִּי־נָדִיב

Shishim hemah melachot,
ushemonim pilagshim
va'alamot ein mispar—
achat hi yonati, tamati,
achat hi le'imah,
barah hi leyoladtah;
ra'uha vanot vay'ashruha,
melachot ufilagshim vayhaleluha.
Mi zot hanishkafah kemo shachar,
yafah chalvana, barah kachama,
Ayuma kanidgalot?
El ginat egoz yaradti
lir'ot beibei hanachal,
lir'ot hafarcha hagefen,
henetzu harimonim.
Lo yadati nafshi samatni
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!³

שׁוּבִי שׁוּבִי הַשְּׁלֵמִית
שׁוּבִי שׁוּבִי וְנִחְזֶה־בָּךְ
מַה־תִּחְזוּ בַשְּׁלֵמִית
כִּמְחֹלוֹת הַמַּחֲנַיִם

Shuvi, shuvi, haShulamit,
shuvi, shuvi venechezeh bach.
Mah techezu baShulamit?
Kimcholot hamachanayim.

¹ 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).

² “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.

³ “*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
כֶּמוֹ חֲלָאִים

מַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵי אָמֵן

שָׁרֵרֶךְ אָגֵן חֶסֶהר

אֶל־יַחֲסֹר הַמָּזֶג

בִּטְנֶךָ עֲרֵמֶת חִטִּים

סוּגָה בַּשּׁוֹשָׁנִים

שְׁנֵי שָׁדַיִךְ כִּשְׁנֵי עֶפְרַיִם
תְּאֵמִי צְבִיָּה

צִזְאֲרֶךְ כִּמִּגְדַּל הַשָּׁן

עֵינַיִךְ בִּרְכוֹת בְּחֶשְׁבּוֹן

עַל־שַׁעַר בַּת־רַבִּים

אַפֶּךָ כִּמִּגְדַּל הַלְבָּנוֹן

צוֹפֶה פְּנֵי דַמָּשֶׁק

רוֹשֶׁךְ עֲלֶיךָ כַּכְרִמָּל

וְדַלַּת רוֹשֶׁךְ כְּאַרְגָּמָן

מֶלֶךְ אַסּוּר בַּרְהַטִּים

מַה־יָּפִית וּמַה־נְעִמָּת

אַהֲבָה בַּתְּעֻנְיִים

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	אֲמַרְתִּי אֶשְׁלַח בְּתָמָר אֶחְזֶה בְּסַנְסִינָיו וַיְהִי־נָא שָׁדַיִךְ כְּאֶשְׁכִּלּוֹת הַנֶּפֶן וְרִיחַ אֶפְךָ כְּתַפּוּחִים	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 כְּיֵין הַטּוֹב הוֹלֵךְ לְדוּדֵי 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 בְּבָכְרִים	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 לַבָּרְמִים 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־נֹלֵךְ 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.

מִי יִתְנַחֵךְ כָּאָח לִי Mi yitnech ke'ach li,
יוֹנֵק שְׂדֵי אִמִּי yonek shedei imi;
אִמְצָאָהּ בַּחוּץ אֶשְׁקֶךָ emtza'acha vachutz, eshak'cha,
גַּם לֹא יִבְזוּ לִי gam lo yavuzu li.
אֶנְהַגְּךָ אֲבִיָּאָהּ Enhagacha, avi'acha
אֶל-בֵּית אִמִּי el beit imi;
תֵּלַמְדֵנִי telamdeni
אֶשְׁקֶךָ מִיַּיִן הָרֶקֶחַ ashkecha miyayin harekach
מִעֵסִיס רִמּוֹנִי me'asis rimoni.
שֶׁמֶלֶל תַּחַת רֹשִׁי Semolo tachat roshi
וַיְמִינוּ תַּחְבֵּקֵנִי vimino techabkeni.
הִשְׁבַּעְתִּי אֶתְכֶם Hishbati et'chem
בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם benot Yerushalayim:
מַה-תַּעֲרִירִי | וּמַה-תַּעֲרִירִי 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 עֹרֶרְתִּיךָ 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.

⁶ Set me as an <i>indelible</i> mark ¹ on your heart,	שִׁמְנִי כַחֲתָם עַל־לִבֶּךָ	Simeni chachotam al libecha,
like an <i>indelible</i> mark on your arm,	כַּחֲתָם עַל־זְרוֹעֶךָ	kachotam al zero'echa,
for love is strong as death,	כִּי־עֲזָה כַּמּוֹת אַהֲבָה	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.	רֶשֶׁפֶיָּהּ רִשְׁפֵּי אֵשׁ שְׁלֵה־בֵּתֶיהָ	reshafeha rishpei esh shalhevetyah.
⁷ Even lots of water could not	מַיִם רַבִּים לֹא יוֹכְלוּ	Mayim rabim lo yuchlu
quench love,	לְכַבּוֹת אֶת־הָאֲהָבָה	lechabot et ha'ahavah,
no rivers drown it.	וְנַהֲרוֹת לֹא יִשְׁטְפוּהָ	uneharot lo yishtefuha.
If someone devoted	אִם־יִתֵּן אִישׁ	Im yiten ish
all the resources at his command	אֶת־כָּל־הָדָן בֵּיתוֹ	et kol hon beito
in a vain attempt to quench love,	בְּאֲהָבָה	ba'ahavah,
people would ridicule him. ²	בּוֹז יַבְוִזוּ לוֹ	boz yavuzu lo.
⁸ We have a young sister	אֲחוֹת 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 לְאֲחֹתֵנוּ	mah na'aseh la'achotenu
on the day when she is spoken for?	בַּיּוֹם שֶׁיִּדְבַּר־בָּהּ	bayom sheyedubar bah?
⁹ If she is a wall,	אִם־חֹמַת 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.
¹⁰ I am a wall; my breasts are like towers;	אֲנִי חֹמַת וְשָׁדַי כַּמִּגְדָּלוֹת	Ani chomah, veshadai kemigdalot;
so to him I've become	אֲזַי הָיִיתִי בְּעֵינָיו	az hayiti ve'cinav
like one who projects <i>her</i> maturity. ³	כְּמוֹצֵאת שָׁלוֹם	kemotzet 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 לְשִׁלְמוֹה

בְּבַעַל הַמֶּזֶן

נָתַן אֶת־הַכֶּרֶם לְנֹטְרִים

אִישׁ יָבֵא

בְּפִרְיוֹ אֶלֶף כֶּף

כַּרְמִי שְׁלִי לִפְנֵי

הָאֶלֶף לְךָ שְׁלֹמֹה

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.

The Book of Rut

רוּת

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 רְחוּי, 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 Efrat,
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 בְּשֵׂדֵי מוֹאָב

