

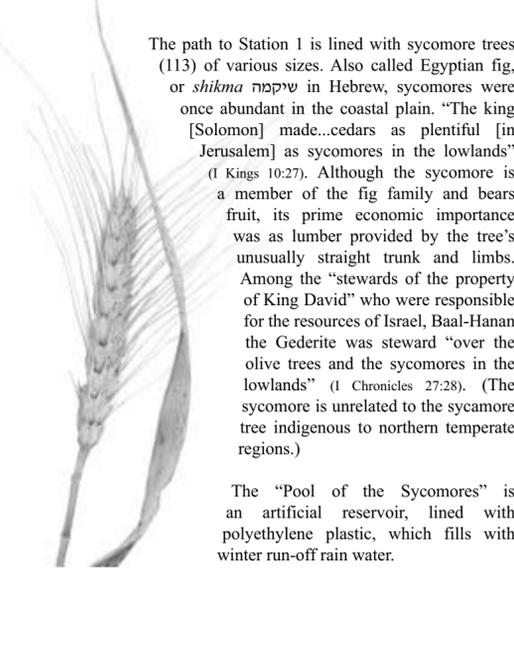
Plant names:

In the guide: The plant numbers correspond to the English, Latin, and Hebrew names listed on the reverse side of the excursion map.

On the ground: 3-digit plant numbers appear on leaf-shaped green signs; plants visible only when in blossom are indicated by the Hebrew letter ׁ.

There are restrooms and litter baskets along the trail.

Bordering Neot Kedumim to the north is an Israel Defense Forces training base, so don’t be alarmed if you hear gunfire.


 The path to Station 1 is lined with sycamore trees (113) of various sizes. Also called Egyptian fig, or *shikma* שִׁיקְמָה in Hebrew, sycomores were once abundant in the coastal plain. “The king [Solomon] made...cedars as plentiful [in Jerusalem] as sycomores in the lowlands” (I Kings 10:27). Although the sycamore is a member of the fig family and bears fruit, its prime economic importance was as lumber provided by the tree’s unusually straight trunk and limbs. Among the “stewards of the property of King David” who were responsible for the resources of Israel, Baal-Hanan the Gederite was steward “over the olive trees and the sycomores in the lowlands” (I Chronicles 27:28). (The sycomore is unrelated to the sycamore tree indigenous to northern temperate regions.)

The “Pool of the Sycomores” is

an artificial reservoir, lined with

polyethylene plastic, which fills with

winter run-off rain water.

STATION 1: “By the sweat of your brow...”

Wheat (175) and barley (176) grown in the surrounding fields are brought to the threshing floor during the grain harvest season, which begins with barley on Pesach and wheat on Shavuot. The implements you see were used in ancient times to carry out the various tasks involved in the arduous process of making bread: plowing, sowing, reaping, binding [the sheaves], threshing, winnowing, sieving [the grain], grinding, sifting [the flour], kneading, and baking. Truly, “By the sweat of your brow shall you get bread to eat...” (Genesis 3:19).

Grain (both wheat and barley) was one of the major crops of ancient Israel, together with wine and oil, which you will meet further along this trail. Their yields depend on the amount of rainfall and its seasonal distribution, as well as on the balance between opposing climatic phenomena throughout the flowering and ripening periods of these crops – during the seven weeks of the “counting of the Omer,” between Passover and Shavuot.

Uncertainty prevailed especially during the Omer, known for its unstable weather conditions. Hot, dry winds from the east-southeast, raising temperatures and lowering humidity to less than 15%, alternate with cold, rainy west-northwesterly winds. Both the dry heat and the rain can ruin the crops if they come at inappropriate times during the flowering and ripening stages. Pagans saw these opposing forces of nature as the will of various gods. The Hebrew Scriptures affirm that all these forces emanate from One Being.

Almond trees (154) have been planted across the road from the threshing floor The almond (*shaked* שִׁשָׁק in Hebrew) is the first of Israel’s fruit trees to blossom, flowering about mid-January, during the rainy season. The speed with which the almond breaks out of its winter dormancy never cease to astonish: one day it is totally bare, the next covered by a cascade of white and light pink flowers. The almond tree itself symbolized the metaphoric meaning of the root verb *shakod*: to be alert, vigilant, and reliable, to stand on guard. “The Lord asked me, ‘Jeremiah, what do you see?’ I answered, ‘A branch of an almond tree.’ ‘You are right,’ said the Lord, ‘and I am watching [*shoked*] to see that my words come true” (Jeremiah 1:11-12). The farmer in Israel is also *shoked* – watching daily in apprehension and prayer for the right wind to blow, especially during the critical Omer period.

