

Courtship at Passover

God's Courtship Begins with Israel at Passover

During the *Shabbat* of Passover week, it is customary to read the ancient “love song” of King Solomon called, *Shir Ha-Shirim*, or the “Song of Songs.” In Jewish tradition, since Passover marks the time when our “romance” with God officially began, the sages chose this song to celebrate God’s love for His people.

The Song is usually interpreted as an allegory of the love affair between God and His people. The Beloved (representing God) therefore says, “As a lily among the thorns, so is my love for you among the daughters,” and the maiden (representing God’s people) replies, “Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the young men. I delight to sit in his shade, and his fruit is sweet to my taste” (Song 2:2-3). The Jewish scholar Maimonides argued that the song was intended to teach about *ahavat HaShem*, the love of God... [Rabbi] Akiva is reported to have further said, “The whole world attained its supreme value only on the day when the Song of Songs was given to Israel” (*Mishnah Yadayim* 3:5). Rashi agrees and therefore states that all the references to King Solomon in the song refer to the LORD, the King of the Universe who creates peace in His high places. Soren Kierkegaard likens the Song to a parable about the disguise of love, the tender passion that is hidden so as to elevate the identity of the beloved.

Rashi interpreted the song as an allegory of a young and beautiful woman (the “Shulamite”) who becomes engaged to and then marries a king. However, sometime later, the woman became unfaithful to him, and the king then sent her into exile to live “as a widow.” Despite his heartache, the king’s love for her remained constant, and he secretly watched over her and protected her from “behind the shutters.” When she finally resolved to return and to be faithful to him alone, the king took her back, with a love that was fully restored. For Rashi, the Jewish people were “engaged” to God when He took them out of Egypt. At that time, Israel pledged love and loyalty to God alone at Sinai (a type of “*chuppah*” or marriage canopy), but later proved to be unfaithful, first with the sin of the Golden Calf, and then through subsequent acts of infidelity. Indeed, her infidelity proved to be so great that God reluctantly sent her into exile. According to Rashi, the opening verse, “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for your love is better than wine” (Song 1:2), is allegorically spoken by Israel in her exile, as she pines away for the former intimacy she once enjoyed with God.

I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine. He feeds his flock among the lilies. – Song of Solomon 6:3

Source: Hebrew4Christians.com, “*Shir Ha Shirim*”

https://hebrew4christians.com/Holidays/Spring_Holidays/Pesach/Song_of_Songs/song_of_songs.html