

Portraits 2 - The left Panel: Israel and Canada



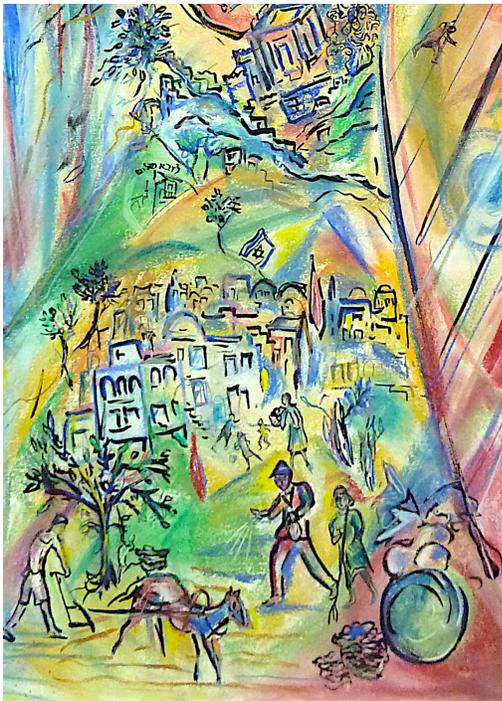
Last week I spoke about the family history of the Kadish-Epsteins and discussed the panel on the right side, of Eastern Europe and South Africa. Now we look at the panel on the left side with Israel and Canada. How are these two very different countries connected in one drawing? By symbols and colors, and of course by inserting details about members of the families. The two panels (Eastern

Europe/South Africa and Israel/Canada) are connected: the colors of the railway-station fade into the blue of the sky over the desert with Avraham's tent, and the beach merges with the Jewish house in the bottom right corner. An angelic figure is placed half in the first panel and half in the second while reaching towards the shabbos candles. Whether a family is religious or more secular, shabbos candles and heirloom candlesticks have played an important symbolic role in



most family histories, and they will likely continue to do so in modern times. The right side of the drawing displays symbols of a Jewish family filled with light and hope, like shabbos candles, and a house made of books (at the bottom of the drawing), the epitome of Jewish life. It is wide open for guests, inside sits a family around a table decked with many plates and cups. A chandelier, symbol of light and warmth, showers them with a golden glow. The side of the house is supported by a *tzedakah* (charity) box.

Between the candles and the house the Biblical host Avraham Avinu serves food for his guests (Bereshit 18:1-15). Avraham took the best calf from his flock, he was known for his outstanding hospitality. The guests were messengers announcing Avraham that he will have a son in his old age, thus securing the continuation of his family. Much later he receives a divine promise that his offspring will be as numerous as the stars and the sand near the sea (Bereshit 22:17). Hidden behind a flap of her tent, Avraham's old and barren wife Sarah observes the visiting angels, and laughs at their incredible prediction. But after a year her son Yitzchak is born. His name means "he laughs." Yitzchak in turn gets children, who get children, and the Jewish people live on till this day. They thrive and flourish despite wars and troubles, like "a tree planted at streams of water" (Tehillim 1:3), which in this case refers as well to Leon and Jocelyn who live in Toronto: the Iroquois Indian name Toronto means "A place where trees are standing in the water."