הוּא וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וּשְׁנֵי בָנָיו

וּשְׁם הָאִישׁ אֱלִמֶלֶךְ

וּשְׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ נְעֹמִי

וּשְׁם שְׁנֵי בָנָיו

מַחֲלֹן וְכִלְיוֹן

אֶפְרַתִּים

מִבֵּית לֶחֶם יְהוּדָה

וַיָּבֹאוּ שְׂדֵי־מוֹאָב

וַיְהִי־יָשָׁם

וַיָּמָת אֱלִימֶלֶךְ אִישׁ נְעֹמִי

וַתֵּשָׂא־רָחֵל וּשְׁנֵי בָנֶיהָ

וַיֵּשְׁבוּ לָהֶם נָשִׁים מוֹאבִּיּוֹת

שֵׁם הָאֶחָת עֹרְפָה

וּשְׁם הַשֵּׁנִית רֹוּת

וַיָּשְׁבוּ שָׁם כְּעֶשֶׂר שָׁנִים

וַיָּמָוּתוּ גַם־שְׁנֵיהֶם

מַחֲלֹן וְכִלְיוֹן

וַתֵּשָׂא־הָאִשָּׁה

מִשְׁנֵי יֶלְדֶיהָ 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 sedei 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 וְכַלְתֶּיהָ
וַתָּשָׁב מִשְׂדֵּי מוֹאָב
כִּי שָׁמָעָה בַּשָּׂדֶה מוֹאָב
כִּי־פָקַד יְהוָה אֶת־עַמּוֹ
לָתֵת לָהֶם לֶחֶם
וַתֵּצֵא מִן־הַמָּקוֹם
אֲשֶׁר הָיְתָה־שָׁמָּה
וּשְׁתֵּי כַלְתֶּיהָ עִמָּהּ
וַתֵּלַכְנָה בַּדֶּרֶךְ
לָשׁוּב אֶל־אֶרֶץ יְהוּדָה
וַתֹּאמֶר נָעֻמִּי לְשְׁתֵּי כַלְתֶּיהָ
לִכְנֶה שְׁבֹנָה
אִשָּׁה לְבֵית אִמָּה
יַעַשׂ 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 לְעַמֶּךָ
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
umetznaa 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 וַעֲשֵׂה, 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 מִיְּהוֹת לְאִישׁ
כִּי אִמַּרְתִּי יֵשֶׁשׁ לִי תִקְוָה
גַּם הַיּוֹתִי הַלַּיְלָה לְאִישׁ
וְגַם יִלְדֹתִי בָנִים
הֲלֹתֶנּוּ תִשְׁבְּרֶנָּה
עַד אֲשֶׁר יִגְדְּלוּ
הֲלֹתֶנּוּ תִעֲנֶנָּה
לְבִלְתִּי הָיוֹת לְאִישׁ
אֵל בְּנֹתַי
כִּי־מַר־לִי מְאֹד מִכֶּם
כִּי־יָצָאָה בִּי יְדֹהוּהָ
וַתִּשְׁנֶה קוֹלָהּ וַתִּבְכֶּינָה עוֹד
וַתִּשָּׁק עֹרְפָּהּ לַחֲמוֹתָהּ
וְרוּת דָּבְקָה בָּהּ
וַתֹּאמֶר
הִנֵּה שָׁבָה יְבִמְתִּךְ
אֶל־עַמָּהּ וְאֶל־אֱלֹהֶיהָ
שׁוּבִי אַחֲרַי יְבִמְתִּךְ
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 אֲדֹנָי לִי וְכֵן יִסִּיף,
that *only* death may part me from you.”¹ כִּי חַמַּוֶּת יִפְרִיד בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶיךָ

¹⁸ Naomi realized

that Rut was determined to go with her, כִּי־מִתְאַמְצֶת הִיא לָלֶכֶת אִתָּה
so she gave up persuading her *to leave*. וַתַּחְדַּל לְדַבֵּר אֵלֶיהָ

¹⁹ They both went on

until they reached the food bank. וַתֵּלַכְנָה שְׁתֵּיהֶם
When they arrived at the food bank, עַד־בֹּאֲנָה בֵּית לַחֶם
the whole town was surprised at them וַיְהִי כִּבְאֲנָה בֵּית לַחֶם
and wondered, “Is this Naomi?” וַתִּהְיֶה כָּל־הָעִיר עֲלֵיהֶן

²⁰ She told them,

“Don’t call me Naomi, וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלֵיהֶן
call me Marah² אֶל־תִּקְרְאֶנָּה לִי נַעֲמִי
for the Almighty has given me great bitterness. קֶרֶן לִי מָרָא
כי־הֵמָּר שָׁדַי לִי מֹאֵד

²¹ I was full when I left

but God sent me back empty. אֲנִי מְלֵאָה הָלַכְתִּי
Why would you call me Naomi וַיִּקָּם הֵשִׁיבֵנִי יְהוָה
לָמָּה תִּקְרְאֶנָּה לִי נַעֲמִי

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 מֶרָא; 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
וַשְּׁדַי הִרָע לִי
וַתָּשָׁב נַעֲמִי
וְרוּת הַמֹּאבִיָּה
כַּלְתָּהּ עִמָּה
הִשְׁבָּה מִשְׂדֵּי מוֹאָב
וַהֲמָה 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 מוֹדַעַי לְאִשָּׁה
אִישׁ גִּבּוֹר חַיִּיל
מִמִּישְׁפַּחַת אֱלִימֶלֶךְ
וּשְׁמוֹ בּוֹאֵז
וַתֹּאמֶר רוּת הַמֹּאבִיָּה
אֶל-נַעֲמִי
אֵלְכֶה-נָּא הַשָּׂדֶה
וְאֶלְקָטָה בַּשִּׁבּוֹלִים
אַחַר אֲשֶׁר אֲמָצֵא-חֵן בְּעֵינָיו
וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ לְכִי בְתִי
וַתֵּלֶךְ וַתָּבֹא
וַתִּלְקֹט בַּשָּׂדֶה
אַחֲרֵי הַקֹּצְרִים
וַיִּקֶּר מִקְרֶה
חֶלְקֶת 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 לַקֹּצְרִים
יְהוָה עִמָּכֶם
וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ
יְבָרֶכֶךָ יְהוָה
וַיֹּאמֶר בָּעַז לִנְעוּרֹו
הַנֹּצֵב עַל-הַקֹּצְרִים
לְמִי הַנַּעֲרָה הַזֹּאת
וַיַּעַן הַנַּעֲרָה
הַנֹּצֵב עַל-הַקֹּצְרִים וַיֹּאמֶר
נַעֲרָה מוֹאבִיתָה הִיא
הַשָּׁבָה עִם-נָעֳמִי
מִשְׁדֵּה מוֹאָב
וַתֹּאמֶר אֶלְקָטָה נָא
וְאֶסְפֹּתִי בַעֲמֹרִים
אַחֲרֵי הַקֹּצְרִים
וַתָּבוֹא וַתַּעֲמֹד
מֵאֵז הַבֹּקֶר וְעַד-עֵתָה
וְהָ שְׁבִיתָהּ בְּבֵית מְעֹט
וַיֹּאמֶר בָּעַז אֶל-רֹוּת
הֲלוֹא שָׁמַעַתְּ בִּתִּי
אֶל-תֵּלְכִי לְלֶקֶט בְּשָׂדֶה אֲחֵר
וְגַם לֹא תַעֲבוּרִי מִזֶּה
וְכֹה תִדְבָּקִין עִם-נַעֲרֹתַי
עֵינֶיךָ בַּשָּׂדֶה 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
vehalachiti 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־הַנְּעָרִים

לְבַלְתִּי נִגְעַךְ

וְצִמַת וְהִלַּכְתְּ אֶל־הַכֵּלִים

וְשָׁתִית מֵאֲשֶׁר

יִשְׁאֲבוּן הַנְּעָרִים

וַתִּפֹּל עַל־פָּנֶיהָ וַתִּשְׁתַּחוּ אֶרְצָהּ

וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו

מָדוּעַ מַצָּאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ

לְהַכִּירֵנִי וְאֲנֹכִי נִכְרִיָּה

וַיַּעַן בָּעַז וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ

הִגַּד הַגֵּד 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;

