*Shiur Qoma*h Speculations, and Rabbinic Interpretations of

the Body of God in *Song of Songs*: A Re-examinationמה דעתך על האפשרויות הבאות:

The Body of God and the *Song of Songs* *in Shiur Qoma* and Rabbinic Literature

*Shiur Qoma* Speculationsand Rabbinic Interpretations of the Body of God in *Song of Songs*

*Shiur Qoma* Speculationsand Rabbinic Interpretations of the Body of the Beloved

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# Introduction

The dating of the doctrine known as *Shiur Qoma* is the subject of debate among scholars. At the center of this work are a mystic’s visions of God’s holy majesty taking on flesh and blood and pictured as a man of enormous proportions that are explicitly detailed. At its climax, when the description reaches the crown on His head, verses from Song 5:1–16, describing the beloved are cited. The presence of these verses integrated into the vision of the divine glory led several scholars to argue that *Shiur Qoma* originated as a Tannaic midrash on the verses of the Song of Songs. According to them, it was very ancient, composed as early as the 2nd century CE. Various objections arose to this claim and it is still the subject of much dispute. The question of the dating of *Shiur Qoma* relates to broader questions about the existence of a corporeal conception of divinity in ancient Jewish culture in general and particularly in early Jewish mysticism. The question of the antiquity of such a conception also relates to questions of the relationship of the Jewish mystical tradition to Christianity and the degree and direction of influence between the two traditions. In this article, I will re-examine the question of the antiquity of *Shiur Qoma* by comparing the physical description of the beloved in Tannaic midrashim on *Song of Songs*[[1]](#footnote-1) with interpretations of the same verses found in later midrash.

# Descriptions of the Beloved’s Body in *Song of Songs*

*Song of Songs* describes the longing of two lovers for one another, under circumstances where they meet but are pulled asunder over and over. In three places, the male lover lists the virtues of the maiden, describing her beautiful body in detail.[[2]](#footnote-2) The maiden also describes her handsome beloved to the daughters of Jerusalem using rich imagery and metaphor:

My beloved is clear-skinned and ruddy, distinguished among ten thousand. His head is finest gold, his locks are curled, and as black as a raven. His eyes are like doves by watercourses, bathing in milk, and fitly set. His cheeks are like beds of spices, producing sweet perfumes; his lips are lilies, breathing the finest myrrh. His hands are as rods of gold, studded with topaz pink; his body is polished ivory, inlaid with sapphires. His legs are like marble pillars, set on bases of fine gold; his form is like Lebanon, excellent as the cedars. His mouth is delicious, and all of him is delightful. Such is my beloved, and such is my lover, O maidens of Jerusalem.[[3]](#footnote-3)

This is the only detailed description of the male beloved in *Song of Songs*. It evokes his lover gazing at him from his head to his legs, pausing over particular body parts. The imagery relating to the beloved’s head and facial features uses analogies to flora and fauna, attributing delicacy and vitality to these features. The figurative language used to describe his body, however, uses hard substances like metals, precious stones, and wood, expressing the beloved’s power and strength. These details about the beloved’s body are framed by opening and closing verses outlining the beloved’s beauty which is not limited to the particulars but evident in the general impression of his stature and attractiveness.

This focus on physical appearance is unusual in the Bible.[[4]](#footnote-4) Its role is to praise the handsome beloved, but even more so to testify to the lovers’ intimate connection, which allows them to gaze at one another and linger over every feature. This intimacy is revealed in the maiden’s concluding words ‘His mouth is delicious, and all of him is delightful.’

# Shiur Qoma and Song of Songs

Several scholars have pointed to the connection between the detailed description of the beloved in *Song of Songs* and the mystical work known as *Shiur Qoma* (literally, ‘The Measurement of the [Divine] Body’). *Shiur Qoma* is written in Hebrew and the date of its composition and redaction is unknown. The work records a mystic’s visions of God described anthropomorphically as a man of enormous size. The text contains detailed information about the divine body, the measurements of His limbs, and their secret names.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The relationship between *Shiur Qoma* and *Song of Songs* is founded on the allegorical understanding of the verses, where the groom is identified as God and whose bride is Israel. According to the allegorical reading, the description of the beloved’s body in Song 5:10-16 refers to God Himself. This understanding finds expression in *Shiur Qoma* where the verses from *Song of Songs* are cited as part of the description of the divine dimensions.

The angel, the interior minister, whose name is Metatron said to me… Rabbi Yishmael says: What are? the measurements of the body of the Holy One, blessed be He, who lives eternally forever – may His name be blessed and his appellation exalted. The soles of his feet fill the entire world, as it is said ‘the heavens are my throne and the earth my footstool’ (Isa 61:1). The height of his foot is three thousand ten-thousands parasangs, Parmassyah is its name. From his feet to his ankles, thousand ten-thousands and five hundred parasangs…of the right [side]… of left [side]…from his ankles to his knees, nineteen thousand ten-thousands parasangs, Kannangi is its name. His calves… from his knees to his thighs twelve thousand ten-thousands parasangs. His right knee… and of the left…right thigh…and left… From his thighs to his neck, twenty-four thousand ten-thousands parasangs. And the hips of his hips… and on his heart – seventy names…blessed and praised be the name of His glorious kingdom for all eternity. His neck is thirteen thousand ten-thousands parasangs, the length of his neck… his beard… the appearance of the face, and the appearance of the jaws in the image of spirit and the form of soul. And no creature can conceive His torso…the width of His forehead…and on His forehead, seventy letters are written….[[6]](#footnote-6)

Like in *Song of Songs*, the description here is detailed and lists body parts and physiognomic features. However, in Shiur Qoma they begin at the bottom and proceed upwards, in ascending order of status. At the highest point of the description, the verses from *Song of Songs* are cited:

[…] The crown on His head is five hundred thousand by five hundred thousand, Israel is its name. And the precious stone between its horns has Israel my people – Israel my people engraved upon it.

