

שושנה – Rose Petals – Rosaceae

The Rose – A symbol of Love

The rose is the undisputed Queen of Flowers. She wears her glorious crown with grace. The numerical value of שושנה/shoshanna – 'rose' is 661, the same numerical value as the name of Queen Esther. Rose was crowned the national flower of the United States in 1986. It is universally known as the flower of love. Its flowering softness is a sign of our loving relationships. Once, when I was away on our anniversary during my annual tour, a beautiful bouquet of red roses greeted me in Toronto with a loving note from my husband. I was moved to tears as I experienced how red roses are symbols of love felt at the deepest levels. Their color corresponds to desire and life force. Receiving red roses let me know that my husband is truly passionate about me, on all levels. His love promises to endure the test of time.



Roses Represents the Relationship of Love between G-d and Us

We are all familiar with the first part of the Torah verse that is an acronym for the month of Elul. Yet, the ending “who shepherds among the roses” is less well known:

ספר שיר השירים פרק ו פסוק ג אָנִי לְדוֹדִי וְדוֹדִי לִי הִרְעָה בְּשׁוֹשָׁנִים:

“I am for my beloved and my Beloved is for me, Who shepherds among the roses”
(*Song of Songs* 6:3).

This ending is repeating a prior verse from Song of Songs, which also describes the relationship of love:

ספר שיר השירים פרק ב פסוק טז דוֹדִי לִי וְאֲנִי לוֹ הִרְעָה בְּשׁוֹשָׁנִים:

“My beloved is mine, and I am his, Who shepherds among the roses” (*Song of Songs* 2:16).

Just as roses represent love between people, it also denotes the deepest love between the Compassionate G-d and His people. Hashem wants a crown of roses from us. He wants a heart of softness. Therefore, a rose is also a symbol of teshuvah (return/repentance), when we return completely to His loving embrace. As long as we have the loving quality of roses, G-d leads us to the beautiful pastures of teshuvah. A diamond ring is worth much more, but gold, silver and diamonds are hard and rough, whereas roses are alive and vibrant. King David further connects roses with love:

ספר תהילים פרק מה פסוק א לְמַנְצֵחַ עַל שְׁשָׁנִים לְבְנֵי קֹרַח מְשֻׁכֵּיל שִׁיר יְדִידוֹת:

“For the conductor on shoshanim, of the sons of Korah, a maskil a song of loves” (*Tehillim* 45:1).

The Renewal and Mercy of the Rose

The Shoshanna teaches us to open our heart and learn soul lessons for our lives. “Hashem wants our heart” – that is roses. A fresh rose just about to bud is a powerful imagery. The new petals of the rose unfolding, signifies preserving the newness in our mitzvah observance. The challenge of being a rose is to be a source of renewal in our small world. We need to be fresh, vibrant and regard today as a brand new day, engaging in the mitzvot as if for the very first time and approaching our prayer book as though the first time we ever prayed. The Zohar opens with comparing the Jewish people to the rose:

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“As a rose among the thorns, so is my beloved among the daughters” (*Song of Songs* 2:2). Who is the rose? This refers to *Knesset Yisrael* – the Collective soul roots of Israel – *malchut* (royalty). Just as a rose, which is found amidst the thorns, has within it the colors red and white, also *Knesset Yisrael* has within her both judgment and loving kindness. Just as a rose has thirteen petals, also *Knesset Yisrael* has within her thirteen paths of mercy that surround her from all sides (*Zohar* I, Intro. p. 1).

The thirteen petals of the rose correspond to the 13 *midot of rachamim* (mercy). We can emulate G-d in these paths, making ourselves conduits of mercy by being gracious and slow to anger. This way we can be “to my beloved,” and then “My Beloved is to me, leading us among the roses.” This is when we walk in Hashem’s path through the attributes of the 13 portals of treating others with compassion (Adapted from Shira Smiles).

שושנה/Shoshanna – Lily or Rose?