ON THE WAY TO STATION 2

These centuries-old olive trees growing on the slopes of “The Hill of the Menorah” were transplanted to Neot Kedumim in the late 1960s. Like the rest of Neot Kedumim, in those early years this hill was barren of soil and plants.

STATION 2: OLIVE PRESS and OLIVE OIL

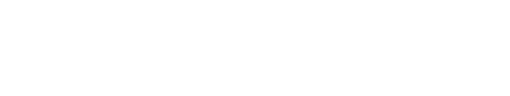
The olive press was bought from a neighboring Arab village and reconstructed here. The crushing wheel and basin date to Roman times.

The harvested olives are placed in the basin and the heavy stone wheel is slowly rolled over the fruit. A harnessed mule, camel, or donkey pulls the wheel, and two or three people help push the wooden spoke around. As the wheel slowly moves over the olives, the fruit is crushed, but no oil is extracted yet. The crushed mash is then scooped into the flat woven baskets, which are piled on top of each other in the press. (The wooden beam press is a reconstruction of an olive press from the Mishnaic period; the metal one was manufactured in Jaffa in 1906).

Water is poured into the stone collecting vats so that the oil flowing in from the press floats to the top and any sediment and dirt sink to the bottom. The pure olive oil is skimmed off and then allowed to settle further in storage jugs or glass bottles. The first press of oil from the crushed mash is called “virgin olive oil” in English. Olive oil produced without the press, by piling baskets of crushed olives on top of each other so that only the weight of the baskets slowly forces out the oil, is the finest oil. This was used to light the menorah in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple. “You shall instruct the Israelites to bring you clear oil of crushed olives for lighting [the menorah]...” (Exodus 27:20).

The heavy, round stone in the hollow carved in the rock was used to crush olives that formed in the sabbatical year (and therefore could not be sold commercially) or to make small quantities of oil for home use.

Olive oil had many uses: light, food, lubrication, medicine, cosmetics, and for anointing priests and kings. It was the most important commercial crop of ancient Israel. The prophet Jeremiah calls the people of Judah “an olive tree, leafy and fair” (11:16) and the prophet Hosea describes Israel as being “magnificent like the olive tree” (14:7).



ON THE WAY TO STATION 3: The dove and the olive

The Bible tells of the dove that told Noah that the Flood waters were receding by bringing him a “plucked-off olive leaf in its beak” (Genesis 8:11). Since olive trees are low compared to forest trees, the freshly picked olive leaf was a clear sign that the water was low enough to expose at least this short tree’s top branches. According to a 4th c. CE homily, in bringing the olive leaf, the dove brought “light to the world” (Midrash Tankhuma, Te’zave 5,1). Another homily relates that when the angel of the Lord told Sarah that she would bear Isaac, “her face shone like the olive tree” (Breshit Rabba 53,3).

The lightest breeze crowns the olive trees with a silver halo that moves like a wave of light over the trees as the wind inverts the leaves. The underside of each olive leaf is covered with tiny whitish scales, while its upper side is dark green. When the wind rustles the leaves of the olive tree, this contrast of shades produces a unique silvery sheen. The light of the olive tree itself, together with the clear white flame produced by burning olive oil, made the olive a symbol of “light to the world.”

STATION 3: WINEPRESS

Grapes were known in the Mediterranean area from earliest times. The Bible relates that “Noah, the tiller of soil, planted a vineyard” when he left the ark (Genesis 9:18). In summer we enjoy its fruit and in the fall grapes are dried into raisins. Pharaoh’s chief cup bearer dreamed of fresh grape juice: “I took the grapes, pressed them into Pharaoh’s cup, and placed the cup in Pharaoh’s hand” (Genesis 40:11). But the main use of grapes was for wine.