‘My beloved is clear-skinned and ruddy, distinguished among ten thousand. His head is finest gold, …His eyes are like doves by watercourses, etc.’ (Song 5:10-11)

{Addition in Genizah fragment Oxford ms Hebr. C. 65:

‘…bathing in milk, and fitly set. His cheeks are like beds of spices, producing …breathing the finest myrrh. … rods of gold, studded with topaz pink; his body is polished ivory, inlaid with sapphires. … bases of fine gold; his form is like Lebanon, excellent as the cedars. His mouth is delicious, and all of him is delightful. Such is my beloved, and such is…’ (Song 5:12-16)}

[…] Rabbi Ishmael said: when I said this matter before Rabbi Akiva, he said to me: Anyone who knows this measure of his creator and the praise of the Holy One, blessed be He is assured in this world and the world to come. He will live long in this world and live long and it will be good for him in the life of the world to come. He prospers in this world and prospers in the world to come.[[7]](#footnote-7)

The verses from *Song of Songs* guide the mystic’s eye, this time from top to bottom. The conception that God has limbs like a human, with specific proportions and mystical names is unique to *Shiur Qoma* among the works of the *Heikhalot* and *Merkava* literature.[[8]](#footnote-8) According to Gershom Scholem, these descriptions served to emphasize the perfect harmony of divine proportions and express His sublime beauty: ‘Your eyes will see the king in his beauty’ (Isa 33:17).[[9]](#footnote-9) Farber-Ginat has pointed out that these descriptions highlight God’s aesthetic beauty and perfection of form, matching the statement in *Heikhalot Zutarti* 25-26: ‘As it were, He is like us and He is more beautiful than anyone.’[[10]](#footnote-10) Ithamar Gruenwald argues that the measurements aim to convey the notion of ideal proportions, apparently shared by God and man alike.[[11]](#footnote-11) The integration of verses from *Song of Songs* that relate to the physical beauty and express the harmony of the different parts of the beloved’s body fits this idea.

According to Halbertal, the gaze and the visual imagery found in mystical literature express a type of spiritual intimacy that is the prerogative of celestial beings. He claims that the reason for the limitations on studying the divine chariot found in rabbinic literature is not fear of error but rather hesitation to reveal the divine form. Not everyone is worthy of glimpsing the king and all the more so gazing upon His face. The Sages believed that an extended look that became pleasurable or satisfying would be a defilement and desecration. Halbertal points out that the attitude found in the *Heikhalot* literature undermines the boundaries of the mystery set by the Sages. The mystical approach found in *Heikhalot* is dominated by the drive to perceive God. That is the purpose of the heavenly journey that climaxes when God appears before the mystic in all His glory. In this way, *Merkava* literature undoes the mystery of the intimate gaze by revealing it and in doing so undermines the mystery itself.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Several scholars have found external evidence for the connection between *Song of Songs* and esoteric literature in the writings of Origen, a church father who lived in the third century CE Caesarea.[[13]](#footnote-13) He wrote a ten-volume commentary on *Song of Songs* and also delivered public sermons/homilies in Caesarea that were collected by his students.[[14]](#footnote-14) Origen had contact with Jewish sages, and his writings are fundamental texts of early Christian mysticism. In the introduction to his commentary on *Song of Songs* he writes:

It is said that with the custom of the Jews is that no one who has not reached full maturity is permitted to hold this book [*Song of Songs*] in his hands. And not only this, but although their rabbis and teachers are wont to teach all the scriptures and their oral traditions [*Mishnayot*] to the young boys, they defer to the last the following texts: The beginnings of Genesis, where the creation of the world is described; the beginning of the prophecy of Ezekiel, where the doctrine of the angels is expounded; and the end [of the same book] which contains the building of the Temple; and this book of the *Song of Songs*.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Origen lists *Song of Songs* along with three other esoteric biblical passages: the description of Creation, the account of the chariot, and the description of the future Temple.[[16]](#footnote-16)

In his book, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkaba Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition,* Gershom Scholem writes that Origen’s inclusion of *Song of Songs* in this list testifies that he was aware of the existence of an esoteric reading of *Song of Songs*, that contained sublime mysteries regarding God and His appearance. According to Scholem, Origen’s statement and *Shiur Qoma* explain one another. He concludes that this connection can aid in dating *Shiur Qoma* as early as the late second or early third centuries CE. Based on this claim Scholem observes that the corporeal conception of God was an early element of Jewish mysticism later adopted by Christian Gnostic circles rather than the other way around.[[17]](#footnote-17)

The Talmudic scholar Saul Lieberman wrote an appendix to Gershom Scholem’s book wherein he adds evidence to the claim that there was an early mystical interpretation of *Song of Songs* that was connected to *Shiur Qoma*. Lieberman points out Tannaic sources that interpret *Song of Songs* esoterically. He claims that the Tannaim understood *Song of Songs* as a description of the revelation of God as He appeared in His chariot at the Red Sea and Mount Sinai. The Song was both a description of that historical moment of revelation and given to them on the same occasion. *Song of Songs* praises the image of God and explains the chariot. According to Lieberman, Rabbi Akiva’s statement that *Song of Songs* is ‘holy of holies’ is based on this interpretation and it is possible that God Himself chanted the Song of Songs when it was given at Sinai.[[18]](#footnote-18) Lieberman writes:

I now accept Scholem’s claim that the Mishnah of *Shiur Qoma* is an early midrash on *Song of Songs* chapter 5:10-16 that was part of an ancient midrash on *Song of Songs*. *Shiur Qoma* is a work of praise and adoration of the Holy One, blessed be He in a form that is beyond us…

The midrash on *Song of Songs* is the work of the chariot which is *Shiur Qoma*.[[19]](#footnote-19)