The word שושנה/Shoshanna comes from the word שש/shesh – ‘six,’ because it refers to a flower with six petals. It is called Shoshanna because it refers to the six directions in which the Shechina dwells (*Sha’ar Ma’amarei Rashbi*). Both the lily and the original uncultivated rose has six petals. King Solomon depicts the beautiful rose as standing in distinguishable contrast to its surrounding thorns:

ספר שיר השירים פרק ב פסוק ב כְּשׁוֹשַׁנָּה בֵּין הַחֹמִים כֵּן רַעֲיָתִי בֵּין הַבְּנוֹת:

“Like the שושנה/shoshanna among thorns, so is my beloved among the daughters” (*Song of Songs* 2:2).

AS A SHOSHANNA BETWEEN THE THORNS - pricking her, nevertheless she her beauty and redness endures. Likewise is my beloved between the daughters. They tempt her to follow them in sin with other gods. However, she stands steadfast in her faith (Rashi, *Song of Songs* 2:2).

This verse refers to our Matriarch, Rivkah, who grew up among the wicked (*Midrash Bereishit Rabah* 23:1); (*Midrash Shir HaShirim Rabah* 2:4).

The Jerusalem Bible translates שושנה/shoshanna as ‘lily,’ which possibly refers to השושן הַצְּחוֹר/*Hashoshan Hatzachor* – *Lilium Cardidum*. It grows in the forests of Carmel and Galilee. Its flowering starts at the beginning of the summer with several thorns. Thus, “The lily among thorns” is the big beautiful lily flower growing on a tall stalk that stands out from among the thorns of the land (*Da’at Mikra*). The following verse from the prophets supports that shoshanna refers to the lily: “I will be as the dew to Israel: he shall flower like the lily, and cast forth his roots like the Levanon” (*Hoshea* 14:6). Ibn Ezra explains that since the lily has thin roots attached to its bulb, the prophet needed to use the trees of Levanon as a metaphor for strong roots. This wouldn’t be necessary if the verse referred to the rose, since the rose is a tree with deep, strong roots.

In the Talmud and Midrash, the shoshanna (rose) is used as a symbol for the blood of a woman’s period. This seems to indicate that the shoshanna is blood red, a support that the shoshanna refers to the rose, rather than the lily, which is not known for being red. Likewise, Rambam holds that the shoshanim are red roses that emit a good fragrance (Rambam, *Commentary on the Mishna, Shevi’it* 7:6). Malbim explains, “A rose among thorns” to refer to the rose that grows on a stalk full of thorns. Therefore, it is necessary that she lift her head above them, so that the thorns won’t prick her.

The Congregation of Israel is a Rose

The most delicate of flowers is not without thorny spiritual protection. The more you try to cut back a rosebush, the greater it blossoms. "For the conductor, upon shoshanim, of David" (*Tehillim* 69:1). "Upon Israel, who is compared to a shoshanna among the thorns- while the thorns pierce them, King David prays for them" (Rashi, *Tehillim* 69:1). Throughout history, the Jewish people have had to overcome many thorns, both from within and without. Our many enemies are repeatedly called, "thorns in your sides" (*Bamidbar* 33:55); (*Yesha'yahu* 11:14). Yet, in the end of days things will change, "No longer will the people of Israel have malicious neighbors who are painful briars and sharp thorns..." (*Yechezkiel* 28:24). The word שושנה/shoshanna is related to the word שנה שונה/shoneh – 'to change.' The rose is called shoshanna because it has the ability to change from judgement to mercy symbolized by its harsh thorns on the one hand and its beautiful fragrant flower on the other. For this reason, the congregation of Israel is called a shoshanna, as we too vacillate between our holiness and impure shells. This is why the Zohar states that there are different kinds of shoshanim - just as a shoshanna among the thorns comes in both the red color of judgment and the white color of purity (Based on *Sha'ar Ma'ameri Rashbi, Bereishit*). A king had a cultivated orchard filled with figs, grapes, pomegranates and apples. He handed it over to a land tenant while he was away. When the king returned and checked what was done with the orchard, he found it full of thorns and thistles. When he was about to chop down the orchard, he noticed one beautiful rose among the thorns. He breathed in its fragrance and his soul was revived. The king then decided to save the entire orchard for the sake of this rose. Similarly, the entire world was only created for the sake of Torah. After 26 generations, G-d checked into His world, to see what was done in it, but He found it full of perversion from The Generation of Enosh, The Flood and The Tower of Babylon. He then brought a weed-whacker to cut it down, but stopped when He saw one 'rose' – referring to the Children of Israel. He breathed in its fragrance when He gave them the Ten Commandments. His soul was revived when they said, "We will do and we will listen." Then the Almighty decided, for the sake of this rose, that the orchard will be saved – in the merit of Israel accepting the Torah. (*Midrash Vayikra Rabbah* 23:3).