וַתֹּאמֶר אֶמְצָא חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ
אֲדֹנִי כִּי נִחַמְתָּנִי
וְכִי דִבַּרְתָּ עַל-לֵב
שִׁפְחָתֶךָ
וְאֲנֹכִי לֹא אֶחָיָה
כְּאֶחַת שִׁפְחֹתֶיךָ
וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ בֹּא
לֶעֱת הָאֵכָל וְנָשִׂי הָלֶם
וְאָכַלְתְּ מִן-הַלֶּחֶם
וְשִׁבַּלְתְּ פִתֶּךָ בַּחֲמֹץ
וַתֵּשֶׁב מִצַּד הַקּוֹצְרִים
וַיִּצְבֹּט-לָהּ קָלִי
וַתֹּאכַל וַתִּשְׂבַּע וַתֵּתֶר
וַתָּקָם לִלְקֹט
וַיֵּצֵא בֹאֵז אֶת-נַעֲרָיו לֵאמֹר
גַּם בֵּין הָעֵמָרִים תִּלְקֹט
וְלֹא תִכְלִימוּהָ
וְגַם שֹׁל-תִשְׁלוּ לָהּ
מִן-הַצִּבּוֹתִים וַעֲזַבְתֶּם
וְלִקְטָהּ וְלֹא תִגְעְרוּ-בָּהּ
וַתִּלְקֹט בַּשָּׂדֶה עַד-הָעֶרֶב
וַתַּחֲבֹט אֶת אֲשֶׁר-לִקְטָהּ
וַיְהִי כֶּאֱפָה שְׁעִרִים
וַתִּשָּׂא וַתָּבֹא הָעִיר
וַתֵּרָא 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 מִשֹּׁבַעָהּ
וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ חַמּוֹתָהּ
אֵיפֹה לִקְטֹתָ הַיּוֹם
וְאַנָּה עָשִׂית
יְהִי מִכִּירֶךְ בָּרוּךְ
וַתֵּגֵד לַחַמּוֹתָהּ
אֶת אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂתָה עִמּוֹ וַתֹּאמֶר
שֵׁם הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי עִמּוֹ
הַיּוֹם בּוֹאֵז
וַתֹּאמֶר נָעֲמִי לְכַלָּתָהּ
בָּרוּךְ הוּא לַיהוָה
אֲשֶׁר לֹא-עָזַב חַסְדּוֹ
אֶת-הַחַיִּים וְאֶת-הַמֵּתִים
וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ נָעֲמִי
קָרוֹב לָנוּ הָאִישׁ מִנְּאֻלָּנוּ הוּא
וַתֹּאמֶר רוּת חַמּוֹתָבִיָּה
גַּם אִי כִי-אָמַר אֵלַי
עַם-הַנְּעָרִים אֲשֶׁר-לִי תִדְבְּקִין
עַד אִם-כָּלוּ אֶת כָּל-הַקֹּצִיר אֲשֶׁר-לִי
וַתֹּאמֶר נָעֲמִי אֶל-רוּת כַּלָּתָהּ
טוֹב בְּחַי
כִּי תֵצֵאִי עִם-נְעוּרוֹתָיו
וְלֹא יִפְגְּעוּךָ
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 בְּנִעֲרוֹת בֹּעַז לְלֶקֶט
 until the barley harvest was completed— עַד-כְּלוֹת קְצִיר-הַשְּׁעָרִים
 and the wheat harvest, *too*— וּקְצִיר הַחֲטִיטִים
 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 אֲבַקֵּשׁ-לָךְ מְנוּחַ “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 וְרַחֲצֵתְךָ וְסֹכֶתְךָ Verachatzt vasacht
 put on your *good* clothes וְשִׁמְתְּ שִׁמְלֹתַיִךְ עָלֶיךָ vesamt simlotayich alayich,
 and go down to the threshing floor. וַיֵּרָדְתָּ 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 וּלְשִׁתּוֹת 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

וַיַּדַּעַת אֶת־הַמָּקוֹם

אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכַּב־שָׁם

וַבָּאָת וַנִּלְיֵת מִרְגְּלָתָיו וַשְׁכַּבְתָּ

וְהוּא יַגִּיד לָךְ אֶת אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשִׂין

וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ

כָּל אֲשֶׁר־תֹּאמַרְי אֵלַי אֲעֵשֶׂה

וַתֵּרֶד הָגֶרֶן

וַתַּעַשׂ כְּכֹל

אֲשֶׁר־צִוְתָהּ חַמּוּתָהּ

וַיֹּאכַל בָּעֵז וַיִּשְׁתַּ וַיִּיטַב לָבּוֹ

וַיָּבֹא לִשְׁכַב בִּקְצֵה הָעֵרֶמָּה

וַתֵּבֵא בַלַּט

וַתֵּגַל מִרְגְּלָתָיו וַתִּשְׁכַּב

וַיְהִי בַחֲצֵי הַלַּיְלָה

וַיַּחֲרֹד הָאִישׁ וַיִּלָּפֶת

וַהֲנִיחַ אִשָּׁה שֹׁכֶבֶת

מִרְגְּלָתָיו

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. מִרְגְּלָתָיו 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. (מִרְגְּלָתָיו 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 אֲמָתְךָ

וּפְרַשְׁתָּ כְנָפֶיךָ עַל־אֲמָתְךָ

כִּי גֹאֵל אַתָּה

וַיֹּאמֶר בְּרוּכָה אַתָּה לַיהוָה בְּתִי

הַיְטַבְתָּ

חֲסִדְךָ הָאֲחֵרוֹן מִן־הָרִאשׁוֹן

לְבִלְתִּי־לֶכֶת אַחֲרֵי הַבָּחֳרִים

אִם־דָּל וְאִם־עָשִׁיר

וַעֲתָה בְתִי אֶל־תִּירְאִי

כֹּל אֲשֶׁר־תֹּאמְרִי אֶעֱשֶׂה־לָּךְ

כִּי יוֹדֵעַ כָּל־שְׂעַר עָמִי

כִּי אִשֶּׁת חַיִּיל אַתָּה

וַעֲתָה כִּי אֹמְנָם

כִּי גֹאֵל אֲנֹכִי

וְגַם יֵשׁ גֹּאֵל קָרוֹב מִמֶּנִּי

לִינִי הַלַּיְלָה

וְהָיָה בְּבֹקֶר אִם־יִגְאָלְךָ

טוֹב יִגָּל

וְאִם־לֹא יַחְפֹּץ לְגַאֲלְךָ

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>	וַתֵּאָחֵז בָּהּ וַיִּמַּד	Vatochez bah, vayamad
six <i>measures of</i> 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 of</i> 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-חַמּוֹתְךָ	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 תִּדְעִין
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.

וַבֵּעֶז עָלָה הַשַּׁעַר
וַיֵּשֶׁב שָׁם
וְהִנֵּה הָגָאֵל עֹבֵר
אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר־בָּעִז
וַיֹּמֶר סִוְרָה שְׁבָה־פֹה
פְּלוֹנִי אֱלֹמוֹנִי
וַיָּסֶר וַיֵּשֶׁב
UVo’az alah hasha’ar
vayeshev sham,
vehineh hago’el over,
asher diber Bo’az,
vayomer, “Surah, shevah po,
ploni almoni”;
vayasar vayeshev.

² Boaz gathered ten
of the town elders
and said “Sit here”; they sat down.

וַיִּקָּח עֶשְׂרֵה אַנְשִׁים
מִזִּיקְנֵי הָעִיר
וַיֹּמֶר שְׁבִי־פֹה וַיֵּשְׁבוּ
Vayikach asarah anashim
miziknei ha’ir
vayomer, “Shevu fo”; vayeshevu.

³ Boaz said to the *other* family member,
“The piece of land
that belonged to Elimelech our relative,
Naomi sold it,

וַיֹּמֶר לַגֹּאֵל
חֶלְקֵת הַשָּׂדֶה
אֲשֶׁר לְאַחִינִי לְאֵלִימֶלֶךְ
מִכֶּרֶה נַעֲמִי
Vayomer lagoonel,
“Chelkat hasadeh
asher le’achinu, le’Elimelech,
machrah Na’omi,

Naomi who came back from the fields of Moab.

הַשְּׂבָה מִשָּׂדֶה מוֹאָב
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.