# The Responses to Scholem and Lieberman’s Approach

Scholem and Lieberman’s opinion regarding the early date of *Shiur Qoma* and its relationship to *Song of Songs* inspired a variety of responses. Some scholars of Jewish mysticism questioned the connection to the mystical interpretation of *Song of Songs*. According to Arthur Green, the identification of *Shiur Qoma* and Midrash Shir ha-Shirim is overstated. *Song of Songs* is a setting in which *Shiur Qoma* found a home. This is perhaps as close as we can come to an appropriate formulation of the still-mysterious relationship between the two in the early centuries of the Common Era.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Assi Farber-Ginat has written that while there is a connection between the *Shiur Qoma* literature, the mystical practice of *aliya* (literally ‘ascent’), and the interpretation of *Song of Songs*, it is not necessary to assume that the source of these is a mystical interpretation of the image of the beloved in *Song of Songs*.[[21]](#footnote-21) As to the dating, Joseph Dan has argued contra Scholem that Origen does not help establish *Shiur Qoma*’s date of composition. Origen does relate to mystical matters but does not give any indication of their nature. Moreover, Origen’s commentary on *Song of Songs* contains no indications of familiarity with *Shiur Qoma*. For these reasons, the question raised by Scholem, whether the Jewish mystical interpretation of *Song of Songs* predated Origen, remains unanswered. Dan believes that there is great significance to the fact that *Song of Songs* is a foundational text of both Jewish and Christian mysticism, but there remain great differences between how the mystics of the two religions relate to this biblical book.[[22]](#footnote-22)

Martin Cohen, the editor of the latest scholarly edition, has dated the text’s redaction to Geonic Babylonia. He argues that there are very few references to the Song of Songs in *Shiur Qoma*, and the passage we are discussing, in his opinion, serves as a liturgical frame for the recitation of the measurements.[[23]](#footnote-23)

A different criticism has come from various midrash scholars, many of them Lieberman’s students. They have argued that Lieberman’s interpretation of the Tannaic sources in support of his claim does not hold up. Boyarin reassesses his teacher’s argument in a section of his article entitled ‘Rabbi Akiva’s midrash on *Song of Songs* – is it Really *Shiur Qomah*?’ Boyarin claims that Lieberman did not prove that *Shiur Qoma* is related in any particular way to Rabbi Akiva and his circles; there is no need to impose esoteric meanings upon the midrashim Rabbi Akiva cites. The Tannaim, as is their way, use verses from *Song of Songs* as a hermeneutic key to interpreting difficult verses in the Torah. Alongside his criticism, Boyarin does not reject the possibility that there existed an esoteric interpretation of *Song of Songs* in the Tannaic period and that it may have been related to *Shiur Qoma*.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Marc Hirshman argues that Rabbi Akiva’s declaration that *Song of Songs* is the holy of holies is meant to emphasize the religious importance of love and does not necessarily reflect a mystical reading. Hirshman points out that the fact that Origen mentions *Song of Songs* in the four texts enumerated is not necessarily because of its esoteric status, but rather out of concern that it encourages carnal desires, which Origen in fact mentions in the introduction to his commentary. At the same time, Origen’s commentary on *Song of Songs* presents the biblical book as a mystical journey and this can support Scholem and Lieberman’s thesis that a mystical interpretation of *Song of Songs* existed at that time.[[25]](#footnote-25)

Alon Goshen-Gottstein opposes Lieberman’s claim that the Tannaim had consistent interpretations regarding the allegorical understanding of *Song of Songs*. That is why one cannot assume that they interpreted Song 5:10-16 as a description of the revelations at the Red Sea or Mount Sinai. Under the circumstances, Goshen-Gottstein believes that there is no basis for the claim that the Sages had a systematic mystical interpretation of *Song of Songs*, i.e., *Shiur Qoma*.[[26]](#footnote-26)

Below, we will attempt to shed new light on the contested topic of whether a corporeal conception of God was an early element in Jewish mysticism by comparing the Tannaic interpretations of body descriptions of the beloved with those that appear in Amoraic literature. Even though these interpretations are allegorical, it is possible to find significant differences between the sources.

# Rabbinic Exegesis of the Descriptions of the Body of the Beloved

## His head is the finest gold; his locks are curled, black as a raven (Song 5:10-16).

We will begin with the analysis of the Tannaic interpretation of Song 5:10-16 that appears in the *Sifrei Devarim*. The *Sifrei* is a halakhic midrash on Deuteronomy; it contains Tannaic interpretations/sayings from the first centuries CE and was redacted circa the middle of the third century CE.[[27]](#footnote-27) The following midrash interprets the verse ‘With him were myriads of holy ones’ (Deut 33:2) that deals with the appearance of God when He revealed Himself to Israel at the Red Sea, for the first time.[[28]](#footnote-28)

And when He revealed Himself at the Sea, they [Israel] immediately recognized Him, as it is said, ‘This is my God and I will glorify Him; the God of my father, and I will exalt Him’ (Exod 15:2). Similarly, the nations of the world would ask Israel, ‘How is your beloved better than another’ (Song 5:9), that you are killed for His sake, as it is said, ‘Therefore do maidens (‘alamot\*) [= unto death do they] love you’ (Song 1:3)? And it also says, ‘It is for Your sake that we are slain all day long’ (Ps 44:23). You are all beautiful, you are all heroic. Come and mingle with us,’. And Israel replied, ‘Let us tell you only a part of His praise and you will recognize Him: ‘My beloved is clear-skinned and ruddy... His head is finest gold... His eyes are like doves by watercourses... His cheeks are like beds of spices... His hands are as rods of gold... His legs are like marble pillars... His mouth is delicious, and all of him is delightful’ (Song 5:10-16).’ When the nations of the world heard of the beauty and the praise of the Holy One, blessed be He, they said to Israel, ‘‘Let us come with you, as it is said, ‘Wither has your beloved gone, O fairest of women? Whither hath thy beloved turned? Let us seek him with you’ (Song 6:1).’ What does Israel reply? That they [the nations] have no part of Him: ‘I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine; He browses among the lilies’ (Song 6:3)[[29]](#footnote-29)