The Rose is Associated with Redemption

Just as the rose exists for the sake of its fragrance, likewise the righteous are created only in order to redeem Israel... (*Midrash Vayikra Rabbah* 23:6). The redemption of Israel from Egypt was like picking a rose from between the thorns, as it states, "G-d ventured to go and take for himself a nation from the midst of another nation..." (*Devarim* 4:34). Since Israel was so assimilated, they would never have been redeemed from Egypt according to strict judgment... (*Midrash Vayikra Rabbah* 23:2). ...Just like the rose, when it is placed between the thorns, the northern wind pushes it towards the south and the thorn stings it; the southern wind pushes it towards the north and the thorn stings it; nevertheless, its heart is directed straight Above. Similarly, Israel - although they are dried up, suffering and under forced labor; their heart is directed towards their Father in heaven... (*Midrash Vayikra Rabbah* 23:5). G-d said to them, "It all depends on you. Just as this rose blooms and its heart is towards the above, likewise, you must do teshuvah before me, and direct your hearts towards Me, Above. Then I will bring the redeemer..." (*Midrash Tehillim, Mizmor* 45). On our way to redemption, we must learn from the rose, that doesn't succumb to the thorns, to be steadfast in overcoming obstacles. We also need to be strong against the pressure of other nations and their cultures, like the rose that is not pushed by the wind but remains straight. We, too, must turn to Above without being influenced by the winds of pressure, including the various pressures of the times.

Medicinal Properties of Rose Petals

Rose petals are sweet, slightly bitter and warming. They can be used as a carminative, stimulant, and emmenagogue. They affect the liver and spleen. The most fragrant roses are used in medicine. Those with a deep red color are more medicinal and astringent than other roses. Roses are used in face toners, perfumes and are one of the most effective anti-ageing ingredients. Ayurvedic physicians use the petals in poultices to treat skin wounds and inflammations. European herbalists recommend dried rose petal tea for headache, dizziness, mouth sores, and menstrual cramps. Rose petals dry up, mucous discharges, relieve constrictive feelings of the chest and abdomen (stuck liver chi), harmonize the blood and irregular menstruation and relieve pain caused by blood stagnation. Hippocrates recommended rose flowers mixed with oil for diseases of the uterus. Rose oil can also reduce high cholesterol levels. The leaves are a mild, laxative. Rose hips are a significant source of vitamin C.

Rose in Aromatherapy

In aromatherapy, essential rose oil is very precious. It is a favorite tool for aroma therapists because of its versatility. Oil of Rose was discovered between 1582-1612 at the wedding feast of the princess Nour Djihan with the Prince of Akbar. A canal circling the entire gardens was dug and filled with rose water. The heat of the sun separated the water from the essential rose oil. It was skimmed off and found to be exquisite perfume. It is necessary to distil about 10,000 lbs. of roses to obtain 1 lb. of oil; 30 roses to make one drop of otto, and 60,000 roses to make one oz. of otto. No wonder pure essential rose oil is the most expensive of all essential oils.