וַאֲנִי אֲמַרְתִּי אֶגְלֵה אוֹזְנֶךָ לְאָמֹר
קִנֵּה נֶגֶד הַיּוֹשְׁבִים
וַנִּגַּד זִקְנֵי עָמִי
אִם־תִּגָּאֵל גֹּאֵל
וְאִם־לֹא יִגָּאֵל
הַגִּידָה לִּי וְאִדְעָה
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'כָּה הַשָּׂדֶה

מִיַּד נָעֳמִי

וּמֵעֵת רֹות הַמּוֹאֲבִיָּה

אֶשֶׁת הַמֶּת קָנִיתָהּ²

לְהַקִּים שֵׁם הַמֶּת

עַל־נַחֲלָתוֹ

וַיֹּאמֶר הַגֹּאֵל

לֹא אוּכַל לְגֹאֵל⁵ לִי

פֶּן־אֶשְׁחִית אֶת־נַחֲלָתִי

גֹּאֲל־לָךְ אַתָּה אֶת־גֹּאֲלִיתִי

כִּי לֹא־אוּכַל לְגֹאֵל

וְזֹאת לְפָנִים בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל

עַל־הַגֹּאֲלָה

וְעַל־הַתְּמוּרָה

לְקַיֵּם כָּל־דָּבָר

שָׁלַף אִישׁ נַעְלוֹ

וְנָתַן לְרֵעֵהוּ

וְזֹאת הַתְּעוּדָה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל

וַיֹּאמֶר הַגֹּאֵל לְבֹעַז

קִנְה־לָךְ וַיִּשְׁלַף נַעְלוֹ

וַיֹּאמֶר בֹּעַז לְזִקְנֵי

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 אִתָּם הַיּוֹם כִּי קָנִיתִי
אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר לְאֵלִימֶלֶךְ
וְאֶת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר לְכִלְיוֹן וּמַחֲלֹן
מִיַּד נָעֳמִי

וְגַם אֶת־רוּת הַמֹּאבִיטָה
אִשֶׁת מַחֲלֹן קָנִיתִי לִי לְאִשָּׁה
לְהָקִים שֵׁם־הַמֵּת
עַל־נַחֲלָתוֹ

וְלֹא־יִכָּרֵת שֵׁם־הַמֵּת
מֵעַם אֲחָיו

וּמִשְׁעַר מְקוֹמוֹ

עֲדִים אִתָּם הַיּוֹם

וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָל־הָעָם אֲשֶׁר־בַּשָּׁעַר
וְהַזְקֵנִים עֲדִים

יָתֵן יְהוָה אֶת־הָאִשָּׁה

הַבָּאָה אֶל־בֵּיתָךְ

כְּרַחֵל וּכְלֵאָה

אֲשֶׁר בָּנוּ שְׁתֵּיהֶם

אֶת־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל

וַעֲשֵׂה־חַיִּיל בְּעִרְתָּהּ

וּקְרָא־שֵׁם בְּבֵית לָחֶם

וַיְהִי בֵיתָךְ

כְּבֵית פֶּרֶץ

אֲשֶׁר־יָלְדָה תָמָר לִיהוּדָה

מִן־הַזֶּרַע אֲשֶׁר יָתֵן יְהוָה לָךְ

מִן־הַנְּעִרָה הַזֹּאת

vechol ha’am,

“Edim atem hayom ki kaniti

et kol asher le’Elimelech—

ve’et kol asher leChilyon uMachlon

—miyad Na’omi.

Vegam et Rut haMo’aviyah,

eshet Machlon, kaniti li le’ishah,

lehakim shem hamet

al nachalato,

Velo yikaret shem hamet

me’im echav

umisha’ar mekomo.

Edim atem hayom.”

Vayomru kol ha’am asher basha’ar

vehazkenim, “Edim.

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.

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 מִשְׁבַּע 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-לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה

וַיָּבֹא אֵלֶיהָ

וַיֵּתֶן יְהוָה לָהּ הֶרְיוֹן

וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן

וַתֹּאמְרָנָה הַנָּשִׁים אֶל-נָעֲמִי

בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה

אֲשֶׁר לֹא הִשְׁבִּית לָךְ גֹּאֵל הַיּוֹם

וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ בְּיִסְרָאֵל

וַהֲיָה לָךְ לְמִשִּׁיב נֶפֶשׁ

וּלְכֹלֶל אֶת-שִׁבְתְּךָ

כִּי כָלַתְךָ אֲשֶׁר-אֶהְיֶינָהּ

יְלָדָתוֹ

אֲשֶׁר-הִיא טוֹבָה לָךְ מִשְׁבַּע בָּנִים

וַתִּקַּח נָעֲמִי אֶת-הַיֶּלֶד

וַתְּשִׁתְּהוּ בְּחִיקָהּ

וַתְּהִי-לוֹ לְאֹמֶנֶת

וַתִּקְרָאנָהּ לוֹ 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-סַלְמָה

וְסַלְמָה הוֹלִיד אֶת-בּוֹאֵז

וּבּוֹאֵז 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 Sample

The Book of Lamentations

אֵיכָה

SPS Sample

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 יִשְׁבֶּה בָדָד	Eicha yashvah vadad,
הָעִיר רַבָּתִי עָם	ha'ir rabati am,
הַיְתָה כְּאַלְמָנָה	haytah ka'almanah.
רַבָּתִי בְּגוֹיִם	Rabati vagoyim,
שָׂרָתִי בְּמַדִּינֹת	sarati bamdinot,
הַיְתָה לָמָס	haytah lamas.
כָּלוּ תִבְלָה בְּלִילָה	Bacho tivkeh balailah,
וְדַמְעָתָהּ עַל לֶחֶיהָ	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.
גָּלְתָה יְהוּדָה	Galta Yehuda
מֵעֲנִי וּמִרֵּב עֲבֹדָה	me'oni umerov avoda.
הִיא יֹשֶׁבֶת בְּגוֹיִם	Hi yashva vagoyim,
לֹא מָצְאָה מָנוַח	lo matza mano'ach.
כָּל־רֹדְפֶיהָ הִשִּׁיגוּהָ	Kol rodfeha hisiguha
בֵּין הַמְּצָרִים	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 מִכֹּל־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 שׁוֹמֵמִין
כֹּהֲנֶיהָ נֹאכְחִים
בְּתוֹלֵתֶיהָ נִיגוֹת וְהִיא מֵרָלָה
הָיוּ צָרֶיהָ לְרֹאשׁ
אֵיבֵיהָ שָׁלוּ
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־מִצְאוּ מְרֹעָה
וַיִּלְכּוּ בְּלֹא־כֹחַ לִפְנֵי רוֹדֶף
זָכְרָה יְרוּשָׁלַם
יָמֶי עֲנִיָּה וּמְרוּדִיהָ
כָּל מַחְמֹדֶיהָ
אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ מִיָּמֶי קֶדֶם
בִּנְפֹל עַמָּהּ בְּיַד־צָר
וְאֵין עֹזֶר לָהּ
רָאוּהָ צָרִים שָׂחָקוּ עַל מִשְׁבָּתֶיהָ

Vayetzeh mibat Tziyon kol hadarah.
Hayu sareha
ke'ayalim lo matzu mireh,
vayelchu velo cho'ach lifnei rodef.
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.

¹ "Her foes have become the head/chief."