The midrash describes a dialogue between the nations of the world and Israel. The nations express their wonder at Israel’s great love for God and ask to join them. Israel’s response is to list God's praises, using the verses from Song 5:10-16. The descriptions of the divine body in this Tannaic midrash express an intimacy with God that no other nation can achieve. Yet the midrash connects this experience with martyrdom: ‘“How is your beloved better than another” (Song 5:9), that you are killed for His sake, as it is said, “Therefore do maidens (‘alamot\*) [= unto death do they] love you” (Song 1:3)? And it also says, “It is for Your sake that we are slain all day long”’ (Ps 44:23).[[30]](#footnote-30) In parallel versions of the text in the *Mekhiltot*, this midrash is attributed to Rabbi Akiva who is associated with martyrdom.[[31]](#footnote-31)

In the dialogue between Israel and the nations, the praise of God has overtones of revealing a secret – ‘Let us tell you only a part of His praise.’ Israel announces in advance that they will reveal only part of His virtues. They establish a clear hierarchy of the exposure of knowledge. Israel and God have the intimate familiarity of lovers, while the nations of the world will always be excluded.[[32]](#footnote-32)

The verses quoted by the *Sifrei* that detail the beauty and splendor of the beloved are descriptions of God Himself. The ability to render this depiction depends upon a visual experience of revelation at the Red Sea where Israel envisioned the Almighty in His full beauty. The opening line of the midrash, ‘And when He revealed Himself at the Sea, they [Israel] immediately recognized Him, as it is said, “This is my God and I will glorify Him; the God of my father, and I will exalt Him”’ (Exod. 15:2) emphasizes the power of this experience. The words ‘This is my God and I will glorify Him’ were understood by the rabbis as an *acclamatio*, a public cry of praise, familiar to them from Roman culture. Scholars have shown the Jews learned the *acclamatio* formulas and their physical gestures from the non-Jewish society around them.[[33]](#footnote-33) One such gesture involved pointing toward the object of praise and crying, ‘This is he.’ According to the *Sifrei*, the divine revelation at the Red Sea was so tangible that it was possible to point at God and declare ‘This is my God’ and to describe His physical appearance in detail, as appears in *Song of Songs*.[[34]](#footnote-34)

In ‘Mishnat Shir ha-Shirim,’ Lieberman cites the text from the *Sifrei* as evidence of the existence of an esoteric interpretation of *Song of Songs* in the Tannaic period. He points out that the midrash conceals more than it reveals. The text quotes just the beginnings of the verses and does not reveal the essence of Israel’s praise of God. Lieberman claims: ‘These verses incorporated within them The Praises, in capital letters. In practice, encoded within this midrash was the ancient midrash of *Shiur Qomah*, which involved praise and extolling of the Holy One blessed be He in a manner whose nature is too wondrous for us.’[[35]](#footnote-35) According to Lieberman, this text was concealed not only from non-Jews but also from parts of the Jewish community. This reflects the esoteric nature of *Shiur Qoma* which was always meant to be reserved for an elite minority.

We will now compare the Tannaic midrash’s description of the beloved’s body with that which appears in the Amoraic *Song of Songs* *Rabbah*. *Song of Songs* *Rabbah* is the largest and earliest rabbinic work we have on *Song of Songs*. It contains a collection of sayings on every verse of *Song of Songs*, following the order of the verses. The material reflects the interpretations of Tannaim and Amoraim from the first through fifth century CE. *Song of Songs* *Rabbah* was compiled in the Land of Israel circa the sixth or the beginning of the seventh century.[[36]](#footnote-36)

The vast majority of *Song of Songs* *Rabbah* is comprised of allegorical exegesis of *Song of Songs*, according to which the verses do not relate to the human love between a man and a woman but to the love between God and Israel. The allegorical interpretation is not one-dimensional and contains a rich and wide range of exegetical approaches as we will see below.[[37]](#footnote-37) The following passage is a midrash on the same verses discussed above. It interprets them as an allegory about the Torah and the scholars who study it.

His head is as the most fine gold (Song 5:11). His head is the Torah, as it says, ‘The Lord made me as the beginning of His way’ (Prov 8:22).

Most fine gold: this refers to the words of the Torah, of which it says, ‘More to be desired are they than gold, than much fine gold’ (Ps 19:11).

R. Hunia said in the name of Resh Lakish: The Torah preceded the creation of the world by two thousand years. How do we know? Because it says, ‘Then I was by Him as a nursling; and I was daily (lit. ‘day, day’) all delight’ (Ps 19:30); and the day of the Almighty is a thousand years, as it says, ‘For a thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past’ (Ps 90:4).

His locks are curled. This refers to the ruled lines [in the scroll]. And black as a raven: this refers to the letters…

With whom are they preserved? Black as a raven (‘oreb): with one who is at them early and late (ma'arib)...

R. Judah applied the verse to the students of the Torah. Locks black like a raven: these are the scholars; they look repulsive and black in this world, but in the time to come, ‘The appearance of them will be like torches, they [will] run to and fro like the lightnings’ (Nah. 2:5)…

R. Simeon b. Lakish said: The scroll which God gave to Moses was of white fire and its writing of black fire. It was itself fire and it was hewn out of fire and completely formed of fire and given in fire, as it says, ‘At His right hand was a fiery law unto them’ (Deut. 33:2).[[38]](#footnote-38)

The midrash interprets the image of the beloved as a description of the Torah. ‘Head’ (*rosh*) in the verse is read as *reishit* (first, beginning), identifying the Torah as existing before Creation and a source of God’s delight. ‘Most find gold’[[39]](#footnote-39) represents the value of the Torah that is more desirable than gold (Ps 19:11). The beloved’s black locks represent the black letters of the Torah written on parchment. They are ‘curled’ to represent how that parchment is pricked or ruled with straight lines (*sirgul*).[[40]](#footnote-40)

The midrash then presents a different allegorical interpretation, in which the descriptions of the beloved represent the rabbis that are engaged in the study of the Torah. The contrasting colors of gold and black symbolize the practice of studying during both the day and the night. Using the same allegorical/ hermeneutical key, Rabbi Yehuda suggests a different reading, with the black representing the state of the Sages in their impoverished present and the gold the reward they will receive in the future when they will shine like burning torches.

This midrash is a good example of the change in the way *Song of Songs* was interpreted between the Tannaic and Amoraic periods. Both use allegory, but in Amoraic midrash, the allegory is not a representation of God Himself but of the Torah or scholars of Torah who study it.

