

**Freedom to Love**  
**The Song of Songs in Biblical, Rabbinic, Mystical, and Modern Perspectives**

A four -part series on Shir HaShirim with Rabbi Jonah Steinberg, PhD.  
Assistant Professor of Rabbinics, Associate Dean  
Rabbinical School of Hebrew College

Dates: April 8, 15, 29 and May 6

Where: Temple Shalom of Newton

Time: 10:00 am to noon

The series is co-sponsored by MBR and Oraita

\$50.00 for members of MBR; \$75.00 for non-members

**Description of Series:** The biblical Song of Songs is a vivid and sensual book that challenges ancient boundaries and defies traditional constraints. On the other hand, the interpretive tradition around the Song of Songs has enabled the book to be a mainstay of Jewish tradition for centuries. In these four linked sessions, incorporating a rich array of sources, we will explore the Song of Songs in its biblical context; in classical rabbinic interpretations; in the Jewish mystical tradition; and in present-day readings.

**Session One - The Song of Songs in its Biblical Context**

We consider the Song of Songs next to other biblical texts, establishing that the Song of Songs knowingly challenges the religious and cultural norms of its own time of origin. We look at the book in and of itself, as sensual and daring love poetry, and we also see that the transformation of such poetry into religious allegory begins within the Bible itself, in the prophetic tradition.

**Session Two - The Song of Songs in Classical Rabbinic Interpretation**

We explore the classical midrashic tradition surrounding the Song of Songs. We see how rabbinic tradition reinvents the Song of Songs as poetry of religious covenant with God, celebrating Jewish endurance and even martyrdom as expressions of spiritual love. We see that rabbinic interpretation of the Song of Songs creates its own distinctive and soulful poetry, inspired by the biblical book, while on the other hand being quite prosaic and much less romantic about worldly love among men and women.

**Session Three - The Song of Songs in the Medieval Jewish Mystical Tradition**

Passion, sensuality, and even eroticism emerge anew in the interpretation of the Song of Songs by Jewish mystics, albeit in terms of the allegorical interpretation. We explore the theme of spiritual passion and arousal of the soul as inspired by the Song of Songs, and we also consider the ways in which such mystical experience relates to the world of physicality and to actual relationships among human beings.

**Session Four - The Song of Songs in Present-Day Readings**

From William Blake to Kate Bush, the Artscroll Siddur to Sinead O'Connor, the Parvarim to Ilana Pardes, Judy Chicago, and the world of Collegiate Jewish a Capella music, we explore echoes and interpretations of the Song of Songs in the poetry, scholarship, activism, religion, graphic art, and song of more recent times. We see the wide range of spiritual and sociological agendas that find inspiration in this ancient legacy of audacious love-poetry.