



The Collective Conversation

Weekly Torah Essays from the
Young Israel of Scarsdale Community



Pesach, Day 7

Shabbat Pesach

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The Romance of Pesach

By Steve Fredman

Megilat Shir HaShirim is customarily read during the course of Pesach. Ashkenazic custom is to read the *Megilah* on Shabbat of *Chol HaMoed*, while the Italian and Yemenite traditions are to read *Shir HaShirim* on the seventh day of *Pesach*. Happily, on years like the present one, when Shabbat and the seventh day of *Pesach* coincide, the book is read by all traditions on the same day.

Numerous reasons have been suggested as the basis of the tradition to read *Shir HaShirim* on Pesach. Rabbi David Abudarham, in his 14th-century commentary on Sephardic liturgy, notes the reference to the Beloved, that is, to Israel, as a beautiful mare in Pharaoh's fleet of chariots (Song of Songs 1:9), thereby linking *Shir HaShirim* to our redemption from Egypt.

Others, like Rabbi Yehuda Eisenstein in his early 20th century work, *Otzar Dinim u-Minhagim*, focus on the references in *Shir HaShirim* to seasonal change, linking these references to Pesach as *הג האביב*, the Festival of Spring. For example (Song of Songs 2:10-13),

Numerous reasons have been suggested as the basis of the tradition to read *ShirHa-Shirim* on Pesach ... the reference to the Beloved ... to seasonal change

קוּמִי לְךָ רַעֲיָתִי יָפְתִי וּלְכִי־לְךָ:

Arise, my darling; My fair one, come away!

כִּי־הִגָּה הַסֶּתִּיב [הַסֶּתִּיב] עָבַר הַגֶּשֶׁם חָלָף
הַלֵּךְ לֵךְ:

For now the winter is past, The rains are over and gone.

הַנִּצְּנִים נִרְאוּ בְּאֶרֶץ עֵת הַזְּמִיר הִגִּיעַ
וְקוֹל הַתּוֹר נִשְׁמַע בְּאֶרְצֵנוּ:

The blossoms have appeared in the land, The time of pruning has come; The song of the turtledove Is heard in our land.

קוּמִי לְכִי רַעֲיָתִי יָפְתִי וּלְכִי־לְךָ:

Arise, my darling; My fair one, come away!

On reflection, though, these words seem to create more than a mere seasonal linkage between the book and the holiday. The words of the Lover to his Beloved are a call to elope, to embark

on a lovers' journey. One need only refer to the words of the Prophets to see that the Lover's call to his Beloved is reflective of God's relationship to his People in the desert.

כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה זְכוּרְתִי לְךָ יְהוָה נְעוּרַיִךְ אֲהַבְתָּ כְּלוּלְתִּיךָ לְכַתֹּב אַחֲרַי בַּמִּדְבָּר בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא זְרוּעָה:
Thus said the LORD: I accounted to your favor The devotion of your youth, Your love as a bride— How you followed Me in the wilderness, In a land not sown.
(Jeremiah 2:2)

Similar expressions of the Exodus experience as an encounter between lovers, between groom and bride, can be found elsewhere in Jeremiah, as well as in Ezekial and Hosea. To quote Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, from his Passover *Machzor*,

The Exodus was more than a theological drama about the defeat of false gods by the true One, or a political narrative about slavery and freedom. It is a love story – troubled and tense to be sure – yet an elopement by bride and groom to the desert

The Exodus was more than a theological drama about the defeat of false gods by the true One, or a political narrative about slavery and freedom. It is a love story – troubled and tense to be sure – yet an elopement by bride and groom to the desert where they can be alone together, far out of sight of prying eyes and the distractions of civilization.

As Rabbi Sacks points out, when *Shir HaShirim* is read as a commentary to the Exodus, it spells out Jeremiah's message. God chose Israel because Israel was willing to follow Him into the desert, leaving behind Egypt for the insecurity of freedom in a land not sown, relying instead on the security of faith and the love of God.

As Pesach comes to an end, may *Shir HaShirim* inspire us to rededicate our relationship to God with passion and love.

Steve and Adina Fredman have been members of the Young Israel of Scarsdale since 1984 and were blessed to raise three children in this community. Their children, Sara and Robert Aeder, moved here in 2017. Steve has been immensely enjoying retired life for the past several years.

*Want to write or dedicate a Parsha essay?
Please contact Steve Smith at LivingTorahFund@gmail.com*

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