Stern argues that this shift was deliberate. The Sages consciously changed the corporeal descriptions of God to refer to the physical features of the Torah or to those of its students to discourage engagement with the divine dimensions. In this way, they tried to prevent the public from engaging with the esoteric meaning of *Song of Songs*. Stern suggests that the two sets of interpretations, the exoteric and the esoteric, may have existed simultaneously and should be seen as two different steps on a ladder of signification, with engagement in esoterics limited to an elite group.[[41]](#footnote-41)

It should be noted that these midrashic texts do not appear to be anti-esoteric. The Torah becomes a physical representation of God and thus a way by which any person can make contact with the transcendent. Torah study is not limited to a small, select group but is accessible to all.

The second allegorical interpretation goes even further, suggesting the rabbis themselves are a screen for the Torah and hence represent God Himself. The verse ‘The appearance of them will be like torches, they [will] run to and fro like the lightnings’ (Nah 2:5) recalls descriptions of angels in the *Heikhalot* literature. In *Song of Songs* *Rabba*, the scholars of Torah will look like angels in the eschatological future.

Another thing worth noting is that the passage begins with Reish Laqish’s mythic description of the Torah as a spiritual entity that existed before Creation and served as God’s delight. It concludes with his depiction of a Torah scroll as black fire written on white fire, like the Torah given at Sinai that was hewn out of fire and formed of fire and given in fire. Reish Laquish’s depictions of the Torah have mystical overtones, yet they are only about the Torah rather than God.

Shraga Bar-On has argued that the claim that the Torah is made of fire is equivalent to saying that it is derived from the divine body that is itself made of fire; God and the Torah become one. The study of Torah is thus the study of God and replaces unmediated encounter with the divine. Mysticism, within this conception, is less about direct contact with God and His angels; the Torah becomes the medium by which the Sages partake in mystical experiences and connect with the transcendent.[[42]](#footnote-42)

## His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me (Song 2:6)

In *Song of Songs* 2:4-6 the maiden describes an intimate moment she had with her beloved:

He brought me to the banqueting house, and his intention toward me was love. Sustain me with raisins, refresh me with apples, for I am faint with love. His left hand is under my head and his right hand embraces me

The last verse expresses the fulfillment of the maiden’s desires, with the two lovers embracing one another. The beloved is represented as physically embracing her in his arms.

*Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmael*, a Tannaic midrash to Exodus that was redacted in the third century CE, interprets this verse in the context of the revelation at Sinai:

‘And when the people saw it they trembled.’ ‘Trembling’ everywhere means only reeling to and fro, as it is said: ‘The earth reeleth to and fro…’ (Isa 24:20).

‘And stood afar off.’ Beyond twelve miles. This tells that the Israelites were startled and moved backward twelve miles and then again, returning, moved forward twelve miles – twenty-four miles at each commandment, thus covering two hundred and forty miles on that day. Then God said to the ministering angles: Go down and assist your brothers, as it is said: ‘The angels of Zebaot lead, they lead’ (Ps 68:13) – they lead them when going, they lead them when returning. And not only the ministering angles assisted Israel, but the Holy One, blessed be He, Himself also, as it is said ‘His left hand is under my head and His right hand embraces me’ (Song 2:6).[[43]](#footnote-43)

The midrash addresses Israel’s ambivalence at Sinai, their attraction and hesitation at the prospect of God’s revelation and hearing His voice. The midrash derives from the word *va-yanu‘u,* ‘trembled,’ that the children of Israel moved back and forth at every divine utterance. This idea is highlighted by adding the calculation of the total distance they traveled that day. God responds by sending His ministering angels, telling them ‘Go down and assist your brothers,’ referring to Israel as the brothers of the angels. Ultimately, God did not rely only on His delegates and engaged with Israel Himself,[[44]](#footnote-44) as described in *Song of Songs*: ‘His left hand is under my head and His right hand embraces me’ (Song 2:6). The physical embrace of God who encircles Israel at Sinai, at the giving of the Torah, expresses his love. Sinai is the climax of the relationship, in which the two sides commit and make a binding covenant.[[45]](#footnote-45) The verses from *Song of Songs* present this moment as physical intimacy and kinship between two lovers.

Let us compare *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmael*’s allegorical reading with the reading of the same verses according to *Song of Songs* *Rabba*:

His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me: this refers to the first tablets. And his right hand embraces me: this refers to the second tablets.

Another explanation: His left hand is under my head: this refers to the fringes. And his right hand embraces me: this refers to the phylacteries.

Another explanation: His left hand is under my head: this refers to the recital of the shema. And his right hand embraces me: this refers to the [amida] prayer.

Another explanation: His left hand is under my head: this refers to the sukkah. And his right hand embraces me: this refers to the lulav.

Another explanation: His left hand is under my head: this refers to the seven clouds of glory that surrounded Israel in the desert. And his right hand embraces me: this refers to the cloud of the divine presence in the time to come, as it says, ‘The sun shall be no more thy light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee’ (Isa 60:19). What then shall give light to see? ‘The Lord shall be thine everlasting light’ (ibid. 20).

Another explanation: His left hand is under my head: this refers to the mezuzah; for R. Simeon b. Yochai taught: ‘And you shall write them upon the door-posts of your house [beitecha]’ (Deut 6:9): that is, of thy coming [beatcha] into your house from the street.