² Two notes on this. First, the "written" word (in manuscript versions) is מִבֵּית instead of מִבֵּת; there's no difference in meaning. Second, the word בֵּת 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 לִנְיָדָה הָיִיתָה
כָּל־מְכַבְּדֶיהָ הִזִּילוּהָ
כִּי־רָאוּ עֲרוֹתָהּ
גַּם־הִיא נִנְחָתָה וַתִּשָּׁב אַחֲוָר
טִמְאַתָּהּ בִּשְׂוֹלֶיהָ
לֹא זָכְרָה אַחֲרִיתָהּ
וַתִּרְדַּד פְּלָאִים אֵין מְנַחֵם לָהּ
רָאָה יְהוָה אֶת־עֲוֹנֶיהָ
כִּי הִגְדִּיל אוֹיֵב
יָדוֹ פָּרַשׁ צָר
עַל־כָּל־מַחְמַדֶּיהָ
כִּי־רָאָתָה גּוֹיִם
בָּאוּ מִקְדָּשָׁהּ
אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתָה
לֹא־יָבֹאוּ בְּקֹהֶל לְךָ
כָּל־עַמָּה נֹאמְרִים
מִבְּקָשִׁים לֶחֶם
נָתְנוּ מַחְמַדֵּיהֶם בְּאֹכֶל
לְהַשִּׁיב נַפְשׁ
רָאָה יְהוָה וַתִּבְּשִׂתָּהּ
כִּי הָיִיתִי זֹלֵלָה
לֹא אֵלֵיכֶם כָּל־עֹבְרֵי דֶרֶךְ
הַבֵּיטוּ וּרְאוּ
אִם־יֵשׁ מַכּוֹחַ כְּמַכּוֹחִי
אֲשֶׁר עֹלָל לִי
אֲשֶׁר הוֹגָה אֲדֹנָי
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 oyevev."
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 מַחְמַדֵּיהֶם but we read מִמְּחַדֵּיהֶם. 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 הִשִּׁיבֵנִי אָחוֹר נִתְּנִי שׁוֹמְמָה 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 בִיֹּדוֹ יִשְׁתָּדְּנֵנוּ עָלָיו עַל־צָוָאֲרֵי הִחְשִׁיל כֹּחִי נִתְּנִי 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 עָלָי מוֹעֵד לְשֹׁבֵר 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־אֵלֶּה אֲנִי בֹכֶיָה עֵינִי עֵינֵי יְרֹדָה מַיִם כִּי־רָחַק מִמֶּנִּי מְנַחֵם מְשִׁיב נַפְשִׁי הָיוּ בָנֵי שׁוֹמְמִים 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*!

פֶּרֶשָׁה צִיּוֹן בְּיָדֶיהָ

אֵין מְנַחֵם לָהּ

צִוָּה יְהוָה לְיַעֲקֹב

סְבִיבוֹ צָרָיו

הָיְתָה יְרוּשָׁלַם לְנִדָּה בֵּינֵיהֶם

צַדִּיק הוּא יְהוָה כִּי פִּיהוּ מְרִיתִי

שְׁמֵעוּ־נָא כָּל־הָעַמִּים

וְרֹאוּ מַכּוֹבִי

בְּתוֹלָתִי וּבְחוּרַי הָלְכוּ בַשָּׁבִי

קָרָאתִי לַמֵּאֲהָבִי

הֵמָּה רִמּוּנִי

כֹּהֲנֵי וְזִקְנֵי בְעִיר גָּוְעוּ

כִּי־בִקְשׁוּ אֹכֶל לָמוֹ

וַיִּשְׁבּוּ אֶת־נַפְשָׁם

רָאָה יְהוָה כִּי־צָרָלִי

מֵעֵי חֲמַרְמָרוֹ

נִהְפַךְ לִבִּי בִקְרִבִּי

כִּי מָרוּ מְרִיתִי

מִחוּץ שִׁכְלָה־חֶרֶב

בְּבֵית כַּמּוֹת

שָׁמְעוּ כִּי נִאֲנַחָה אָנִי

אֵין מְנַחֵם לִי

כָּל־אֵיבֵי שְׁמֵעוּ רַעְתִּי שָׂשׂוּ

כִּי אַתָּה עָשִׂיתָ

הַבָּאָתָּ יוֹם־קָרָאתָ

וַיְהִיו כַּמוֹנִי

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, sasv

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 דָּוַי
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!
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.
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

אֵיכָה יָעִיב בָּאֵפוֹ אֲדֹנָי
אֶת־בַּת־צִיּוֹן
הִשְׁלִיךְ מִשְׁמַיִם אֶרֶץ
תִּפְאֶרֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל
וְלֹא־זָכַר הָדָם רַגְלָיו
בְּיוֹם אָפּוֹ
בִּלְהַ אֲדֹנָי וְלֹא חָמַל
אֶת כָּל־נְאוֹת יַעֲקֹב
הָרָס בְּעִבְרָתוֹ
מִבְצָרָיו בְּתִי־הַנְּהִיחַ
הִגִּיעַ לְאַרְצָן
חִלֵּל מַמְלָכָה וְשָׂרָהָ
גָּדַח בַּחֲרֵי אָף
כָּל קֶרֶן יִשְׂרָאֵל
הִשִּׁיב אַחֹר יְמִינוֹ מִפְּנֵי אוֹיֵב
וַיִּבְעַר בְּיַעֲקֹב
כַּאֲשֶׁר לֶהָבָה
אָכְלָה סָבִיב
Eicha ya'iv be'apo Adonai
et bat Tziyon,
hishlich mishamayim eretz
tiferet Yisra'el,
velo zachar hadom raglav
beyom apo.
Bilah Adonai, velo chamal,
et kol ne'ot Ya'akov;
haras be'evrato
mivtzerei vat Yehudah,
higi'ah la'aretz,
chilel mamlachah vesareha.
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 *חָמַל* is what we read. In a scroll, we would write *חָמַל*, 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
וַיַּהֲרֹג כָּל מַחֲמַדֵּי-עֵין vayaharog kol machamadei ayin;
בְּאֹהֶל בַּת-צִיּוֹן be'ohel bat Tziyon
שָׁפַךְ כָּאֵשׁ חַמָּתוֹ shafach ka'esh chamato.
הָיָה אֲדֹנָי אֶל-כְּאֹיֵב Haya Adonai ke'oyev;
בִּלְהַע יִשְׂרָאֵל bilah Yisra'el,
בִּלְהַע כָּל-אַרְמְנוֹתֶיהָ bilah kol armenoteha,
שִׁחֶת מִיִּצְרָאֵל shichet mitzarav,
וַיִּרֶב בְּבֵית-יְהוּדָה vayerev bevat Yehudah
תְּאַנִּיחַ וְאֶנִּיחַ ta'aniyah va'aniyah.
וַיַּחֲמֹס כָּגֵן שָׂכֹו Vayachmos kagan sukoh,
שִׁחֶת מוֹעֵד shichet mo'ado;
שִׁכַּח יְהוָה 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 אַרְמְנוֹתֶיהָ chomot armenoteha;
קוֹל נַתְּנוּ בְּבֵית-יְהוָה kol natnu bebeit Yehovah
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 שָׂכֹו, “God’s shelter,” as סִיכָה (from סִיכָה, 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
חֹמַת בַּת־צִיּוֹן

נָטָה קֶוֶן
לֹא־הָשִׁיב יָדוֹ מִבְּלָעַ
וַיֹּאבֶל־חֵל וַחֲמוּמָה
יַחַדָּו וּמְלָלוּ

טָבְעוּ בָּאָרֶץ שַׁעְרֶיהָ
אֶבֶד וְשִׁבַּר בְּרִיחֶיהָ
מַלְכָּה וְשָׂרֶיהָ בְּגוֹיִם
אֵין תּוֹרָה

גַּם־נְבִיאֶיהָ לֹא־מָצְאוּ חֲזוֹן
מִיְהוָה

יֵשְׁבוּ לָאָרֶץ יְדֻמוּ
זִקְנֵי בַת־צִיּוֹן
הָעֵלּוּ עָפָר עַל־רֹשָׁם
חָגְרוּ שָׁקִים

הוֹרִידוּ לָאָרֶץ רֹאשָׁן
בְּתוֹלוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם
כָּלּוּ בַדְּמָעוֹת עֵינַי
חָמַרְמַרְמֵי מַעֵי