The inherent Connection between the Torah and Medicinal Properties of the Rose Roses strengthen the blood, the source of vitality that keeps us strong to overcome obstacles in life. Both the People of Israel and the Torah are compared to the rose, because they are the blood and vitality of the world, keeping our planet going while saving it from destruction. The three properties of rose: carminative, stimulant and emmenagogue (mover of blood) are all connected with keeping things moving to overcome stagnation. Carminative – the power to digest – moves food along its journey through the body. Stimulant perks us up and imbues us with strength to keep moving. Emmenagogue keeps the blood moving and revitalizes us to bring constant renewal. This dynamic quality of the rose fits in with the meaning of שושנה/shoshanna from the word שונה/shoneh – ‘to change,’ and the power of teshuvah, which we learn from the rose.

Healing Properties of Rose Water

Rose water has natural antiseptic, astringent, anti-bacterial and antiviral qualities. Its scent also alleviates depression and tension. The earliest English herbalists recommended rose water for the complexion and heart. Rose water was successfully used to cure all kinds of ailments, such as trembling, constipation, drunkenness, skin and throat infections and insomnia.

Mood-lifter: Rose Water is soothing for the nerves. It treats conditions of stress: nervous tension, peptic ulcers and heart disease. It is also a mild sedative and anti-depressant. Use rose water as an air freshener to balance the spirit. Spray some rose water on your face at the end of a tiring day and feel all the tensions and troubles melt away! With its pleasant aroma, rose water spray enhances mood and is cooling and toning.

Skin-Healer: Rosewater is renowned as a gentle skin softener that enhances the glow and appearance of the skin. Its nourishing, tonic, soothing and hydrating qualities are useful for all skin types, especially mature, dry and sensitive skin. It helps moisturize the skin at bedtime, or before

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and after exposure to the sun. Rosewater stimulates regeneration and has a calming effect in acne and sunburns. It is also helpful for inflammation and reducing the visibility of broken capillaries.

Hands On

Rose water is gently cleansing and maintains the pH balance. You can spritz your face with pure rose water for facial toning, especially in summer.

Rose Water

1. Pick rose petals and place them in a glass bowl rather than a plastic bag.
2. Fill a pot with the rose petals to the brim.
3. Add as much water in the pot as can fit, leaving only enough space so it won't boil over.
4. Simmer while covered on the lowest heat for about 40 minutes.
5. Store in the refrigerator for up until 1 month.

Rosewater Lemonade

1. Make a pitcher of lemonade with fresh lemons and honey.
2. Add ¼ cup rose water!
3. Enjoy on a hot summer day!

Rosewater Cold Cream

9 teaspoons of rosewater
 9 teaspoons of almond oil
 2 teaspoons of beeswax
 20 drops rose otto essential oils

1. Combine the oil and beeswax in your double boiler (or in a stainless steel or glass vessel inside a pan filled with water) on low heat. Wait until everything is melted.
2. At the same time, put the rosewater in another double boiler on low heat so that it reaches the same temperature as the oils.
3. Once the oil and beeswax are melted, take them off the heat and start whipping with an electric mixer on low speed for a few minutes; while adding the rosewater spoon by spoon.
4. After a few minutes, the liquid will soon turn into a cream as you progressively add the water.
5. Once it has reached a creamy consistency, add the essential oils and blend.
6. Scoop the cream into sterile glass jars and allow to cool at room temperature before closing with a lid.

Rose Vinegar

Rose vinegar treats headaches, especially those brought on by heat for example by the sun.

1. Gather fresh rose petals.
2. Heat some distilled vinegar until it begins to simmer. Then pour into a jar filled with petals, all the way to the top.
3. Cover the jar with a layer of plastic wrap, and then a lid. Let sit in a cool, dark place for a few weeks or until the desired color is reached.