R. Johanan said: It is written: ‘And you shall set the table without the veil and the candlestick... toward the south’ (Ex 26:35). Is not this the natural way? Does not one put the lamp on the left so that it shall not hinder the right hand? Does not one put the left hand under the head and embrace with the right? R. Aha said: R. Johanan derives the rule from this verse: ‘To love the Lord your God... and to cleave to Him’ (Deut 11: 22). How is cleaving effected? With: his left hand is under my head.[[46]](#footnote-46)

The Amoraic midrash interprets the beloved’s arms with a string of varied allegories, but in contrast to the Tannaic source above, none of them involve a physical description of God. The midrash emphasized the fact that one needs both arms to perform certain actions. The midrash therefore cites various pairs that complete one another or are connected in some other way. Some of them relate to practical mitzvot: Ritual fringes (*tsitsit*) and phylacteries (tefilin), the recital of the *shema* and the *amida*, and *sukka* and *lulav*. Other pairs relate to historical events: the first and second tablets at Sinai, the clouds of glory and the cloud of the divine presence that accompanied Israel in the desert, and the construction of the Tabernacle in which the menorah and the shewbread table were placed.[[47]](#footnote-47)

The pair that stands out in this list and is also closest to the description of God in the *Mekhilta* is that of the left hand representing seven clouds of glory and the right hand the cloud of the divine presence. However, this similarity actually accentuates the difference, since the cloud of the divine presence refers to the eschatological future. Isaiah 60:19 states that Israel will then have no need for the light of the sun during the day or the light of the moon at night since God will accompany them Himself.

The interpretation by the Amora Rabbi Aha that concludes the series expresses the mutuality of the love between God and His people. God revealed His love in a variety of historical events where He embraced them with, so to speak, His right and left hands with the tablets, the clouds of glory, and the Tabernacle and its contents. A person who wishes to cleave/adhere? to God must act similarly – he must surround himself every day with practical mitzvot. This is the reason the list begins with the first and second tablets, representing the Torah that contains the mitzvot that will be mentioned afterward.

The comparison between the interpretations of the descriptions of the body of the beloved in the Tannaic midrash and those in the Amoraic sayings in *Song of Songs* *Rabbah* brings out the significant differences between them. Both interpret the verses allegorically but in the Tannaic source, the descriptions of the body of the beloved are an allegory for the body of God while in the Amoraic texts they relate to other topics.[[48]](#footnote-48) The pair at the beginning of the list in *Song of Songs* *Rabbah* is a particularly good example of this difference. Both sources relate to the Sinai revelation but the Mekhilta has God surrounding and embracing Israel in His arms while *Song of Songs* *Rabba* focuses on the tablets God gave Israel.[[49]](#footnote-49) Even after Moses broke the first tablets, God’s love for Israel remained firm as expressed by His giving the second tablets.

## Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm (Song 8:6).

Another example of the phenomenon we have found relates to the verse in Song 8:6: ‘Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm.’ The maiden uses the metaphor of a seal, a talisman tied on a string and worn around her neck or right arm finger. She implores her beloved that she should remain close to his heart or bound to his arm.

This verse is cited in the *Tosefta* as an example of a verse that contains ‘mixed utterances,’ i.e., the words in the verse are divided and said by different speakers:

In similar fashion, one says, ‘Under the apple tree I awakened you’ (Song 8:5) – thus said the Holy Spirit. ‘Set me as a seal upon your heart’ (Song 8:6) – said the congregation of Israel. ‘For love is fierce as death’ (ibid.) – said the nations of the world. Three utterances [*devarim*] alongside one another.[[50]](#footnote-50)

In this passage, the verses from *Song of Songs* are read as a conversation between three participants: The Holy Spirit, the congregation of Israel, and the nations of the world. The two lovers express their love through direct speech – ‘I awakened you,’ ‘Set me.’ The last sentence, ‘For love is fierce as death,’ is a comment made by the nations of the world observing from the side. The love and longing of the two lovers can be heard in their words, while the nations’ comment contains a hint of jealousy, that can be seen from the continuation of the verse, ‘For love is fierce as death, jealousy, hard as the grave’ (Song 8:6). Dividing the verse among different speakers highlights the dialogue between God and His people that the nations can only witness. This Tannaic midrash does not explicate the descriptions of the beloved’s body in the verse – ‘set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm’ but the heart and head refer allegorically to God’s heart and head and express the unmediated intimacy of God and Israel.

The allegorical meaning of the description of the beloved in *Song of Songs* *Rabba* stands is notably different:

Set me as a seal. R. Berekiah said: This refers to the recital of the shema’, as it says, ‘And these words... shall be upon thy heart’ (Deut.6:6). As a seal upon thine arm: this refers to the phylacteries, as it says, ‘And you shall bind them for a sign upon your hand’ (ib. 8).[[51]](#footnote-51)

The midrash changes the speaker from the female to the male beloved. According to this allegorical interpretation, the physical description is of Israel, who set a seal upon their arms so that they are aware of God throughout the day. The recital of *shema* morning and evening represents the seal upon their heart, as the verse says, ‘And these words... shall be upon thy heart.’ The seal on the arm is the phylacteries that are wrapped around the arm as the verse says, ‘And you shall bind them for a sign upon your hand.’

# Conclusion

A comparison of the Tannaic sources, *Sifrei Devarim, Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmael,* and the *Tosefta* with the Amoraic midrash, *Song of Songs* *Rabbah,* reveals a significant difference in their treatment of descriptions of the male beloved. The Tannaic sources treat the beloved’s descriptions as imagery of God Himself. The verses in Song 5:10-16 are understood as a description of God’s revelation to Israel by the Red Sea. The *Mekhilta* regards the description of God’s hands to refer to God’s tangible embrace of Israel at Sinai seeking to draw a frightened Israel closer to Him. The maiden’s request to be a seal on her beloved’s heart and arm is a direct request of God Himself.

The interpretations found in the Amoraic midrashim, by contrast, do not allegorize the beloved’s body as the divine body. The beloved’s figure represents the Torah or the Sages learning Torah, his hands are a collection of practical mitzvot that surround man or reflect significant historical moments. Reversing the usual reading of the verse, the seal represents actions (reciting the *shema* and wearing phylacteries) that Israel performs in order not to forget her beloved.

The Tannaic approach to the verses from *Song of Songs* describing the beloved’s body is similar to the physical conception of God in *Shiur Qoma*. One cannot necessarily conclude from this that the Tannaim engaged in the mystical practices of *Shiur Qoma*, but even so, there is a commonality. These findings can support the position of Lieberman and Scholem that *Shiur Qoma* is a midrash on *Song of Songs* from the end of the Tanaic period. The Tannaim’s interpretation of the description of the beloved in *Song of Songs* is characterized by a corporeal conception of God, which could also have been a component of early Jewish mysticism.

