

# A Passover Song of Songs

BY DVORA WAYSMAN

Every Passover, on the Sabbath that falls during the Festival, we read "The Song of Songs" at the end of the Morning Service. According to Jewish tradition, King Solomon was the author of this beautiful and erotic love poem.

Consisting of 117 verses, it is a series of lyrical love songs, expressing the delights and anguish of love. Although rich in sensual imagery, it is never coarse or vulgar. The story is simple: an exquisite young Shulamite has been sold by her brothers to the ageing Solomon and made the favorite of his harem. Yet she longs for her youthful shepherd lover. It is filled with extravagant and lavish praise for the physical attributes of the young lovers:

The rounding of thy thighs are like the links of a chain,  
The work of the hands of a skilled workman.  
Thy navel is like a round goblet,  
Wherewith no mingled wine is wanting;  
Thy belly is like a heap of wheat  
Set about with lilies.  
Thy two breasts are like two fawns  
That are twins of a gazelle.

"The Song of Songs" belongs to the same literary genre as Arabic love poetry. It is unique in the Bible being the only example of such passionate expressions of sexual love and occupied with that one theme. God's name is not mentioned even once, and no morals are drawn.

There are two interpretations of "The Song of Songs" - literal and allegorical. The rabbis of the 1st century C.E. suppressed the literal interpretation and promoted the poem as an allegory in which the love of God for His people was expressed. The lover, under the guise of King Solomon or the young shepherd, was recognized as God, and His beloved was Israel.

Thus a poem which seemed devoid of any religious connotations was transformed into a vehicle for expressing a deep spiritual relationship. Rabbi Akiva admonished: 'He who trills his voice in the chanting of "The Song of Songs" in the banquet - halls and makes it a secular song, has no share in the world to come' (Sanh. 12:10). He added: 'All the Writings are holy, but "The Song of Songs" is the Holy of Holies.'

During the 18th century C.E., the view arose that it was a drama, complete with characters, a plot and a moral. The leading characters were, of course, Solomon and the Shulamite. Then there arose a 3 - character version, with Solomon vying with the shepherd for the maiden's love. But history does not bear out this theory, for the Jews of antiquity produced no dramas and opposed them on religious grounds.

No matter what interpretation is given to them, the verses remain among the most beautiful ever written. Today, the predominant trend in modern scholarship is to accept "The Song of Songs" literally as a collection of lyrical love songs. But even in this context, it is redeemed in the eyes of the religious by the fact that love, in all its manifestations, is the work of the Divine Creator.

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his

mouth; for thy love is better than wine. Because of the savour of thy good ointments thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee.

Draw me, we will run after thee; the king hath brought me into his chambers: we will be glad and rejoice in thee, we will remember thy love more than wine: the upright love thee.

I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon....

My beloved is unto me as a cluster of henna - flowers in the vineyards of Ein-ge-di. Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold thou art fair....

## VATICAN MEETS WITH PLO

NEW YORK (WNS) -- Criticism continued here of the meeting held at the Vatican by Cardinal Augustine Casaroli, the Vatican's Secretary of State with Farouk Kaddoumi, head of the Palestine Liberation Organization's political department. The criticism was coupled with a warning that such incidents threaten Jewish-Christian relations.

A letter protesting the meeting was sent to Msgr. Jorge Mejia of the Vatican's Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity, by the National Christian Leadership Conference for Israel, a coalition of Protestant and Catholic clergy and laity who seek to foster understanding and support for Israel in the United States.

"By officially receiving those who vowed to add one more horrible chapter to the long history of Jewish suffering, the Church -- we believe -- nourishes fear among our Jewish and Christian brethren that once again Christians will forsake them at a critical moment in their history," the Leadership Conference said. "In light of past experience

such sentiments are all too understandable"

The letter was signed by Dr. Frank H. Littell, president of the Leadership Conference; Sister Rose Thering, vice president; Rev. William Barter, secretary-treasurer and Rev. Isaac Rottenberg, executive director.

The American Jewish Congress also expressed concern that Casaroli's meeting with Kaddoumi was part of an emerging pattern of Church actions that threaten a deterioration of relations between the Church and Jews.

"With the election of John Paul II (as Pope), a witness to the destruction of European Jewry, we were deeply hopeful that the Catholic Church would be more responsive to the depth of Jewish suffering and the necessity to prevent a recurrence of such crimes against the Jewish people," Henry Siegman, executive director of the AJC said. "The meeting with the PLO follows a number of developments in recent months, including a hostile reference to Jewish ethics in the recent Encyclical which have gone far to undermine this hope."

TEL AVIV (WNS) -- Eliahu Ben-Elissar, Israel's first Ambassador to Egypt, returned home after resigning to allow him to run for a Knesset seat in the June 30 election. Under Israel's election law, would-be candidates serving in the civil service, the army or the police must resign at least 100 days before the election.

## BEGIN MEETS WITH IRISH DEFENSE MINISTER

JERUSALEM (WNS) -- The Defense Minister of Ireland, Sylvester Barrett, met with Premier Menachem Begin to discuss the tense situation in South Lebanon. Barrett is urging Israel to use its influence to restore calm to the region and cooperate with United Nations peace-keeping forces.

Barrett's visit comes following a confrontation between United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL) commanded by General William Callaghan of Ireland and the Christian forces in south Lebanon led by Maj. Saad Haddad who is supported by Israel.

Begin told Barrett that Israel desires to cooperate with UNIFIL and does its best to restrain Haddad. However, Begin said he could not tell him what to do.

According to Begin, the source of trouble in south Lebanon is in reaction to the aggressive behavior on the part of the Palestine Liberation Organization which enjoys direct support from the Soviet Union. Begin also said that the clash between UNIFIL and Haddad stemmed from the dispatch of Lebanese army regulars to the south, a move supported by UNIFIL but opposed by Haddad as a threat to his authority in the region.

## GOLD BROTHERHOOD AWARD



NEW YORK -- DR. DAVID HYATT (LEFT), PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CHRISTIANS AND JEWS, PRESENTS HIS ORGANIZATION'S NATIONAL MASS MEDIA GOLD BROTHERHOOD AWARD TO BRANDON STODDARD, PRESIDENT, ABC-TV MOTION PICTURES FOR THEIR TELEVISION NOVEL "MASADA."

NEW YORK (WNS) -- The 60 - year - old synagogue of Congregation Mishkan Israel in the Astoria section of Queens was gutted by a fire in late March. The Astoria Center of Israel, a Conservative synagogue next to the destroyed Orthodox synagogue, was extensively damaged but the 300 - family congregation planned to hold services in the building. Fire Department Lt. Michael Kimchak termed the fire of suspicious origin.

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