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Tisha BeAv
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We are "in the nine days" preceding Tisha BeAv, which commemorates the two times in history that Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed—the first time by the Babylonians in 586 BCE and the second time by the Romans in 70 CE. After the first destruction, ten of the twelve Jewish Tribes were exiled from the Northern Kingdom of Israel. According tradition, they ended up behind the legendary River Sambatyon, which flows six days a week but stops on Shabbat. Despite searches, these tribes have never been found back, although a remnant of the Jewish people returned form this first Exile and rebuilt the Temple. Some say the Ten Tribes assimilated with the populations that surrounded them. After the second time the Temple and Jerusalem were destroyed, the remainder of the Jews —in the Southern Kingdom, Judea— were sent into the so-called Great Exile which lasts until our day and will be terminated when Moshiach brings back the Jews from all four corners of the Earth to Israel. We already have a state, barukh HaShem, but no Temple yet and many of us are still in exile. We, the current Jewish

population, are descendants of those Jews who survived the Roman siege in 70 BC. The "Nine Days" are gloomy and filled with mourning. One does not listen to music, buy new clothes, conduct weddings, or get engaged in other happy activities. But an artist has to paint, also during the nine days. I get inspired to make art about the Great Galut and figure that many of my fellow artists do the same. Unfortunately, our long Jewish history does not lack sad stories of expulsion and Exile.

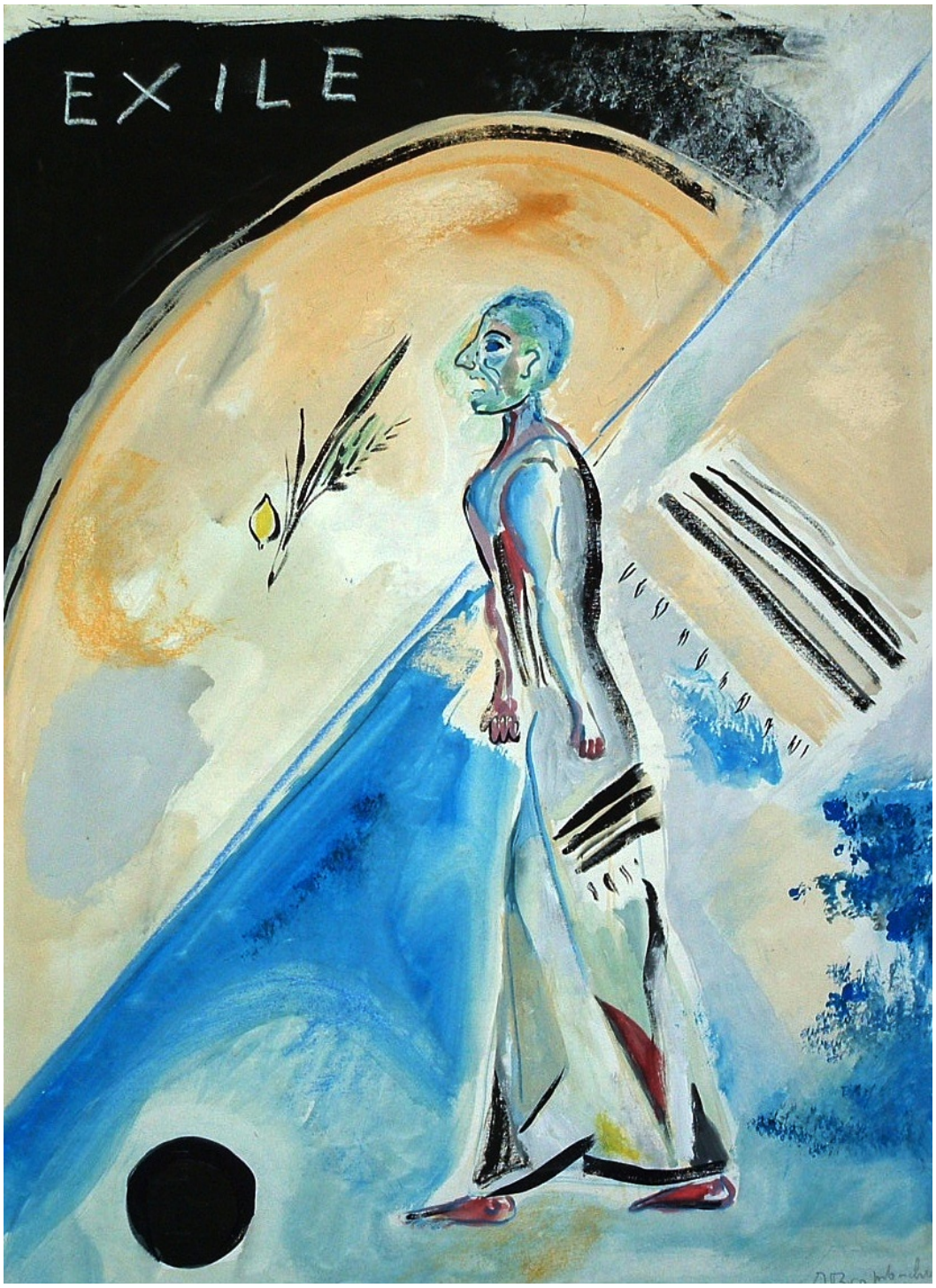
Let me show you some of my work that is related to this theme. In some of my drawings, I show the main theme of Tisha BeAv, Jerusalem on fire, but usually in the context of a broader story, like in this drawing of the Tribe of Shim'on on page 1. It belongs to a series that depicts the connection between the Jewish Tribes and their founding fathers, the sons of Yaakov, with the mazalot (zodiac signs) and the Jewish months, as described in the *Zohar*.[1] Shimon's Tribe is connected with the month of Av, when two Temples went up in flames, and with the sign of Leo, the lion. Above the Temple—in the bottom left corner—priests throw the keys of the Tempel-gates up in despair and implore HaShem to take care of His house, because they are not able to in the flames. Such small, but significant, details give a drawing depth and make it more dramatic. The other details in the drawing are

