

Jewish Marriage Customs; the Shepherd's Inconvenient Visit; the Shulammite Changes Her Mind & He Leaves His Calling Card; Principles on Dating, SOS 5:2-5

Gower, Ralph. *The New Manners & Customs of Bible Times*. Rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 2005), 61-62:

Marriages were arranged, if possible, with members of one's own kin. Abraham sent a servant to find a bride for Isaac from his own people (Genesis 24:3-4), and Jacob was sent to the same place to find a wife (Genesis 28:2; 29:19). Samson's parents were upset because Samson had not chosen a wife from his own clan (Judges 14:3). Marriages sometimes took place outside the clan (Genesis 41:45; Ruth 1:4), and this usually happened for political reasons (1 Kings 11:1; 16:13). It was never approved, however, because people from other clans worshipped different deities and this affected the whole religious life of the people (1 Kings 11:4). Close marriages within the family were forbidden. The laws forbidding marriages between close relatives are set out in Leviticus 18:6-18).

1. Note that the Shepherd does not call the Shulammite "his wife" but rather "his darling." The word is רַעְיָה *ra'yah* and speaks of a "lover" but also "darling," which is more appropriate here.
2. "My dove" is a romantic term of endearment but "my undefiled" is a statement of fact. It is the feminine adjective טָמִיָּה *tamiyah* which means "undefiled and upright." When used to describe a woman it refers to her virtue and in this case the fact that the Shulammite is a virgin.
3. The Shepherd's appeal also includes a desire to get in out of the rain. The word "dew" is טַל *tal* and can mean dew but also a light rain or mist.

SOS 5:2 - [SW] "I was asleep but my soul was awake. A voice! My beloved was knocking on my door:

[SL] 'Open to me, my Jewess, my darling, my dove, my undefiled one! For my head is drenched with rain, my locks with the damp of the night.'"

4. At this point the Shulammite makes a mistake that benefits her in her standoff with Solomon. She rejects the Shepherd's appeal and becomes self-centered. When a woman rejects a man's advances it is because she is either disinterested or inconvenienced. For her it was the latter.

SOS 5:3 - [SW] "I have taken off my dress, how can I put it on again? I have washed my feet, how can I dirty them again?"

1. This is called whining. She could just as well have said, "This is a fine time for you to show up. I've gotten undressed, washed my feet for the night, and gone to bed. If I go out there with you I'll get drenched and then have to prepare for bed all over again. I can't be going and coming and coming and going in this kind of weather."
2. She immediately regrets her impulsive reaction that is an insult to her right man who made the effort to travel in the rain to see her. He leaves his calling card and then disappears into the night.

SOS 5:4 - [SW] "My beloved extended his hand through the opening, and my feelings were aroused for him."

1. The Shepherd hears her complaint and responds by reaching through the hole of the door and smearing perfume on the door's latch.

2. This act had a romantic effect on the Shulammitte but since he could not see her positive response, and being the complete gentleman, he respected her decision and left.
3. What he was not aware of is that the sight of his hand was enough to change the Shulammitte's mind. The word "feelings" is translated by the King James as "bowels." How crass! The Hebrew word here is מַעֲהָ *me'eh* and refers figuratively to the emotions, in this case romantic passions and desires.
4. This is indicated by the word for "aroused," the Qal perfect of the verb הָמָה *hamah* which means to groan, and in a romantic context is an impassioned sigh.

SOS 5:4 - [SW] "My beloved extended his hand through the opening of the door, and my passions and desires were moved and I sighed for him."

1. The Shepherd did not barge into her quarters. He knocked on the door and asked her to open it. She responded with a laundry list of reasons why his timing was bad and all the things she would have to do to meet him outside.
2. He is standing in the rain while she complains that she would have to wash her feet again. The Shepherd responds by putting his hand through the opening in the door and smearing myrrh on the latch, then does the gentlemanly thing and departs.
3. A tradition in the ancient world provides the explanation for smearing myrrh on the door latch and its history is explained by:

Pope, Marvin H. *Song of Songs*. (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1977), 522-23:

From Lucretius \lū-krē'-shē-as\ [1st century BC Roman poet] (*De rerum natura* [From the Nature of Things] IV 1173): a lover shut out weeps, piles flowers at the threshold, and smears unguent on the doorposts:

The tearful lover, shut out, oft clothes
With flowers and wreaths the threshold, and anoints
The door jambs with marjoram [any of various fragrant and aromatic Old World mints often used as seasoning].