The grape harvest began some two months after the end of the “counting of the Omer,” around the end of July. The grapes were crushed barefoot on the treading floor of the winepress, to the accompaniment of singing, music, and rhythmic shouts of “hey-dadd.” The juice flowed into the collecting vat where the fermentation process began. The juice was then scooped into clay jars (amphora) where fermentation continued until the desired alcohol content was reached. Nutritious and thirst-quenching, wine mixed with water was a common drink in ancient Israel. When the prophet Isaiah describes the catastrophe that shall befall Moab, famous for its grapes, he says, “Rejoicing and gladness are gone from the farm land; in the vineyards no shouting or cheering is heard. No more does the treader tread wine in the presses – the shouts have been silenced” (Isaiah 16:10). Because of its importance, the grape has its own, exclusive blessing in Jewish tradition: “Blessed are You, Lord..., Creator of the fruit of the vine.”

STATION 4: IN THE SHADE OF THE OLIVE TREE

The grain, wine and oil you have met along this trail were brought as daily offerings to the Temple in the form of fine flour mixed with oil, over which the wine libation was poured. To this very day, these crops are brought to the Sabbath table in the form of hallah, wine, and candles (which have replaced olive oil lamps). In this way, hundreds of generations of Jews have kept the thread binding them to the Temple: “When the Temple stood, the altar expiated man. Now that the Temple does not exist, man’s table [the Sabbath table] expiates him” (Menahot 97a).

Look carefully at this olive tree (109) and you will see that its trunk is dry and dead; all its large branches are in fact growing from the ground surrounding the original trunk. When the olives trees were transplanted to the Hill of the Menorah, this particular tree did not take. Just as we decided to remove it, two offshoots started growing from its roots. The dead trunk was not cut down, the offshoots continued to develop, and over the years they completely covered the parent trunk. This is a living illustration of the prophet Isaiah’s dramatic metaphor concerning the eternal viability of the House of Jesse (King David’s father): “A branch [*hoter*] shall grow out of the trunk of Jesse, and a shoot [*netzer*] from its roots” (Isaiah 11:1).

The offshoots growing around the parent tree appeared to the psalmist as children sitting around their parents’ table, continuing in their footsteps: “Your sons, like olive saplings around your table” (Psalm 128:3). In the same psalm we find bread (“You shall enjoy the fruit of your labors,” that immediately associates with “By the sweat of your brow shall you get bread to eat” [*Genesis 3:19*]) and the grapevine (“Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine within your house”). Like the family table on the Sabbath, so in this psalm, grain, wine and oil are central to the theme of joy and continuity.



STATION 5: THE LIVING MENORAH

Although we do not know exactly what the menorah in the Temple looked like, in modern times the menorah was incorporated into the emblem of the State of Israel.

Exodus provides a detailed description of the menorah. “There were six branches stemming from its sides: three branches of the menorah stemmed from one side and three branches from the other side” (Exodus 25:32, 37:18). The configuration of the branches of some of the sage (*moriah*) plants along the wall (147, 148, 149, 150, 153) bear a remarkable resemblance to the shape of the menorah described in the Bible.



BY THE DOVECOAT

The dovecote on the roof of the shelter was built of mud and straw, the traditional Middle-Eastern building materials, from which the Israelite slaves in Egypt made bricks for Pharaoh’s cities. The doves frequently fly away and return only when they want a safe nesting place. The dove that “brought light to the world” when it returned to Noah’s ark with the olive leaf also intimated the importance of freedom, according to this homily: “It is better to eat bitter food [in freedom] than sweets from your hand [in captivity]” (Breshit Rabbah 33, 6). (Both olive leaves and unmarinated olives are very bitter.)

STATION 6: LIGHT AND FRAGRANCE

Most sage (moriah) plants are very fragrant. Some, like the “pungent sage” (149) and the “land of Israel sage” (147), contain fragrant essential oils in all parts of the plant. Others concentrate their perfume only in their leaves, while only a very few have no fragrance at all. The perfume is most noticeable in the heat of the day, when the sun is at its zenith and gives off most light and heat. The sun’s radiation begins to increase from Pesach and reaches its apex during the wheat harvest, the festival of Shavuot. At this time, late May and early June, we can literally breathe in Rabbi Yehoshua ben-Levi’s words about Shavuot, also called Matan Torah – the Day of the Giving of the Torah: “As each commandment [of the Ten Commandments] was spoken by the Holy One, Blessed be He, the world filled with fragrance” (Sabbath 88b).