נִשְׁפַּךְ לָאָרֶץ כֶּבֶדִּי
עַל־שֶׁבֶר 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 Le’imotam yomru,
אֵיכָה דָגָן וַיַּיִן “Ayeḥ dagan vayayin?”
בְּהִתְעַטְּפָם כְּחָלָל behitatfam kechalal
בִּרְחוֹבוֹת עִיר bir’chovot ir,
בְּהִשְׁתַּפֵּךְ נַפְשָׁם behishtapech nafsham
אֶל-חֵיק אִמּוֹתָם el chek imotam.
מַה-אֶעֱיִדָּךְ Mah a’idech,
מַה אֲדַמֶּה-לָּךְ mah adameh lach,
הַבַּת יְרוּשָׁלַם habat Yerushala’im?
מַה אֲשַׁוֶּה-לָּךְ וְאַנְחָמֶכָּךְ Mah ashveh lach va’anachamech,
בְּתוּלַת בַּת-צִיּוֹן betulat bat Tziyon,
כִּי-גָדוֹל כַּיָּמ שִׁיִּרְעָךְ ki gadol kayam shivrech;
מִי יִרְפָּא-לָּךְ mi yirpah lach?
נְבִיאֶיךָ חָזוּ לָּךְ שָׁוָא וְתַפֵּל Nevi’ayich chazu lach shav vetafel
וְלֹא-גִלּוּ עַל-עוֹנֶךָ velo gilul al avonech
לְהָשִׁיב שְׁבוּתֶךָ³ lehashiv shevutech,
וַיַּחֲזִיזוּ לָּךְ vayechezu lach
מִשָּׁאוֹת שָׁוָא וּמַדּוּחִים masot shav umaduchim.
סָפְקוּ עָלֶיךָ כַּפַּיִם Safku alayich kapayim,
כָּל-עֹבְרֵי דֶרֶךְ kol ovrei derech,
שָׁרְקוּ וַיִּנְעוּ רֹשָׁם sharku vayani’u rosham
עַל-בַּת יְרוּשָׁלַם al bat Yerushalayim.
הַזֹּאת הָעִיר Hazot ha’ir
שֶׁיּוֹמְרוּ כִלִּילַת יוֹפִי sheyomru kelilat yofi,
מָשׁוֹשׁ לְכָל-הָאָרֶץ 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 שְׁבוּתָךְ 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 וַיִּחַרְקוּ־שֵׁן

אָמְרוּ בִלְעָנִי

אֲךָ זֶה הַיּוֹם שֶׁקִּוִּינוּהוּ

מַצָּאנִי רָאִינוּ

עָשָׂה יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר זָמַם

בַּצָּע אֶמְרָתוֹ

אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה מִימֵי־קֶדֶם

הָרָס וְלֹא חָמַל

וַיִּשְׂמַח עָלֶיךָ אוֹיֵב

הֶרֶם קֶרֶן צָרָיִךְ

צָעַק לָבָם אֶל־אֲדֹנָי

חֹמַת בַּת־צִיּוֹן

הוֹרִידִי כִנְחָל דִּמְעָה

יוֹמָם וּלְלַיְלָה

אֶל־תִּתְּנִי פִּוְנָתְךָ לָךְ

אֶל־תִּדְּמִי בַת־עֵינֶךָ

קוּמִי רֹנִי בַלַּיְלָה

לְרֹאשׁ אֲשֻׁמְרוֹת

שִׁפְכִי חֲמַיִם לִבֶּךָ

נֹחַח פְּנֵי אֲדֹנָי

שֶׁאִי אֵלָיו כַּפָּיִךְ

עַל־נֶפֶשׁ עוֹלָלֶיךָ

הָעֲטוּפִים בְּרָעָב

בְּרֹאשׁ כָּל־חֻצּוֹת

Patzu alayich pihem kol oyvayich;

sharku vayacharku shen.

Amru, “Bilanu.

Ach zeh hayom shekivinu.

Matzanu, ra’inu!”

Asah Adonai asher zamam,

bitzah emrato

asher tzivah mimei kedom.

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 בְּחָרֵב

הָרַגְתָּ בְּיוֹם אַפֶּךָ

טָבַחְתָּ לֹא חֲמַלְתָּ

תִּקְרָא כְּיוֹם מוֹעֵד

מִגּוּרַי מִסָּבִיב

וְלֹא הָיָה בְּיוֹם אַף-יְהוָה

פָּלִיט וְשָׂרִיד

אֲשֶׁר-טִפַּחְתִּי וְרִבִּיתִי

אִיבֵי כֻלָּם

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 nafu 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 רֵאֵה עֹנִי

בְּשֶׁבֶט עֲבָרְתּוֹ

אוֹתִי נָהַג וַיִּלְךָ

חֹשֶׁךְ וְלֹא-אֹר

אֵךְ בִּי יָשׁוּב

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

בָּלָה בְּשָׁרִי וְעוֹרִי

שִׁבַּר עַצְמוֹתַי

בָּנָה עָלַי

וַיִּקַּף רֹאשׁ וּתְלָאָה

בַּמַּחֲשָׁקִים הוֹשִׁיבָנִי

כְּמֵתֵי עוֹלָם

גָּדַר בַּעֲדִי וְלֹא אֶצֵּא

הַכְּבִיד נִחַשְׁתִּי

גַּם כִּי אֶזְעַק וְאֶשְׁוֶה

שָׁתַם תְּפִלָּתִי

גָּדַר דְּרָכִי בְּגִזִּית

נִתְיַבְּתִי עוֹה

דָּב אֲרֵב הוּא לִי

אַרְיִי⁴ בְּמִסְתָּרִים

דְּרָכִי סוֹרֵר וַיַּפְשִׁחֵנִי

שָׁמָנִי שֹׁמֵם

דָּרַךְ קִשְׁתּוֹ וַיַּצִּיבָנִי

כַּמְטָרָה לַחֵץ

הֵבִיא בְּכִלְיוֹתַי

בְּנֵי אֲשָׁפָתוֹ

הָיִיתִי שֶׁחֹק לְכָל-עַמִּי

נִגִּינָתָם כָּל-הַיּוֹם

Bilah besari ve'ori,

shibar atzmotai,

banah alai,

vayakaf rosh utela'ah,

bamachashakim hoshivani

kemetei olam,

gadar ba'adi velo etzeh,

hichbid nechashti.

Gam ki ez'ak va'ashave'ah,

satam tefilati.

Gadar derachai begazit,

netivotai ivah.

Dov orev hu li,

ari bemistarim.

derachai sorer vayefashcheni,

samani shomem.

Darach kashto vayatziveni

kamatarah lachetz.

Hevi bechilyotai

benei ashpatu.

Hayiti sechok lechol ami,

neginatam kol hayom.

¹ Or, "like the dead *people* of the world" or "like *people who are* dead forever/eternally."

² We assume that שָׁתַם and סָתַם mean the same: close off, or stop up.

³ "My paths did *God* twist."

⁴ A manuscript text would read אַרְיִי, 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.

הַשְׁבִּיעַנִי בַמְרוֹרִים Hisbi’ani vamrorim,
הִרְוֵנִי לַעֲנָה hirvani la’anah,
וַיַּאֲרֶס בְּחֶצֶץ שָׁנַי vayagress bechatzatz shinai,
הִכְפִּישָׁנִי בָאָפֶר hichpishani ba’efer.
וַתִּזְנַח מִשְׁלֹם נַפְשִׁי vatiznach mishalom nafshi,
נָשִׁיתִי טוֹבָה nashiti tovah.

וַאֲמַר אֶבְדַּ נְצַחִי Va’omar, “Avad nitzchi
וַתּוֹחַלְתִּי מִיְהוָה vetochalti me’Adonai.”