Evidence has been adduced from Mesopotamia for pouring precious, perfumed oil on thresholds, doors, and door bolts, a striking parallel to the classical *paraclausithyron* [παράκλαυσιθύρον, *paraklausithuron*: a lover's complaint sung at his mistress's door, (Liddell & Scott, 1313)], or a song of the locked-out lover, a motif which has been treated in detail by Frank O. Copley [Exclusus Amator: A Study in Latin Love Poetry], 1956. The excluded lover pleads to be let in, begs, cajoles, complains, threatens, falls asleep outside the door, or he departs leaving his garland, or having scribbled some verses on the door, or having smeared it with unguents. (p. 522)

Parallels between common features of the *paraclausithyron* and Canticles [Song of Solomon] 5:1-5 may be briefly noted. The pouring of perfumed oils on the thresholds, doors, and bolts in ancient Mesopotamia shows that the practice long antedated the Greek and Roman usage and that both the myrrh-dripping door bolt of the Canticle [SOS] and the unguent-smeared door of the classical *paraclausithyron* had ancient Near Eastern antecedents and prototypes. (pp. 522-23)

4. The Shepherd did not cavort, cajole, and mewl and camp outside the door. He left his calling card which involved the custom of smearing the door latch with perfume, and in his case, liquid myrrh.
5. Hearing his voice—a sign of aural response to her right man—and seeing his hand—a sign of visual response to her right man—causes the Shulammitte to experience a rush of passions and desires for her right man.

6. But a complete gentleman never forces himself on a woman. There is a point at which aggressiveness must recognize the volition of the woman and leave her alone.
7. A young man may approach a young lady and ask her for the pleasure of her company and be refused. He even may try at another time and be refused once again. This is a sign that she is not interested in dating him but it does not necessarily indicate a dislike for him.
8. One of the torturous ideas that boys have is that a no to a request for a date indicates personal dislike. This is not usually the case but a self-centered person often reaches this conclusion.
9. A gentleman with doctrine approaches a woman for a date with several principles in mind: (1) she has a right under her free will to refuse my request, (2) she may not prefer my type but this does not mean she rejects me as a person, (3) we each have a right person, (4) if by chance we are right for each other we will eventually get together, (5) if we are not then it is best that we both move on, and (6) the lack of attractiveness may be a clue if not an indicator of eventual incompatibility.
10. A woman with no doctrine responds to any man that pays her some attention thus sends the wrong signals to them all, such as Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind*. Extremely self-centered, Scarlett was used to having her way and thus very strong-willed. Her tragic flaw was a lust to want and then pursue what she could not have.
11. However, both the Shepherd and the Shulammitte were not of this ilk. He was the complete gentleman and she the perfect lady. He loved her dearly and wanted only to be with her while she adored him and responded to his voice and presence.
12. However, although the Shepherd had made a great effort to visit her, enduring a long trip in misty rain, his arrival was not convenient for the Shulammitte.
13. She was correct by insisting that the timing of his arrival was inconvenient for her to receive him and it was appropriate for him to be considerate of her wishes and retire.
14. Nevertheless, her deeply held love for the Shulammitte overwhelms her as she belatedly disregards the inconvenience and rushes to the door to let him in only to find that he is gone.
15. Notice that when the Shulammitte did not immediately respond to the Shepherd he had the good manners to leave her alone and not invade her privacy.
16. But no matter how often she fails to respond to Solomon he keeps up his incessant attempts to woo her with smarmy pick-up lines.
17. She never has second thoughts about rejecting the king of Israel but in the incident that she now recalls she reveals how she did change her mind about going to the door that evening in hopes of catching the Shepherd.

SOS 5:5 – [NASB] [SW] “I arose to open to my beloved; and my hands dripped with myrrh, and my fingers with liquid myrrh, on the handles of the bolt.”