This tie between light and fragrance in Israel appears in the Biblical instruction to burn the incense on its altar when lighting the lamps of the menorah: “Aaron shall burn fragrant incense; every morning when he tends the lamps he shall burn the incense, and when he lights the lamps between dusk and dark, he shall burn the incense; so there shall be a perpetual burning of incense before the Lord for all your generations” (Exodus 30:7-8).

The menorah and the incense altar are always mentioned together. Since the destruction of the Temple, when “man’s table expiates him,” the lamps of the menorah and the fragrance of the incense are commemorated by the light of the special havdallah candle and the fragrant spices on Saturday night. Together with the goblet of wine, they separate (*mavdil*) between the holy (*Sabbath*) and the mundane (days of the week).



ON THE WAY TO STATION 7: “One to remember and one to observe”

“One Sabbath eve as darkness was descending, they [Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son] saw an old man running with two bunches of myrtle in his hands. They asked him, ‘What are these for?’ And he answered, ‘for the Sabbath.’ ‘But is not one [bunch] enough?’ Said he, ‘One is for “Remember the Sabbath day” (Exodus 20:8) and one is for “Observe the Sabbath day” (Deuteronomy 5:12).’ Said Rabbi Shimon to his son, ‘Look how beloved the commandments are by Israel!’” (Sabbath 33, Bialik/Ravnitzki, Sefer Ha’agadot.)

Many spices can be used for the havdallah ceremony, but myrtle (145) (*hadass*), the quintessential fragrant plant of Israel, is first choice. Rub the branches and you will smell the delicate fragrance on your hands. In many Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jewish communities the havdallah spice box is called *hadass*.

The Sabbath itself is called by numerous romantic names: bride, queen, beloved. The parting from “her” with light and fragrance is like the parting between the two lovers in the last verse of the Song of Songs, customarily read on Sabbath eve and on Passover: “Make haste, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a fawn upon mountains of spices” (8:14). Such “mountains of spices” are most fragrant in Israel during the season of light and heat between Passover and Shavuot, when “the world fills with fragrance.” This is also the season central to the Song of Songs.



STATION 7: IDENTIFICATION OF BIBLICAL SPICE PLANTS

Biblical and Talmudic literature mentions the names of over 20 spice plants and fragrances extracted from them. The identification of these names is difficult enough in Hebrew and Aramaic, but becomes next to impossible when groping about in various translations. For example, the relatively well-known names that appear in the list of choice products Jacob sent with his sons to Egypt (Genesis 43:11) include *tzori...nekhof* and *lot*, familiar in most English translations as “balm, gum and ladanum.” Words like spikenard, saffron, clouds of myrrh and frankincense, fragrant reed and cinnamon, aloes, and other translated names appear in various English versions of the Song of Songs.

The difficulty in identifying these plants is compounded by the secrecy that surrounded the manufacture of spices and perfumes. Archaeological finds have revealed, for instance, the intense secrecy that cloaked the cultivation of the mysterious *afarsemon* in Ein Gedi and the product derived from it.

The trees growing here, among those whose identification was not kept secret, have been known and used for many centuries. The famous henna powder is made from the ground leaves and other parts of the *kofer* tree (134). (Please do not pick!) Between Passover and Sukkot (and at Neot Kedumim, sometimes quite a bit later), the trees bear clusters of creamy flowers whose pungent fragrance can be felt from afar.

“My beloved to me is a cluster of henna blossoms from the groves of Ein Gedi” (Song of Songs 1:14). This is how the shepherdess in the Song sees her beloved. “Your limbs are an orchard of pomegranates and of all luscious fruit, of henna and of nard,” says the shepherd to his loved one (4:13). Although there are no henna trees in Ein Gedi today, the tree is well known in the gardens of Jericho. During their blossoming season, clusters of henna flowers are sold in the markets of East Jerusalem, filling the *shuk* with their fragrance.

Another plant growing here (144) is regarded by many researchers as the tree from which myrrh (*mor*) was extracted. It is also possible that the sage/*moriah* is the source of this spice: “*Mor* is chief of all the perfumes; it is the patriarch Abraham who sacrificed his son Isaac on Mount Moriah” (Shir Hashirim Rabba 3,5).