זָכֹר-עֲנִי וּמְרוּדִי Zechor onyi umerudi,
לַעֲנָה וְרָאֵשׁ la’anah varosh.

זָכֹר תִּזְכּוֹר Zachor, tizkor,
וַתִּשּׁוּחַ² עָלַי נַפְשִׁי vetasho’ach alai nafshi.

זֹאת אֲשִׁיב אֶל-לִבִּי Zot ashiv el libi,
עַל-כֵּן אוֹחִיל al ken ochil:

חֲסַדֵּי יְהוָה כִּי לֹא-תֵמַנּוּ Chasdei Adonai, ki lo tamnu,
כִּי לֹא-כָלוּ רַחֲמָיו ki lo chalu rachamav.

חֲדָשִׁים לִבְקָרִים Chadashim labkarim,
רַבָּה אֱמוּנָתֶךָ rabah emunatecha!

חֶלְכִּי יְהוָה אִמְרָה נַפְשִׁי “Chelki Adonai,” amrah nafshi,
עַל-כֵּן אוֹחִיל לוֹ al ken ochil lo.

טוֹב יְהוָה לְקוֹנֵי Tov Adonai lekovav,
לְנַפְשׁ תִּדְרֶשְׁנִי 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 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 <i>It's</i> good for a man to suffer when young. ¹	טוב לַנָּבֵר כִּי־יִשָּׂא עַל בִּנְעוּרָיו	Tov lagever ki yisah ol bin'urav.
²⁸ Let a <i>person</i> sit alone and stay silent for <i>God</i> has lifted the load.	יֵשֵׁב בְּדָד וַיִּדָּם כִּי נָטַל עָלָיו	Yeshev badad veyidom, ki natal alav.
²⁹ Let a <i>person</i> place his mouth in the dust; perhaps there is <i>reason</i> for hope.	יִתֵּן בֶּעָפָר פִּיהוּ אוּלַי יֵשֶׁ תִּקְוָה	Yiten be'afar pihu; ulai yesh tikvah.
³⁰ Turn the <i>other</i> cheek when someone hits you so <i>the attacker</i> will earn a full measure of blame. ²	יִתֵּן לַמַּכֶּהוּ לְחִי יִשְׁבַּח בְּחֶרְפָּה	Yiten lemakehu lechi, yisbah becherpah.
³¹ For <i>God</i> does not spurn <i>you</i> forever.	כִּי לֹא יִזְנַח לְעוֹלָם אֲדָנִי	Ki lo yiznach le'olam Adonai.
³² If <i>God</i> brings grief, <i>God</i> brings comfort, in keeping with <i>God's</i> abundant mercies.	כִּי אִם־הוֹנִיחַ וְרַחֵם כְּרֹב חֲסָדָיו ³	Ki im hogah vericham, kerov chasadav.
³³ For <i>God</i> does not bring trouble willingly bringing grief to humanity, ⁴	כִּי לֹא עֲנָה מִלְּבּוֹ וַיִּגַּח בְּנִי־אִישׁ	Ki lo inah milibo vayageh venei ish.
³⁴ crushing underfoot all those who are confined to the world,	לְדַכָּא תַּחַת רַגְלָיו כָּל אֲסִירֵי אֶרֶץ	Iedakeh tachat raglav kol asirei aretz,
³⁵ twisting human justice despite the presence of the High One, ⁵	לְהַטּוֹת מִשְׁפָּט־נָבֵר נֶגֶד פְּנֵי עֲלִיּוֹן	Iehatot mishpat gaver neged penei Elyon,
³⁶ cheating someone in a conflict; <i>God</i> doesn't approve of <i>such</i> behavior.	לְעֵוֶת אָדָם בְּרִיבּוֹ אֲדָנִי לֹא רָאָה	le'avet adam berivo; Adonai lo ra'ah.
³⁷ Who can speak and make <i>something</i> happen if <i>God</i> hasn't ordered it?	מִי זֶה אָמַר וַתֵּהִי אֲדָנִי לֹא צִוָּה	Mi zeh amar vatehi, 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 חסדו

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-חַטָּאוֹי²

נַחֲפֶשֶׁה דְרַכֵּינוּ וְנַחֲקֹרָה

וְנָשׁוּבָה עַד-יְהוָה

נִשָּׂא לִבֵּנוּ אֶל-כַּפַּיִם

אֶל-אֵל בִּשְׁמָיִם

נַחֲנוּ פָשַׁעְנוּ וּמָרִינוּ

אַתָּה לֹא סָלַחְתָּ

סָכַתָּה בָּאָף וַתִּרְדְּפֵנוּ

הַרַגְתָּ לֹא חָמַלְתָּ

סָכַתָּה בְּעָנָן לֹךְ

מִעֲבוֹר תִּפְלִיחַ

סֶחִי וּמָאוֹס תִּשְׁמִינִי

בִּקְרֵב הָעַמִּים

פָּצוּ עָלֵינוּ פִּיהֶם

כָּל-אֲבִינִי

פָּחַד וּפִחַת הָיָה לָנוּ

הִשָּׂאת וְהִשָּׁבַר

פָּלְגֵי-מַיִם תִּרְדַּ עֵינַי

עַל-שֶׁבֶר בַּת-עַמִּי

עֵינַי נִגְרָה וְלֹא תִדְמֶה

מֵעֵין הַפִּגּוֹת

עַד-יִשְׁקֹף 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 עוֹלָלָה לְנַפְשִׁי מִכָּל בְּנוֹת עִירִי	Eini olelah lenafshi mikol benot iri.
⁵² They trapped me like a bird, my enemies, for no reason.	צֹד 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 אָמַרְתִּי 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 לְרוֹחַתִּי לְשׁוֹעַתִּי	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 אָמַרְתָּ 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 נִצַּלְתָּ חַיִּי	Ravta, Adonai, rivei nafshi, ga’alta chayai.
⁵⁹ You have seen, O God, how I suffer; judge my case!	רָאִיתָה יְהוָה עֲוֹנֹתַי שֹׁפְטָה מִשְׁפָּטִי	Ra’itah, Adonai, avatati; shoftah mishpati.
⁶⁰ You have seen all their spitefulness, all their plots against me.	רָאִיתָה כָּל-נִקְמָתָם כָּל-מַחְשְׁבוֹתָם לִי	Ra’itah kol nikmatam, kol machshevotam li.
⁶¹ You’ve heard their taunts, God, all their plans against me.	שָׁמַעְתָּ חֶרְפָּתָם יְהוָה כָּל-מַחְשְׁבוֹתָם 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 מִגְנַת־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 יוּעַם זָהָב
יִשְׁנֶה הַכֶּתֶם הַטוֹב
תִּשְׁתַּפְּכְנָה אַבְנֵי־קֹדֶשׁ
בְּרֹאשׁ כָּל־חוֹצוֹת
בְּנֵי צִיּוֹן הַיֶּקָּרִים
הַמְּסֻלָּאִים בַּפֹּז
אֵיכָה נִחְשְׁבֻ לְנִבְלֵי־חֶרֶשׁ
מַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵי יוֹצֵר
גַּם־תַּנִּים חָלְצוּ שָׂדַי
הַיִּיקוּ גוּרֵיהֶן
בַּת־עַמִּי לְאַחְזָר
כִּי־עֲנִים בַּמִּדְבָּר
דָּבַק לְשׁוֹן יוֹנֵק
אֶל־חִיקוֹ בַּצִּמָּא
עוֹלָלִים שְׁאֵלוּ 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 לִמְעַד־נִים
נִשְׁמוּ בַּחוּצוֹת
הָאֲמוּנִים עַל־י תוֹלַע
חִבְקוּ אֲשָׁפוֹת

Ha'ochlim lema'adanim
nashamu bachutzot;
ha'emunim alei tolah
chibku ashpatot.