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1. My argument in this article focuses on the rabbinic exegesis of *Song of Songs* and the way the Rabbis interpret the corporeal expressions ascribed to the beloved. The question of how the Tannaim and Amoraim deal with anthropomorphism in general, or how they understand physical descriptions of God in other biblical books, requires its own treatment. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In Song 4:1-7 her head and body are described. 6:4-10 includes a description of her head and face. A full description, from her feet to the crown of her head, appears in Song 7:1-7 mentioning also the maiden dancing. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Song 5:10-16. English translation by Sefaria, https://www.sefaria.org.il/Song\_of\_Songs, with some adaptations. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Physical descriptions of the body can be found in the Bible in the description of the statue in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in Dan 2:31-33 and in the description of the man clothed in linen in Dan 10:5-6. This literary genre apparently began in ancient Mesopotamian literature, where these descriptions focused on the bodies of the goddesses. See Pope, *Song of Songs*, 54-85. There are ancient Egyptian love songs that contain descriptions of different parts of a beloved woman’s body, but these are very limited. See Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* 269-271 and songs 31, 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. On *Shiur Qoma* and its vast influence on Hasidei Ashkenaz, medieval Kabbalistic literature, and the Kabbala of the Ar’i, see Bar-Levav and Idel, *An Introduction to Jewish Mysticism,* vol 1, 79-84. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *The Shi’ur Qomah: Texts and Recensions*, Sefer Haqqomah, 136-142. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *The Shi*’*ur Qomah: Texts and Recensions,* Sefer Haqqomah, 149-152 and Appendix 1, Oxford ms Hebr. C. 65, 184. See other recensions in the same book: Shi’ur Qomah in Merkavah Rabbah, 72-73; Shi’ur Qomha in Sefer Razi'el, 97; Seder Rabbah Debereshit, 46-50. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Dan, *History of Jewish Mysticism and Esotericism, Ancient Times*, 891-892. According to Dan, *Shiur Qoma* derives from a different set of traditions than the other Merkbaava literature. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Scholem, *Major Trends,* 64; Dan, *History of Jewish Mysticism and Esotericism, Ancient Times*, 891-892. In contrast to Scholem, Dan believes that the purpose of the description is to emphasize the greatness of God and in doing so to inspire a numinous attitude to Him. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Farber-Ginat, Asi. ‘Studies in the book of *Shiur Qoma*,’ 361-394. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Gruenwald, Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism, 246. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Halbertal, ‘Concealment and Revelation,’ 15-26. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. McGinn, The Presence of God, 117-127. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Only three (or four) volumes of the commentary have survived in a Latin translation by Rufinus in the fifth century CE. A number of passages in Greek have been preserved in Procopius of Gaza’s catena. Of his homilies, just two survived, both in Latin translation by Hieronymous in Rome, circa 383 CE. These sources cover only the first two chapters of *Song of Songs*. For a comparison of the character of the these works and their Latin translations, see Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved*, 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Based on the translation by Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 38, with some adaptations. Compare: *Origen,* *The Song of Songs Commentary*, 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. The mishna constrains the study of the first two in mHag 2:1: ‘One may not expound forbidden relations in the presence of three, nor the act of Creation in the presence of two, nor [account of] the chariot in the presence of one, unless he is a sage and understands of his own knowledge.’ Study of the future Temple is perhaps alluded to at the end of the same Mishna: ‘Anyone who looks into four things is worthy of not having come into the world: what is above, what is below, what is before, and what is after.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism,* 36-42. Scholem is responding to an earlier article by Lieberman that had explained Origen’s statement based on later rabbinic sources. See Lieberman, *Shkiin & Yemenite Midrashim*, 16-17. In ‘Mishnat Shir ha-Shirim’, Lieberman relied mainly on Tannaic sources. See below. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Lieberman, Saul. ‘Mishnat Shir ha-Shirim,’ 118–126. In an article by Urbach, ‘The Homiletical Interpretations of the Sages,’ 249-251, originally published in Hebrew in 1961, E.E. Urbach draws a connection between Rabbi Akiva’s declaration that *Song of Songs* is holy of holies and the mystical interpretation of *Song of Songs*. He cites other Rabbinic interpretations of *Song of Songs* that are esoteric but does not make a connection to *Shiur Qoma*. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Lieberman, Saul. ‘Mishnat Shir ha-Shirim,’ 123, 126. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Green, *Keter: The Crown of God in Early Jewish Mysticism*, 78-79 n.3. On the connection between *Song of Songs* and early Jewish mysticism and Kabbalah, see Green, ‘The *Song of Songs* in Early Jewish Mysticism,’ 49-63. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Farber Ginat, Studies in the Book of *Shiur Qoma*, 364. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Dan, *History of Jewish Mysticism and Esotericism,* vol3, 891-898. For example, Origen’s mystical commentary on *Song of Songs* has an erotic character, according to Dan, that is entirely missing from *Shiur Qoma*. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Cohen, Liturgy and Theurgy, 110-12; Cohen, Texts and Recensions, 15-16. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Boyarin, ‘Two Introductions to the Midrash on the *Song of Songs*.’ See Green’s critique of Boyarin in Green, *Keter*, 78-79 n.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Hirshman, *A Rivalry of Genius*, 83-94. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Goshen-Gottstein, ‘Did the Tannaim Interpret the *Song of Songs* Systematically?’ 260–271. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 270-273; Kahana, ‘The Halakhic Midrashim,’ 95-100. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. According to Lieberman, the allegorical interpretation of the *Song of Songs* as referring to the historical moment at the Red Sea was a consistent exegesis applied by the Tanna Rabbi Eliezer. See Lieberman, ‘Mishnat Shir ha-Shirim,’ 12. For a full analysis of this midrashic unit and its context in the *Sifrei*, see Fraade, *From Tradition to Commentary*, 42-44. Fraade argues that the midrash on the phrase ‘this is my God, and I will praise him’ (Exodus 15:2) about the Song of the Sea should be distinguished from the dialogue between Israel and the nations of the world, that is about the giving of the Torah. In my interepretation below, I will relate to the whole passage as one unit, as it is understood in parallel texts. About this passage see also Kaplan, *My Perfect One*, 139-142. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. SifDeut *Ve-zot ha-berakha*, 343, Finkelstein edition, 398-399. Translation by Fraade, *From Tradition to Commentary*, 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Boyarin, Daniel. ‘Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism,’ 577-627. Boyarin is discussing the parallel version in MekRY (601-605). He claims that Rabbi Akiva became a prototyp of martyrium and that is why the midrash was attributed to him. Dan (*History of Jewish Mysticism and Esotericism*, vol 2, 759-761) believes that the conception of *Song of Songs* as a mystical work developed in the same circle that ascribed to it a martyrologial-erotic meaning, wherein the love is identified as the love between God and his righteous. This love reaches its climax in the context of martyrdom, with the *Song of Songs* serving as a guide to the martyr who seeks to sanctify the divine name. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. MekRY Beshalah shira 3 (Horovitz-Rabin p127, Lauterbach pp185-186); MekRSbY 15:2 (Epstein-Melamed p79). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. See Fraade, *From Tradition to Commentary*, 42-44; Stern, ‘Ancient Jewish Interpretation of the *Song of Songs*,’ 54-77; Kaplan, *My Perfect One*, 26-28. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Lieberman, ‘Keles Kilusin,’ 433–439; Leiter, ‘Worthiness, Acclamation, and Appointment,’ 138-151. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Lieberman, ‘Mishnat Shir ha-Shirim,’ 121. See the other examples he cites there. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Lieberman, ibid., 123. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. On CantR, see Kadari, ‘Early Rabbinic Literature: *Song of Songs* Rabbah’; Lachs, ‘Prolegomena to Canticles Rabba,’ 235-255. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. On the rich variety of allegorical interpretations in *Song of Songs* *Rabbah*, see Kadari, ‘Friends Hearken to your Voice,’ 183-209. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. CantR 5.11:1-6 (Simon edition pp239-244). Textual variants can be found in the synoptic edition at https://schechter.ac.il/midrash/shir-hashirim-raba/. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. The Hebrew reads *Ketem* *paz*, that are two types of gold. See Pope, Marvin H. *Song of Songs: A New Translation, with Introduction and Commentary*, New York: Doubleday, 1977, 534-535. Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs*, 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. The word *Sirgul* probably means both pricking and ruling, that were part of one technical procedure, , see Beit-Arié, *Hebrew Codicology*, 370-376. CantR 11.1 ‘Another matter: ‘“We will make you ornaments of gold” – that is the writing. “Spotted with silver” – that is the ruling.’ See yMeg 1:8 (p71c): ‘It is a halakha from Moses at Sinai that they write on parchment and write with ink and rule with a reed.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Stern, ‘Ancient Jewish Interpretation,’ 69-72. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Bar-On, ‘The Wonders of the Torah,’43-44. Bar-On’s discussion is about ySota 8:3 (Academy of the Hebrew Language Edition, p940). The text there reads: ‘The Torah is given from fire,’ i.e., it was given from God, Who is fire. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. MekRY, yitro, ha-hodesh 9 (Horovitz-Rabin p236, Lauterbach p340). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. This idea of direct divine engagement as opposed to by means of angels recurs in several places in Tannaic literature. See, for example, MidrTann Deut 26:8: ‘And the Lord took us out of Egypt not by an angel, and not by a seraph, and not by an agent, but the Holy one, blessed be He, himself.’ בבקשה תציין מניין התרגום Regarding the giving of the Torah, see CantR 1.2:2. Scholars have suggested that the passage reflects a Jewish-Christian polemic from the Amoriac period. See.כאן אני מפנה לאורבך ולהירשמן Urbach, *The Homiletical Interpretations of the Sages and the Exposition of Origen on Canticles and the Jewish-Christian Disputation*, 253-257; Hirshman, *A Rivalry of Genius*, 83-94. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. According to Lieberman, the allegorical interpretation of the *Song of Songs* as referring to the historical moment at Mount was a consistent exegesis applied by the Tanna Rabbi Akiva. See Lieberman, ‘Mishnat Shir ha-Shirim,’ 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. *Song of Songs* *Rabbah* 2:1, 1 (Simon, 111-112) with adjustments. This passage is corrupted in the manuscripts and I completed the missing text based on Geniza fragments. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. These opinions reflect the historical allegorical understanding of the Song as a description of Sinai, the Tabernacle and the journey through the desert. See Kadari, *Friends Hearken to your Voice*, 202-205. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Compare Kaplan, *My Perfect One*, 135-157. In a chapter devoted to ‘Israel's Ideal Man,’ he concludes that the Tannaim use the descriptive language of the male beloved in order to highlight the uniqueness and exemplarity of Israel’s God, by using two interpretive strategies: first, in contradistinction to the nations’ gods and second, in correspondance to the features of an ideal Israel. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. See also CantR 5, 14:1 (Simon, p245): ‘His hands are as rods of gold’ – these are the tablets of the covenant, as it is said, ‘and the tablets were the work of God.’ For another comparison of the Torah with a person’s arms, see the story about Rabbi Elazar ben Rabbi Shimon in bSanhedrin 68a: ‘He took his two arms and put them on his heart; he said: Woe to you my two arms that are like two rolled Torah scrolls.’ In this case, the arms are compared to rolled scrolls made of parchment. For another passage that relates to the word of God which was engraved on the tablets after it surrounded Israel on both sides see CantR 1,2:2 (Simon p23): ‘Teaching that the utterance went forth from the right hand of the Holy one, blessed be He, to the left hand of Israel and went right around the camp of Israel…and returned from the right hand of Israel to the left hand of the Holy one, blessed be He, and God received it in His right hand and inscribed it on the tablet.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. tSota 9.8 (Lieberman p213). Translation by??? [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. CantR 8, 6:2 (Simon p306). [↑](#footnote-ref-51)