STATION 8: LADANUM AND HYSSTOP

The bushes on the right are fragrant rockrose (143). Many believe that fragrant rockrose is the plant from which ladanum (*lot*) was manufactured, mentioned as one of the “choice products”. Pink rockrose (142) and white rockrose (141) grow further along this same terrace.



To the left of the trail are a number of plants all appearing in Talmudic literature under the general name *ezov*. Although they belong to different genuses, they are all members of the *Labiatae* family and have square stalks that you can discern with a light touch. The most famous of these is hyssop (102), *za’atar* in Arabic. Also growing here is whorled savory (153) –“Roman hyssop,” spiked thymbra (136) - “desert hyssop,” French lavender (137) – “blue hyssop,” poley (139) – “*ezovion*” a well-known medicinal plant that the Sages said “is not food for healthy people,” and tea hyssop (139) whose main use is as a very pleasant-tasting , refreshing, spearmint-flavored tea.

From here the trail divides: straight along the paved trail for strollers and wheelchairs; right along the dirt trail for those who wish a closer look at other spice and aromatic plants. The trails converge at the bottom of the “Ascent of Spices,” just before the shaded rest area.

SIGHTS ALONG THE WAY TO STATION 9

If you take the dirt trail, look straight ahead at the hill in front of you. If you're on the paved trail, look right. You may glimpse gazelles and fallow deer on the upper slope of the hill, reminders of the last words in the Song of Songs: "Make haste, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a fawn upon mountains of spices" (8:14).

One of the clearly visible bushes along both trails is the lentisk (129). One of the well-known identifications of the lentisk is *tzori*, translated as "balm of Gilead." Jeremiah mentions it as a medicinal plant imported from Gilead (8:22, 46:11). Ezekiel lists it as one of the products that reached the merchants of Tyre from the kingdoms of Judah and Israel (27:17). In Genesis (43:11), *tzori* is included together with *lot* and the as-yet unidentified *nekhori* in the list of "choice products" that Jacob sent with his sons to Egypt. The sap of the lentisk has an especially pungent smell, and many believe it to be the *mastiki* or gum mentioned in the Talmud. On the dirt trail, you will pass by lentisks pruned to grow into small trees with thicker trunks which we hope to tap to extract the sap and analyze its properties.

Where the asphalt and dirt trails meet, you have an excellent view of walnut trees to the left of the shaded rest area. You will get there shortly. For now, turn right along the asphalt path towards Station 9.

THE LITTLE FOXES

At the top of the trail's horseshoe curve, you see the terraces of the "Vineyard of the Carmel" that remind us of the words of the shepherdess whose brothers set her "to guard the vineyards" (Song of Songs 1:6).

"Catch us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, while our vineyards are in blossom" (2:15). Since obviously foxes eat grapes and not flowers, at first glance the verse seems to speak of a combination impossible in nature: there is at least a four month wait between the pollination of the grapevine flowers (between Passover and Shavuot) and the appearance of even semi-ripe fruit in July. The answer lies in the life cycle of many of Israel's animals. Most young are born in March when "the rains are over and gone," so that during the Counting of the *Omer* period they are still babies – "little." It therefore makes sense to "catch the foxes" while they are still young, when the vineyard is "in blossom," and so prevent the foxes from "ruining the vineyards" when they are bigger, months later when the grapes begin to ripen.

As you continue along the trail, you see the "Pool of the Shepherdess" and the "Shepherds' Stage" below on your right, where we hold special events relating to the Song of Songs and shepherding life.

STATION 9: MANDRAKE (163) – FERTILITY ENHANCER

"Once, at the time of the wheat harvest, Reuben came upon some mandrakes in the field and brought them to his mother Leah" (Genesis 30:14). All over its native growing regions of the Far East and the Mediterranean basin, the mandrake has been prized as a medicine for stimulating ardor and overcoming barrenness. The mandrake's root gave rise to the plant's sexual associations: it is disproportionately large in relation to the visible plant and shaped like the human male figure in all its particulars. The mandrake has vile-smelling leaves in winter and lovely lavender but unpleasant smelling flowers towards the end of winter. But as the mandrake fruit ripen (April-May), their fragrance spreads, attracting birds and animals. Around Shavuot (late May-early June), the season of the wheat harvest, it is very unusual to find mandrake fruit still in the field, hence the mention when Reuben came across the fruit.