וַיִּגְדַּל עֶזֶן בַּת־עָמִי
מִחַטָּאת סֹדֶם
הַהִפּוּכָה כְּמוֹ־רָגַע
וְלֹא־חָלוּ בָּהּ יָדַיִם

Vayigdal avon bat ami
mechatat Sedom,
hahafuchah chemo ragah,
velo chalu vah yadayim.

זָכוּ נְזִירֶיהָ מִשֶּׁלֶג
צָחוּ מִחֶלֶב

Zaku nezireha misheleg,
tzachu mechalav.

אָדְמוּ עֲצֵם מִפְּנִינִים
סָפִיר גִּזְרָתָם

Admu etzem mipninim,
sapir gizratam.

חָשַׁח מִשְׁחוֹר תְּאֵרָם
לֹא נִכְרוּ בַּחוּצוֹת

Chashach mishchor ta'oram,
lo nikru bachutzot;

צָפַד עוֹרָם עַל־עֲצָמָם
יָבֵשׁ הָיָה כָּעֵץ

tzafad oram al atzmam,
yavesh hayah cha'etz.

טוֹבִים הָיוּ חַלְלֵי־חֶרֶב
מִחַלְלֵי רָעַב

Tovim hayu chalelei cherev
mechalelei ra'av,

שֶׁהֵם יֻזְבוּ מְדֻקָּרִים
מִתְּנוּבֹת שָׂדֵי

shehem yazuvu medukarim,
mitnuvot sadai.

יְדֵי נָשִׁים רַחֲמָנִיּוֹת
בִּשְׁלוּ יַלְדֵיהֶן

Yedei nashim rachamaniyot
bishlu yaldeihen;

הָיוּ לְבָרוֹת לָמוֹ
בְּשֶׁבֶר בַּת־עָמִי

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.

כָּלָה יְהוָה אֶת-חֲמָתוֹ
שָׁפַךְ חֲרוֹן אַפּוֹ
וַיַּצֵּת אֵשׁ בְּצִיּוֹן
וַתֹּאכַל יְסוֹדֹתֶיהָ
לֹא הֶאֱמִינוּ מַלְכֵי-אֶרֶץ
כָּל-יֹשְׁבֵי תֵבֶל,¹
כִּי יָבֹא צָר וְאוֹיֵב
בְּשַׁעֲרֵי יְרוּשָׁלַם
מִחַטָּאת נְבִיאֶיהָ
עֲוֹנוֹת כֹּהֲנֶיהָ
הַשִּׁפְּכִים בְּקִרְבָּהָ
דָם צַדִּיקִים
נָעוּ עִירִים בַּחֲצוֹצוֹת
נִנְאָלוּ בַדָּם
בֶּלֹא יוֹכְלוּ
יָגְעוּ בַלְבִּשֵׁיהֶם
סוּרוּ טָמֵא קָרָאוּ לָמוֹ
סוּרוּ סוּרוּ אֶל-תִּנְעֹנוּ
כִּי נָצוּ גַם-נָעוּ
אָמְרוּ בְּגוֹיִם לֹא יוֹסִיפוּ לָגוּר
פְּנֵי יְהוָה חִלְקָם
לֹא יוֹסִיף לְהִבְיֹטֵם
פְּנֵי כֹהֲנִים לֹא נָשְׂאוּ
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 tiga'u,"
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

עוֹדֵינוּ תִּכְלֶינָה עֵינֵינוּ Odenu tichlenah eineinu
אֶל-עֲזָרָתֵנוּ הָבֵל el ezratenu—havel!
בְּצִיפְיָתֵנוּ צִיפִינוּ Betzipiyatenu tzipinu
אֶל-גּוֹי לֹא יוֹשֵׁעַ el goy, lo yoshi'a.
צָדוּ צֵעֵדֵינוּ Tzadu tze'adeinu
מִלֶּכֶת בְּרַחֲבֵינוּ milechet bir'chovoteinu;
קָרַב קִצֵּינוּ מָלְאוּ יָמֵינוּ karav kitzeinu, malu yameinu
כִּי-בָא קִצֵּינוּ ki vah kitzeinu.
קָלִים הֵיוּ רֹדְפֵינוּ Kalim hayu rodfeinu
מִנִּישְׁרֵי שָׁמַיִם minishrei shamayim;
עַל-הָהָרִים דִּלְקָנוּ al heharim delakunu,
בַּמִּדְבָּר אָרְבוּ לָנוּ bamidbar arvu lanu.
רוּחַ אֶפְעֵינוּ מֵשִׁיחַ אֲדֹנָי Ru'ach apeinu, meshi'ach Adonai,
נִלְכַּד בִּשְׁחִיתוֹתָם nilkad bishchitotam;
אֲשֶׁר אָמַרְנוּ asher amarnu,
בְּצִלּוֹ נַחֲיָה בְּגוֹיִם “Betzilo nichyeh vagoyim.”
שִׁישִׁי וְשִׁמְחִי בַת-אֲדָוָם Sisi vesim'chi, bat Edom
יֹשֶׁבֶת⁵ בְּאֶרֶץ עוּץ yoshevet be'eretz Utz.
גַּם-עָלֶיךָ תֵּעָבֵר-כּוֹס Gam alayich ta'avar kos:
תִּשְׁכְּרִי וְתִתְעָרִי tishkeri vetit'ari.

¹ A manuscript version would read עוֹדֵנָה.

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 יוֹשְׁבִיתִי.

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־הָיָה לָנוּ
 הַבִּיטָהּ² וּרְאֵה אֶת־חֲרָפָתָנוּ

Zechor, Adonai, meh hayah lanu;
 habitah ure'eh et cherpatenu.

² Our heritage is turned over to foreigners,
 our homes to strangers.

נָחֲלָתָנוּ נְהַפְכָה 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 bechesef 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.

אַבֹּתֵינוּ חָטְאוּ וְאִיֵּם
 וְאַנַּחְנוּ⁷ עוֹנֵתֵיהֶם סָבָלְנוּ

Avoteinu chatu ve'einam
 va'anachnu avonoteihem savalnu.

⁸ Servants give us orders;
 there's no one to save us from their power.

עֲבָדִים מְשָׁלוּ 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 הַבִּיט.

³ A manuscript version would read אִין.

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 אַנַּחְנוּ.

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 כִּתְנִיזִר נִכְמָרוּ	Orenu ketanur nichmaru
מִפְנֵי זֶלַעְפוֹת רָעָב	mipnei zalafot ra'av.
נָשִׁים בְּצִיּוֹן עָנוּ	Nashim beTziyon inu,
בְּתֻלוֹת 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 בָּעֵץ כָּשָׁלוּ	une'arim ba'etz kashalu.
זִקְנִים מִשְׁעַר שָׁבָתוֹ	Zekenim misha'ar shavatu,
בַּחֲרוּרִים מִמְּנִינָתָם	bachurim min'ginatam.
שַׁבַּת מְשׁוֹשׁ לִבֵּנוּ	Shabat mesos libenu,
נִהְפָּךְ לְעֵל מֵחֻלֵּנוּ	nehpach le'evel mecholenu.
נִפְּלָה אֶתֶרֶת רֹשֵׁנוּ	Naflah ateret roshenu;
אֹיֵ-נָא לָנוּ כִּי חָטָאנוּ	oy nah lanu ki chatanu.
עַל-זֶה הָיָה דָּוֵה 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 אֱלֹהֵיךָ 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 קִצַּצְתָּ 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 אֱלֹהֵיךָ וְנָשׁוּבָה חֲדָשׁ יָמֵינוּ כְּקֶדֶם	Hashivenu, Adonai, elecha venashuva; chadesh yamenu kekedem.

¹ A manuscript version would read ונשוב. SPS Sample