



Rabbi Akiva said, “The world was never as worthy as on the day that Shir Hashirim was given to Yisroel, for all the Writings are holy, but Shir Hashirim is the holiest of holy.” Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah said, “To what can this be compared? To a king who took a kur (a measurement) of wheat and gave it to a baker. He said to him, ‘Extract for me ten sa’im (a measurement) of fine flour. Then he further requested, “take four from six, and then take one from four.” Similarly, the King of Kings took the Nivi’im from the Torah and the Kesuvim from the Nivi’im and Shir hashirim from the Kesuvim.” (Rashi, Shir Hashirim 1:1)

How can we understand these words of Rav Akiva? Is there anything imperfect about the Torah chas v’shalom that would require sifting something better out of it? Additionally, we know that the opposite order of supremacy is true. Torah is the direct command of Hashem, whereas the books of the Nevi’im are Hashem’s words through his prophets and the Kesuvim were not even written with full prophesy rather with a lower level referred by Chazal as “Divine spirit” i.e. Ruach HaKodesh? (Although all of Tanach in the final analysis is the word of Hashem as every aspect of the Torah was given to Moshe at Sinai). We have suggested an answer in the past, but I would like to bring support to it from the following words of Rabbeinu Bachaya (Kad HaKemach, Ahavah):

Upon this attribute of passionate love Shir HaShirim was founded, which begins with, ‘Kiss me from the kisses of your mouth.’ Chazal say, ‘all the writings are holy and Shir HaShirim is holy of holies,’ for the central and underlying point that is asked of a person is to cling his thoughts to the holy of holies (Hashem).

It seems that Shir HaShirim is considered the holiest of holies because its entirety addresses the underlying point of the entire Torah which is the loving relationship between Hashem and His children. In contrast, the Torah on its surface addresses many other issues including prophecies mentioning the severe punishments for one who violates its commandments. The books of the Nevi’im on the other hand are perhaps considered “sifted like fine flour” from the Torah, as they are more focused on “the underlying point” of the Torah. They don’t contain any commandments and are largely focused on the loving relationship between Hashem and His children and His exhortations that we return to Him. Additionally, regarding the prophecies found in the Nevi’im, Rabbeinu Bachaya makes an interesting note (in the above treatise): One is obligated to ponder and place upon his heart his great duty to love Hashem. All the more so, being that Hashem has already preceded in loving us with a great love. That is why the writings analogize His love to Yisroel to the love of a man to his wife as is written (Hoshea 2), ‘And I will be betrothed to you forever.’ And it also states (Yeshayah 54), ‘For the One who has wed you (Hashem)...’ Due to His great love towards us we do not find in all the books of the prophets any punishments and rebukes to Yisroel that do not include consolation as well, and even in the place of rebuke itself we find consolations.

Following in this “sifting towards the underlying point” of the Torah are the Kesuvim which do not contain any prophecies of punishment at all. This process ends with Shir HaShirim which, in its entirety, solely addresses the underlying point of the entire Torah and the purpose of the creation of the world, the infinite love between Hashem and His children. For this reason, Rabbi Akiva said, “The world was never as worthy as on the day that Shir Hashirim was given to Yisroel, for all the writings are holy, but Shir Hashirim is the holiest of holy.” For, in the words of Rabbeinu Bachaya above, the central and underlying point that is asked of a person is to cling his thoughts (i.e. his relationship) to the Holy of holies (Hashem).