"The mandrakes yield their fragrance, at our doors are all choice fruits, both freshly picked and long-stored have I kept, my beloved, for you" (Song of Songs 7:14). The wonderful fragrance of the mandrake fruit and its mention in the Song of Songs created a tradition among the Jews of Yemen to put mandrake fruit in the pockets of their Sabbath garments, while welcoming the Sabbath with the words: "Come my beloved, let us welcome the Sabbath bride." (The mandrake's Hebrew name, *dudaim*, comes from the same root as the Hebrew word for beloved, *dod*.)

STATION 10: IN THE SHADE OF THE REST AREA

To the right of the "Pool of the Shepherdess" is a large black tent. "I am dark and comely, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the pavilions of Solomon" (Song of Songs 1:5). And the shepherd says of his beloved, "Your head is like the Carmel" (7:6). On the slopes of this hill are planted a number of trees common to the Carmel forest, such as the yellow broom (197), strawberry tree (131), laurel (173), three-leafed sage (150), and others.

Between the rest area and the "Pool of the Shepherdess" are a number of pomegranate trees (132). Their flowers and fruit appear often in the Song of Songs. "Your cheeks are an orchard of pomegranates" (4:13). "Your parted lips behind your veil are like a pomegranate split open" (4:3, 6:7).

Look up to the hill to the west dotted with cedars of Lebanon. The shepherd calls his beloved: "From Lebanon come with me; from Lebanon, my bride, [come] with me" (4:8). The shepherdess describes her love as being "majestic as Lebanon, stately as the cedars" (5:15).

On the side of the hill to the right of the cedars are trees variously identified as *broshim* or *brotim*. It is generally accepted that the *brosh* is the juniper, a tree that was widely used in construction and manufacture. "The beams of our house are of cedar, the rafters of juniper" (Song of Songs 1:17).

STATION 11: WHY GO "DOWN" TO THE WALNUT GARDEN?

Before planting walnut saplings (162) in front and to the left of the rest area, we were warned that they would never grow in this hot area. But our reliance on the literal words of the Song of Songs, "I went down to the walnut garden..." (6:11), helped us select the correct habitat for them.

The shepherd must have had a reason for specifying "down." The walnut needs three conditions: deep soil, water, and a few nights of winter frost. Soil washes down into low places from the surrounding hills. Runoff rainwater from the hills provides moisture, which we supplement here with drip irrigation. And since hot air rises and cold air sinks, a cold pocket forms in this small valley, providing the winter frost (ensuring the total defoliation that is vital to spring growth). The walnut flowers in April and bears ripe nuts around October. In addition to being a very nutritious food, the walnut was used as a source of oil for light and cooking, as a source of brown dye, and its shells for fuel.

The walnut appears in numerous homilies in Talmudic literature. One dealing with the danger of climbing the walnut's slippery trunk is still appropriate to today's politicians: "Rabbi Levi said: The walnut is slippery and anyone who carelessly climbs to the top will fall down and die. In like manner, anyone who is an arrogant leader and does not weigh his manner of leadership will fail and get what he deserves" (Shir Hashirim Rabbah 6).

STATION 12: WHICH "APPLE"?

"Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the young men" (Song of Songs 2:3). What exactly is this apple tree? Probably not the cultivated apple, which cannot grow unintended "among the trees of the forest." More likely it is the hawthorn (125), which grows in Israel's natural forests and bears small, crabapple-like fruit in late summer. Other trees native to Israel's forests can be seen on the facing slope – terebinth (128), oaks (117, 127), storax (177), strawberry tree (131), phillyrea (wild olive) (130), and all sorts of shrubs.

On the way to Station 13, domesticated apple trees (124) were planted to the right of the trail to show the contrast between cultivated apples and forest trees that grow wild. The cultivation of apples was evidently widespread in Israel already in the days of the First Temple (10th- 6th c. BCE) as attested to by the Hebrew word for apple, "*tappuah*," appearing as a name for villages, towns, and even a region in the area allotted to the Tribe of Menasseh, "the region of Tappuah" (Joshua 17:8). The prophet Joel lists the apple as one of the orchard crops destroyed in the drought: "The vine has dried up, the fig tree withers, pomegranate, palm and apple – all the trees of the field are withered" (Joel 1:12).



