

Song of Solomon 4:1-7

Song of Solomon 4:1 Behold, you are fair, my love! Behold, you are fair! You have dove's eyes behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats, going down from Mount Gilead.

The commentators point out that these verses are a form of Arabic poetry called a *wasf*. This is a song of praise of one's beloved that gives attention to the specific parts of the body. We could make several general observations. 1) This description would be unlikely to help identify the subject if she were unknown to you and was in a crowd along with a number of other attractive young women. How do you distinguish hair that is like a flock of goats compared to hair that is not like that? 2) The description makes use of metaphors that are specific to the culture and geography of the poet. So you have dove's eyes behind your veil, a flock of goats, Mount Gilead, shorn sheep, a strand of scarlet, a piece of pomegranate, a tower of David, an armory on which hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men, and two fawns, twins of a gazelle which feed among the lilies. Broader and less specific imagery could have been chosen and the effect would have been significantly altered. 3)

The description is favorable and impressive. It gives attention to the woman's physical beauty from her eyes down to her breasts but it is not pornographic. The purpose is clearly not arousal. 4) The description reminds me of an Aesop's Fable in which a deer admires itself part by part from his antlers down to his legs. The fable makes a point as does this description in the Song as rendered in The Message, "You're beautiful from head to toe, my dear love, beautiful beyond compare, absolutely flawless." As such, if we were to go back to that crowd of young women and look for the one, "beautiful beyond compare, absolutely flawless," we might "find" the girl after all. There are beautiful women who are basically universally recognized as such. It is not the sum of the parts that makes them so but the whole package taken altogether that is what it is. And then there are those women who are beautiful with that which comes from within and whose beauty does not diminish with age.

The man's words here make another point. He has taken some trouble and made quite an effort to voice his enthusiasm for the beauty who is his. She could not know that he saw her is this way unless he told her. His words make it clear that she is treasured by him and that he is completely and

entirely entranced by her. His work will make a difference in himself and in his bride.

The spiritual application is found in the Song's invitation to participate in the practice of praise. The method of our poem is instructive. Instead of praising God with words that are general and universal (such as God is great and powerful and loving, and merciful etc.) try using metaphors that are specific to you and to your experience of the Lord in your life.

My God is powerful and strong like my Yellow Van. When my Son-in-Law and grandchildren were in trouble and hundreds of miles away, I knew that the Yellow Van was strong enough to go and get them and their broken car and bring them all home. God is like that. Our troubles will not take us too far away, nor will they ever be too heavy for Him to handle. We are never out of the range of God's help.

Driving the Yellow Van around town is like a witness to God's working in and through my life. People see the van and know where I am and what I am doing. If they are out of church the Holy Spirit speaks and calls them to come home.