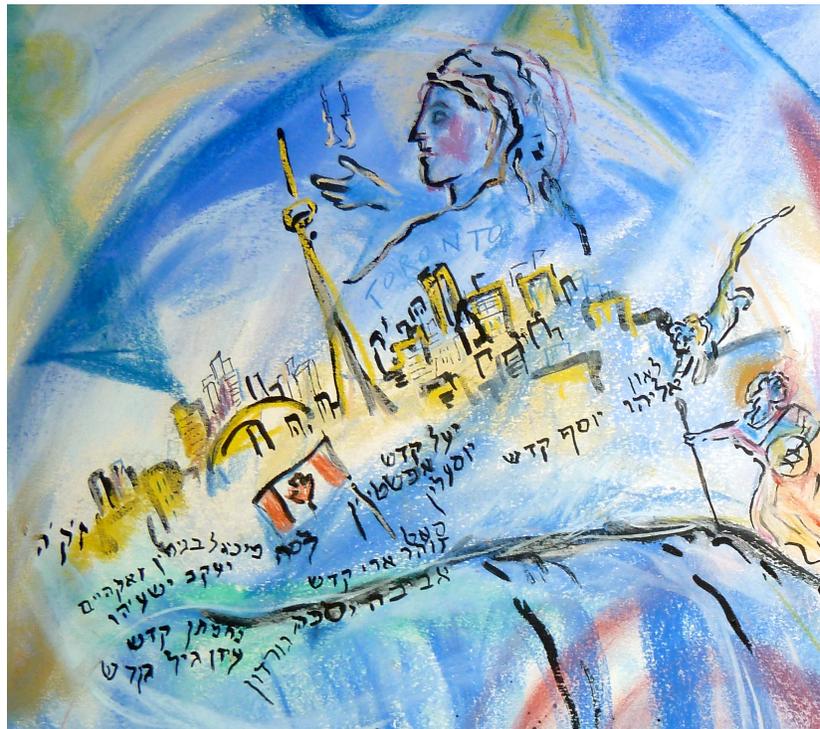


Avraham is the symbol of the Jewish nation. HaShem commanded him to pack up his family, leave his country of residence and move to the country which HaShem would show him, that is Israel, (Bereshit 12:1-3). According to the Midrash his righteous wife Sarah, who followed him on his dangerous and complicated journeys, was rewarded for this act by having a Divine cloud hover over her tent, in which shabbat lights and challah never cease to be. This tent was later given to her son Yitzchak's wife, Rivkah, because a family continues by its traditions. The stories of the Torah are timeless, hence the biblical characters in this work of art wear ancient garb but are anachronistically seated on modern chairs at a modern table. Avraham and Sarah in this panel are, of course, an allusion to Avraham Epstein and Sarah Zuchawitzky, who moved from Eastern Europe to Kfar Saba in Israel, and were among the founders of its modern Jewish community.

In the middle of the drawing King David plays his harp and composes his Tehillim (Psalms), which the Jews have taken with them into *galuth* (exile) after being exiled from their own country for a few millennia. They are their songs of joy, hope, sadness and support, and connect Jews in every country and continent. The musical notes are dancing in the strings, like little people. Over David's shoulder stands the Etz Chayim, the Tree of Life: this is the Torah which every king is obligated to keep with him (*melekh we-torato*, Devarim 17:18) in order to rule as a righteous king. In the middle of the panel, under king David,

stands the Beth haMikdash (Temple) in Jerusalem. It was built by his son Shelomoh because David was too involved in warfare for such a holy task. One can achieve great accomplishments in times of trouble, but greater things happen in times of peace. Right below this scene, near the tree, are the outlines of the Luba Slome Dental Clinic, established in her honor by her son Bennie Slome in the Bukharan Quarter in Jerusalem. The section under the Temple shows the State of Israel: fragrant green hills which are cultivated by ploughing and sowing Jewish farmers. Israel has white houses and many playing children, an abundant harvest of big grapes and olives and other wonderful fruits and plants. An Israeli flag waves proudly over the town. The Star of David in the flag appears in the sky as well as in prismatic lines around King David, it is our "Shield of David", our protection. Jocelyn's mother Zelma (Slome) Epstein lives in Herzlia in Israel and has Israeli (great-)grandchildren. Between "Israel" and "Canada" on the left side of King David is a scene of *matan torah*, the Giving of the Torah on Har Sinai. Moshe Rabbenu receives the two Tablets of the Law. Matan Torah refers to the son of Leon and Jocelyn, Noah Matan. The joy of the people in the Israeli town refers their son Eden (Idan Gil, which means "era" and "joy"), and the lion surrounded by a glow to their son Seth (Zohar which means splendor, glow - Ari, lion). Several children bear names of ancestors from Eastern Europe, other names refer to the tranquility and the "paradise" (Eden) the parents were seeking in South Africa. The name of the daughter-in-law Arielle (Aviva Yiska) is connected to the family through Yiska, which is another name for Sarah (Bereshit 11:29).