STATION 13: ROSE ARBOR

This rose arbor was built with a gift from the sixth president of the State of Israel, Chaim Herzog, and his wife, Ora. Wild and domesticated rose bushes (123, 122) were planted in and around the arbor. Some Bible scholars identified "the 'shoshanah' among the thorns" (Song of Songs 2:2) as the rose because it grows on a thorny stem. Roses were cultivated from ancient times for their beauty, fragrance, and a dye manufactured from the roots. Although the rose (*vered* in Hebrew) is not mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures, there are many homilies about the rose in rabbinic literature.

ON THE WAY TO STATION 14

The shepherdess of the Song identifies herself as "the 'rose of Sharon,' (*havatzelet hasharon*) the 'lily of the valleys' (*shoshanat ha-amakim*)" (2:1). The identification of these two flowers has been debated for centuries. To which two flowers did "the fairest of women" (6:1) compare herself? We have planted some of the suggested candidates, which you can see blossoming, each in its season: the purple iris (201), the sand lily (160), and that most impressive flower, the Madonna lily (161), which is probably the flower that was carved into the capitals of the pillars in Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 7:19, 22).

STATION 14: THORNS

The cultivated field of thorns (120) are *חורח* *hoakh* (plural *חורחים* *hokhim*) that sprout in March after the winter rains, with yellow flowers appearing in June. The *hoakh* turns brown and then grayish white at the end of the summer. A prime candidate *שושנת העמקים* *shoshanat ha'amakim*, commonly translated as "lily of the valleys," is the narcissus (119).

"Like the narcissus among the *hokhim* (thorns), so is my beloved among the maidens" (2:2). Thus the shepherd in the Song describes his beloved. The narcissus and the *hoakh* thorn often share a common habitat. In December-January, when the narcissus blossoms, its gentle white beauty stands out among the tall white thorns — just as, in the eyes of her beloved, the shepherdess in the Song of Songs stood out among other women.

"Like a thorn in the hand of a drunkard, so is a proverb in the mouth of a fool" (Proverbs 26:9). Like the shepherd in the Song of Songs, the book of Proverbs employs the common habitat of narcissus and thorns to make a point. Reaching for the beautiful narcissus, the drunkard might end up with a sharp thorn plant in his hand, with painful results. Similarly, reaching for a proverb, the fool may painfully pick the wrong one.

IN THE SHARON FOREST

The young Tabor oaks (117) and white broom (103) are part of the "Sharon Forest" which, together with other trees and bushes, were part of the natural forests of the Sharon Valley in biblical times. Even in the days of King David, the Sharon was famous as a grazing area. David appointed "Shirtai the Sharonite" as a special minister "over the cattle pasturing in Sharon... And over the cattle in the valleys, Shaphat ben Adlai" (1 Chronicles 27:29).



Also growing here in the red sandy loam brought from the Sharon Valley is the Sharon tulip (159). Although commonly translated as "rose of Sharon," the *havatzelet hasharon* *תבצלת השרון* is most likely this bright reddish-orange flower that blooms towards the end of the rainy season in late February and March. (The Hebrew *תבצלת* *havatzelet* relates to the root *בצל* *batzal*, meaning onion or bulb, from which the tulip grows.)

STATION 15: THE LOVE STORY IN THE SONG OF SONGS

The tender love story of the Song of Songs is inseparable from Israel's landscapes. The season central to the Song begins with the bringing of the barley offering (the Omer) to the Temple in Jerusalem. This first grain was compared by the prophet Jeremiah to the first love between God and Israel: "I remember the unfailling devotion of your youth, the love of your bridal days, when you followed me in the wilderness, through an unsown land. Israel was holy to the Lord, the first fruits of His harvest, all who ate of it were punished" (Jeremiah 2:1-3).

Between Passover and Shavuot, Jews from all over Israel and beyond came to Jerusalem. Those who came on Passover brought the barley offering; those who came on Shavuot, the first offering of wheat. Those who were shepherds, like people from Gilead or the Sharon, would join the throngs of pilgrims after the winter rains and graze their flocks on the edge of the wilderness east of Jerusalem (an area that provides lush grazing at this time of year, especially after rainy winters). There, "by the tents of the shepherds" (1:8), they could stay and occasionally go down to the city filled with rejoicing throngs.

