



ART & CALLIGRAPHY BY DEBRA BAND; SCANS COURTESY JEWISH PUBLICATION SOCIETY

Band's new Song

"The Song of Songs: The Honeybee in the Garden," a new illuminated Hebrew manuscript of the Biblical love poem, has local roots – literally.

While illustrating the book in the late '90s, Debra Band wanted to draw a pomegranate blossom. Not having a clue what one looked like, she planted a pomegranate tree in her yard in University City. That effort bore fruit; after more than a decade of research and illustration, Band will be showing original art from her book at the Lawrence Family JCC from May 4-22.

"The Song of Songs" is one of the most beloved – and strangest – books of the Bible. It is a collection of short love poems between two idealistic lovers. It is seemingly devoid of theology. But for centuries rabbinic scholars have interpreted it as an allegory for the passionate love between God and Israel.

Whatever the case, Band's monumental new book beautifully captures the sensual spirit of "The Song of Songs." At times, Band's Hebrew calligraphy seems so caught up in the poems' passion that it weaves itself around red roses or cascades alongside a billowing blue cloak.

The book includes two English translations of "The Song of Songs," including a new one by Debra's husband David, as well as a summary of rabbinic commentary on the poems. While Debra no longer lives in San Diego, she did most of her research for the book here, studying commentaries on "The Song of Songs" under Rabbi Jeff Wohgelernter at Congregation Adat Yeshurun in La Jolla for five years.

"[Song of Songs] is in the culture but other than when it's read on Pesach, it's not something you encounter in its entirety very often," Debra says. "I hope this will encourage people to be more aware of it, and to love it."

The three samples showcase verses (clockwise from L) from the first, fourth and seventh chapters of "The Song of Songs."