The left side of the panel shows the Niagara Falls and the skyline of the Canadian city **Toronto** with its skyscrapers, the CN Tower and the Toronto Blue Jays Baseball Club. A Canadian flag with a maple leaf is proudly raised over the city. The fish don't only allude to all the water near Toronto, like Lake Ontario, but also indicate agility, *panta rhei*, everything flows. The female face with the candlesticks symbolizes the memories embedded in the family genes which are carried along, even when the family physically lands in a peaceful place with tranquil waters (pun intended, nobody would call the Niagara Falls quiet).



Leon and Jocelyn now live in Toronto, and most of their children were born here (Lisa was born in South Africa). The family found a home, but Jewish families being Jewish families, nobody



knows where their children and grandchildren will live eventually. Even in tranquil times one has to be prepared, which is expressed in the *pasuk* (the verse from Tenakh beginning and ending with the first and last letter of one's name) for Lisa: "For David, Blessed is Hashem my Rock, Who teaches my hands battle, my fingers war," Tehillim 144:1. One should not be belligerent, but be aware of what could happen and be prepared, even for battle. The symbol for Lisa is the woman-warrior under the lion. Jewish women have stood up and saved their people, like Devorah and Yehudit. The warrior lunges forward but looks backward, because we always learn lessons from our past.

Leon (Eliyahu Yosef) Kadish and Jocelyn (Yael) Epstein's names appear around the city skyline, together with their children and their children's spouses: Michael Benjamin Zackheim with Lisa (Lisa) Kadish (Kodesh) and their son Jacob (Ya'akov -named after his grandfather-Yeshayahu), Seth (Zohar Ari Kodesh) Kadish with Arielle (Aviva Yiska)

Gordon, Noah (Noach Matan) Kadish, and

Eden (Idan Gil) Kadish. The little lion refers to Leon Kadish. The acronym *z'q'h'* at the far left stands for *zera' qodesh hem*, "a holy seed are they," meaning the descendants of martyrs. This refers both to the name Zackheim (from *z-q-hem*), the family name of Lisa's spouse, and to the fact that the Jews not only survived pogroms and persecutions, but spread out and ended up in the New World to live there in peace and quiet. The graveyard on the far right in the first panel is reduced in Canada to memorial letters; it is for now far away, but certainly not forgotten.



The story on the panels ends here, but goes on in real life. So, summarized, what does an artist have to do when he or she takes a commission to make a family piece like this?

First, one must be able to handle genealogy and preferably be able to read and interpret documents in different languages, like Yiddish and Russian, or know somebody who can. The family in my panels offered a lot of information and documents (which they weren't always able to read), but in other cases the artist must do (more) research.

Second, one must research the locations mentioned in the family papers. For this the Internet is a great help. It enables the artist to see, for instance, photos of Riga or Vilna in the twenties of the last century, or monuments and cityscapes which do not change, like Edinburg, for which I simply used Google-maps.

Third, one has to make a connection between names or locations and their biblical or Jewish counterparts, symbols, and references, and then organize them in a coherent composition which is pleasing to the eye. One must match the mood of the place with certain colors. For instance, Israel is golden, Eastern Europa has a lot of red, the sea journeys are blue, like water.

And last but not least, is important to make a nice description, because people like that.

So as we see, creating this kind of family portrait is very different from portraits of just one person, or just a few people.

The next blog will leave the portraits for a while and discuss Pesach.

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