This background clarifies some of the descriptions found in the Song of Songs: The shepherdess arrives with her young sheep from the area of the Sharon forest. Outside Jerusalem, she meets the man of her dreams "leaping over mountains, bounding over hills" (2:8). He has arrived in Jerusalem from Gilead, with his flock of goats that came "streaming down Mount Gilead" (4:1). Such a meeting on the edge of the wilderness between pilgrims to Jerusalem can explain the shepherdess's request: "Tell me, you whom I love so well, where do you pasture your sheep? Where do you rest them at noon?" (1:7). She does not want to appear too forward, "as one who strays beside the flocks of your companions" (1:7), in her search for him. If he cannot be more specific, his instructions to her are: "If you do not know, O fairest of women, go follow the tracks of the sheep, and graze your kids by the tents of the shepherds" (1:8).

"She comes up from the desert, leaning upon her beloved" (8:5). The association with Jeremiah's "love of bridal days" (Jeremiah 2:2) is unavoidable, for that was when Israel "followed Me in the wilderness" (Jeremiah 2:2). But when the shepherdess enters Jerusalem, she loses track of her beloved amidst the crush of the throng and realizes that "I must...roam the town, through the marketplaces and through the streets; I must seek the one I love" (3:1). Her confrontation with the city authorities is not a happy one: "I met the watchmen who patrol the town; they struck me, they bruised me. The guards of the walls stripped me of my mantle" (5:7).

Who better than Rabbi Akiva, who kept the flame of love burning for his betrothed, Rachel, for 40 years, could understand the Song of Songs not only as a love poem between man and woman but as a dialogue between the people of Israel and the Creator. "If all the books of the Bible are holy, the Song of Songs is the holy of holies" (Mishna, Yadayim 3.5).

STATION 16: "MY DOVE..."

"My dove, in the cranny of the rock, in the recesses of the cliff..." (Song of Songs 2:14) The dove is widespread throughout the world and can be found all over Israel. It has been domesticated for over 5000 years for food and sacrifices.

A beautiful bird, the dove resembles the shape of the elongated human eye. It seeks shelter in the recesses of the cliff, just as the human eye is protected by the brow ridge. The dove is a symbol of fidelity and perfection: "Let me in, my own, my darling, my faultless dove" (5:2), says the shepherd, and she says of him, "His eyes are like doves by watercourses, bathed in milk..." (5:12).

STATION 17: THE TRAIL'S HARVEST

You have returned to a threshing floor, an appropriate place to summarize the "harvest" of this circular trail. You have seen the grain, wine, and oil that grace the Sabbath table as representatives of the major crops of ancient Israel. You have breathed in the fragrances of various spice plants, which, together with candlelight, remind us on Saturday night of the Temple menorah and the incense altar. You have seen how Israel's varied landscapes are deeply rooted in Jewish tradition, from the Hebrew Scriptures through rabbinic literature.

And you have seen that the Song of Songs is full of the life and color of a people making the pilgrimage to Jerusalem on Passover and Shavuot, surrounded by fields and blossoming vineyards in the agricultural areas, and by wild flowers and thickets in the grazing regions, all pervaded by the fragrance of the season's special perfume. The "bridal love" between the people and their God and between the people and their Land is expressed in all its radiant splendor in the Song of Songs, which remained "the holy of holies" in all the scattered communities of the Jewish people over thousands of years.



SELF-GUIDED TOUR

TRAIL B (BLUE) Distance: 2.5 km

How Israel's nature is reflected in the Sabbath traditions, in the symbols of the menorah, and in the Song of Songs.

Accessible to strollers and wheelchairs
The rebuilding of this trail for the needs of the handicapped was made possible with the support of The Kahanoff Foundation and the Ministry of Tourism, through the Israel Government Tourist Corporation.



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Much of the material in this guide is condensed from the books **Nature in Our Biblical Heritage** and **Tree and Shrub in Our Biblical Heritage** by Nogah Hareuveni, founder of Neot Kedumim. These books are on sale in the entrance gift shop at a special discount price.

