

BOOK LOOK

Writers have penned words of love throughout the centuries. Favorites in the English language include Shakespeare's sonnets and the poetry of Elizabeth Barrett Browning. The Italians often recite the love sonnets of the 14th century poet Petrarch. The words of 20th century Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore also come to mind.

Long before these poets graced the world with their romantic and passionate words of love, there was "The Song of Songs." Found in the Old Testament, the 117 verses of the "Songs" have provided lovers with some of the most passionate and lasting love poetry ever written.

The true meaning of their words, however, continues to be debated. Are the verses a celebration of romantic love or an allegory of divine love and redemption?

In a new book, *The Song of Songs: The Honeybee in the Garden*

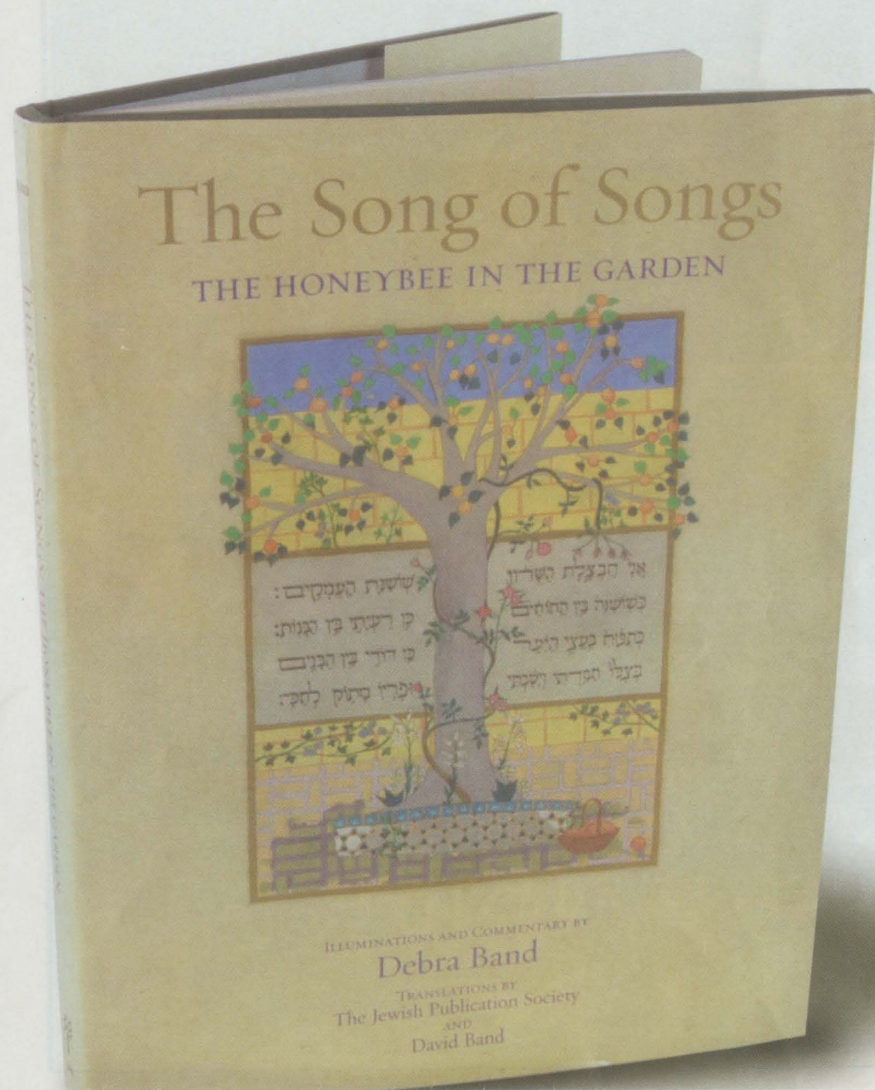
(Jewish Publication Society; \$75), author and artist Debra Band offers an illuminated work in which these two lines of interpretation are harmonized within a visual context:

Like "The Song of Songs" themselves, her lovely calligraphy, artwork and paper cuts are both literal and allegorical, sensuous as well as spiritual.

The 65 full-page illuminations in the book draw upon classic rabbinic texts and modern scholarship. The art is accompanied by the artist's interpretation of the images, and it includes the Bible text in its original Hebrew, next to translations by the Jewish Publication Society and the new David Band translation.

This new publication would make a lovely gift for weddings, anniversaries and other occasions celebrating romantic love. □

— Gail Zimmerman,
creative editor



Words of Love



*I went down to the walnut grove,
to see the fresh growth by the stream,
to see whether the fresh vines have flowered,
whether the pomegranates have budded.*

*Before I was aware,
she set me in a chariot beside my people's prince.*

— From “The Song of Songs 6:11-12,” translated by David Band;
illumination by Debra Band, from *The Song of Songs: The Honeybee in the Garden*

“The man exults in the pleasure he finds with his lover,” writes Debra Band, in explaining her artwork accompanying these two verses.

“The crown-shaped painting shows the garden at dawn. Behind the curtains shielding the bed, the bedcover and the woman’s blue and gold cloak have fallen to the floor. Walnuts and brilliant pomegranate blossoms have dropped onto the crumpled cloth. A candle stub still smokes as the faint dawn light dapples the dark tiles with the shadows of the garden’s greenery.”

אֶל-עֵינַי אֵנִי יוֹדֵת לְרֹאשׁ בְּאֵבֵי הַגֶּחַל
לְרֹאשׁ הַפְּרֻחַ הַגֶּפֶן הַנֶּצוּ הַרְמִיָּם:
לֹא יָדַעַת נַפְשִׁי שֶׁמִּתְנִי מִרְפָּבוֹת עִמִּי נֶדְיָב: