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New books, music celebrate Pesach

By Lyn Payne
Associate Editor

Passover comes late this year, so you've got some time to study that Haggadah before the seder. There's a new book that I've found especially helpful—"Leading the Passover Journey: The Seder's Meaning Revealed, the Haggadah's Story Retold" by Rabbi Nathan Laufer (Jewish Lights, 2005) is a wonderful book for seder leaders and for anyone else curious about the reasons and the stories behind our most beloved yearly ritual. Rabbi Laufer literally "dissects" the order of the seder (whose very name means "order") and the story of the Haggadah. He gives the Hebrew for the important parts of the seder, with an English translation and thorough explanation. Along the way, he tells fascinating stories about why and how we came to incorporate so many seemingly disparate elements into one holiday. After reading his book, I now have a much more comprehensive idea of what I'm doing every year, and a more thorough understanding of how everything fits together. This book is so easy to use, in fact, that when four of us in my adult Hebrew class sat around after the lesson singing "Mah Nishtana" and we all forgot one of the words to the second question, we flipped quickly to the index of Rabbi Laufer's book, found the part we needed, and joyfully finished singing all four parts. The book is enjoyable and accessible, yet filled with information interesting enough that my rabbi liked it, too. Who could ask for anything more?

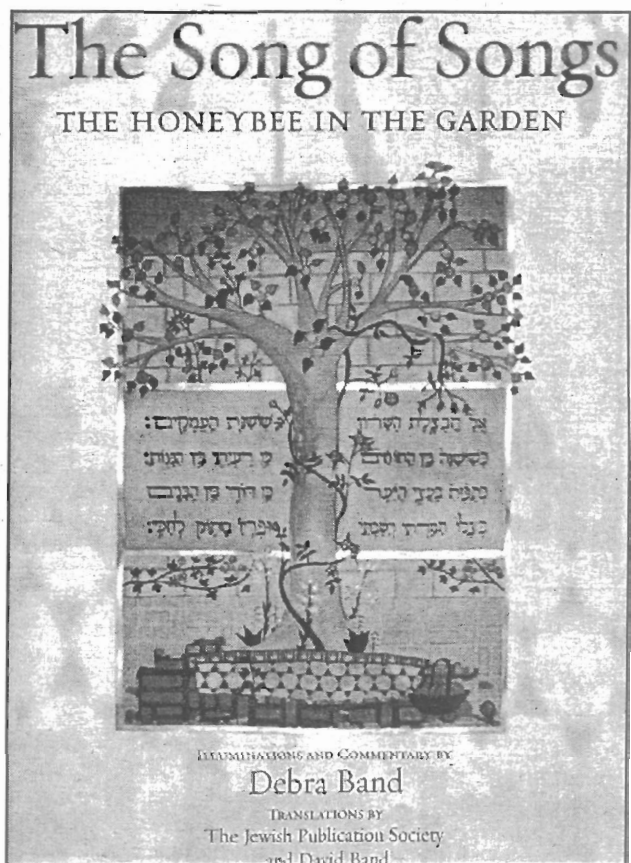
If you're looking for a beautiful Pesach-related book to give as a gift, or just to love forever as a piece of treasured art in your home, get the extravagantly beautiful "The Song of Songs: The Honeybee in the Garden," published by the Jewish Publication Society, and containing some of the most gorgeous illuminated paintings I've ever seen. The art is by Debra Band, whose husband, David Band, also contributes poetic new translations of the verses to accompany the original Hebrew and the traditional JPS English text.

This lovingly produced volume contains 65 full-page illuminations and beautifully crafted papercuts. The illuminations draw upon classic rabbinic texts and modern scholarship, creating both visual beauty and a new visual midrash on this beloved poetry.

This work has been acclaimed a masterpiece by scholars and art-lovers around the world. I can't even describe to you the beauty of this art—the depth of the blue used as the background in one scene is of such a cobalt richness that you can literally fall into the page.

You could give this book as a gift for a wedding, an anniversary, or just to honor a special person, but also remember that the "Song of Songs" is the scroll traditionally associated with Passover, and is especially meaningful at this time of year.

If you need some new music for the season, you need "Celebrate Passover," produced by Craig Taubman and published by Sweet Louise Music. It's



part of the "Celebrate" series of Jewish holiday music, and features both traditional and contemporary arrangements by artists such as Debbie Friedman, Linda Hirschhorn, Safam, and Dana Mase. The musicianship is first-quality, and the individual pieces add up to a collective retelling of the Passover story. "Motherless Child" by Shlomo Gronich and the Sheba Choir is especially moving. This year, after I've cleaned my closets and hoisted my chametz over to Jewish Family Services (see page 1), and am ready to drop with exhaustion, I know I'll be listening to the beautiful sounds of this CD

to get me back in the mood to enjoy the holiday. Highly recommended for that pre-Passover burnout.