

## FOREWORD

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*Shir HaShirim*—Song of Songs. It is the song that is exalted over all song—the song whose theme is the essence of song. It is the song of Shlomo HaMelech. It is the last song recorded in Scripture—the last of the great songs until the end of time.

And yet the nature of this book continues to elude us. R. Akiva said that on the day this book was given, the world changed for all eternity. He was wont to weep copiously as he read its words, for he correctly perceived the lofty messages it contains. Our Sages described this book, in relation to the all the other books of revelation, as the holy of holies—*kodesh ha-kodoshim*. Obviously the key to this level of revelation is allegory. Thus it has been said that, unlike all the other books of Scripture, this book cannot be understood at any other level. It is allegory in its purest form. Hence we acclaim the appearance of the master of allegory, the sainted Maggid of Dubno, in anticipation of a key to this book of all books.

As with his previous skillful achievements, our dear Reb Dovid has done the public an inestimable favor. Opening up the works of the Maggid—and this work specifically—has given our generation access to the wellsprings of our heritage. The life of our people is the Torah, and our Torah tradition is founded upon the words of the prophets and the teachers of Torah in each generation. The Maggid was among the greatest of these teachers. And so, with this new volume of Dubner Maggid commentaries, Reb Dovid has once again etched a place for himself in the chain of tradition.

In the unfolding of Jewish history, every generation has had its special role. And every generation has stood at the threshold of redemption. As this book goes to print, we have not yet merited to cross the threshold, but our gaze is yet upon it. This book is unique, in that it speaks directly to our relationship with our Redeemer, and hence to our relationship with all of history—past, present, and future. May Hashem shower His blessing on our generation, and may we be witness to the return of our promised glory. Assuredly, this return will come about through the learning and dissemination of Torah. May this work serve as a step forward in that process. Amen.

## TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

"The voice is the voice of Jacob ..." (Genesis 27:22).

"Their voice shall sing forth from the window ..." (Zephaniah 2:14).<sup>1</sup>

With heartfelt praise and thanks to the One Who chooses His people Israel with love, I present this English translation of the Dubner Maggid's *Kol Yeshorer—A Voice Shall Sing Forth*—a commentary on the Song of Songs. This is, *bli ayin hara*, my fourth volume of translations of the Maggid's commentaries, the first three having covered Lamentations, Esther, and Ruth. These commentaries are all part of the collection *Kol Yaakov—Voice of Jacob*—of Dubner Maggid commentaries on the Five Megillos. I am truly grateful to the Ribbono Shel Olam for granting me the opportunity and wherewithal to compile these works.

### *The Commentary*

I have noted previously in my prefaces that the Dubner Maggid was not only a purveyor of charming parables, but also an outstanding scholar and deep thinker. The Song of Songs is a difficult book. It is through superlative scholarship and depth of thought that the Maggid opens this book up for us.

All books of the Bible bear multiple meanings. Our tradition identifies four basic levels: plain meaning (*pshat*), allusions (*remez*), homiletical teachings (*drash*), and hidden wisdom (*sōd*). The Song of Songs is unique among Biblical books in that its plain meaning does not correspond at all to the literal meaning of the words. We could say that the level of *pshat* is subsumed in the level of *remez*: it is only through the teachings of our Sages that the plain meaning of the book emerges. On a literal level, the book is a tale of courtship. But this is not what the book is really about. Rather, as the Midrashim explain, the Song of Songs is an account of the special relationship between God and the Jewish People.

This relationship is a central theme in all the Maggid's works. It is thus natural that, in this commentary on the Song of Songs, the Maggid's brilliance comes forth with exceptional magnificence. This magnificence is all the more naturally manifested here given the allegorical nature of the book—which, as Rav Belsky notes in his foreword, puts the Maggid squarely in his element. Yet we must note that, just as the Maggid is not merely a man of parables, so, too, his commentary on Song of Songs does not deal merely with the simple level of the allegory. Rather, as in his other works, the Maggid operates primarily at the level of *drash*, building on Midrashim that convey the deeper meanings of the Biblical text. The Maggid, with his unique skill, brings out these deeper meanings with striking sharpness.

The relationship between God and the Jewish People is a *bris*—a covenant. The defining characteristic of a covenant is that it is eternal. Even though the relationship may undergo difficult periods, it remains destined to reach its ultimate fruition.

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<sup>1</sup> Here the Maggid's son borrowed an expression from a prophesy of calamity, and, transferring the expression to a new context, chose it as the title of this commentary.

The Maggid brings out God's side of the covenant with a moving allegory.<sup>2</sup> The Maggid tells a story of a man who went to a distant land to seek work. He acquired a position with a certain gentleman, and served in this position for a length of time. The gentleman grew very fond of him. Finally, the time came for the man to collect his wages and return home. The gentleman, out of his great love for this man, wished to make sure that the man would arrive home with all the money. He therefore made the man a special promise: if the man would lose the money on the way home, he would replace it. In no event would he leave the man empty-handed. Similarly, when God gave us the holy Land of Israel, He made us a special promise: if we sin and are expelled from the land, we are not doomed—God will make sure that the land is restored to us. God will never let His plan for us to come to naught.

In regard to the Jewish People's side of the covenant, we may turn to a classic Midrashic teaching: the Jewish People is loyal to God like a dove to its mate.<sup>3</sup> Throughout centuries of tribulations, the Jewish People has steadfastly maintained this loyalty.

This is the immutable love of which the Song of Song speaks. In his commentary, the Maggid brings out for us the many facets of this love, so that we can truly appreciate how profound it is.

### *The Translation*

In this translation, I have followed the same general approach as previously. My goal was to provide a full translation of the original Hebrew text into idiomatic English prose. Thus, this work is neither an abbreviated digest nor a strictly literal translation. A deliberate decision was made to leave intact the basic structure of the original Hebrew text, and to firmly avoid substantive deletions or additions. Headings and subheadings were added as an aid to the reader, along with citations to Biblical and Rabbinic sources. In addition, I have included explanatory notes, but, as before, I make no claim to comprehensive annotation.

The text contains many references to Biblical verses and Rabbinic statements, particularly Midrashim. The translation of these passages is my own. I was guided here by the classical commentaries and by extant English translations, especially for Biblical verses. In many cases where the original Hebrew text quotes just a fragment of a Biblical or Rabbinic passage, the English version includes the full passage for the benefit of the reader. In several cases where such a passage is quoted more than once in the same section of the commentary, the repeated quotation is omitted or shortened in the English translation. In quotations from *Midrash Rabbah*, the new Wagschal edition of *Midrash Rabbah* generally is followed. It should be noted that this edition of the Midrash uses a revised numbering system for *Shir HaShirim Rabbah*, and the citations here follow this system. Citations to the *Eitz Yosef* commentary on the Midrash are also drawn from this edition. In citations to *Yalkut Shimoni*, the form of citation is either I:xxx or II:xxx, where I and II refer to Part A (Torah) and Part B (Prophets and Writings) respectively, and xxx is the paragraph number. I have left the phrase *Knesses Yisrael* transliterated, since the parallel English phrase *Congregation of Israel* seemed too cumbersome for repeated use.

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<sup>2</sup> *Ohel Yaakov, Parashas Masei* (end).

<sup>3</sup> *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 1:63 on Song of Songs 1:15.

A Voice Shall Sing Forth  
Dubner Maggid's Commentary on the Song of Songs

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Citations to my translation of the Maggid's commentary on Lamentations, Esther, and Ruth refer to the following works:

Voice of Weepers: Commentary of the Dubner Maggid on the Book of Lamentations (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Feldheim Publishers, 2007)

Voice of Rejoicing and Salvation: Commentary of the Dubner Maggid on the Book of Esther (Feldheim Publishers, 2005)

Voice of the Dove: Commentary of the Dubner Maggid on the Book of Ruth (Feldheim Publishers, 2006)

These works are cited using, respectively, the following abbreviations: *VoW*, *VoR&S*, and *VoD*.