[1] See https://absolutearts.academia.edu/Brombacher

connected with other days of the month of Av, which falls outside the scope of this blog. You can read about them in the article mentioned in the footnote.

The second and third drawings (page 2) are less detailed. They show a mourning figure and the word Eikha ("how," on the left) and al eleh ("About these," on the right), which are, respectively, the name of Jeremiah's scroll describing the sack of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in all its terrible details, which is read on Tisha BeAv, and the title of a sad kinah (mourning poem) for that day. In the past, I have created drawings for four of the five so-called Megillot—Song of Songs, Ruth, Kohelet, and Esther—but refrained from illustrating the fifth one, Eikhah (Lamentations), because the heinous details repelled me.

The following three works on page 3, 4, and 5 show the outcome of the destruction of the city: the expulsion of its inhabitants. "Exile" is depicted as a woman being driven from home and hearth with a sack with the meager belongings she could save on her back, only one Shabbat candlestick, which is turned upside down in mourning, and a downcast face. She is not weeping but accepts her fate, because there is no other choice. The letter gimel stands for Galut, Exile. This has been worked out further in the drawing and oil-painting on page 4 and 5. In the drawing, an emaciated and tortured figure, reminiscent of Holocaust art, walks in an empty universum between a tallit and a lulav, symbols of tradition and the bond with haShem (the tallit with its tzitzit, fringes) and of hope (the lulav). The plant-bundle symbolizes the prophetic promise that



the Temple will be rebuilt and the Jews will go up again to Jerusalem to celebrate the biblical Festivals. Sukkot was a big and splendorous festival in the time of the Temple. The lulav and ethrog are often found in Jewish art as a symbol of hope. The empty universe surrounding the figure striding stiffly, with clenched fists and a frozen scream after the horrors he (or she) witnessed during ages of Exile, is

composed of black, with a black sun, but also cerulean blue and golden yellow. In this empty universe, Jews have to reinvent themselves in the post-Temple era, in which they—fortunately— succeeded.

The oil-painting, however, shows no such blue but a black and bleak sky surrounding a field in the shape of the Tablets of the Law with the yellowish-white color of an old, woolen tallit. Here, too, is a black sun, in addition to the graves of the ancestors which the exiled have to leave behind with a heavy heart. Their visible footsteps symbolize their lost history and their old lives. The exiled woman shows more than two legs under her garment. These are the children she can take

with her and of those she had to leave behind, dead, memories. Her soul —the blue head— cries out to the Heavens, but she maintains a stony face. In front of her she sees the letters of the word Galut (Exile) but over her head is a symbol of hope, the lulav.

The small painting on page 6 was made for the book about Avraham Abulafia, which I have discussed in earlier columns. It does not depict the abstract concept of Galut, like the works mentioned above, but one of the many events in history of Jews being cruelly expelled from the country where they had lived for a long time. In this particular case, we see exiled Jews being forced out of Sicily by the Spanish king in 1492. The Jewish community of Sicily is old. Some of its members are descendants of those exiled from Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 BC, who found refuge on this isle in the Mediterranean. Men, women and children are leaving the city of Catania and its famous fish market near the Jewish Quarter with sacks on their back and tears in their eyes. I painted the fish market as it looks now, in the twenty-first century, because we should feel as if the exile of a group of Jews that happened more than five-hundred years ago happens to us, now. We have seen the same faces and the same children clinging to their mothers' skirts on too many occasions.

But must all art for Tisha BeAv be sad and mournful? Isn't it quasi obligatory for Jews to have hope, as in the national anthem of Israel, Hatikvah, and look forward at the future? Therefore, the last two images in this blog are of a different nature. The pastel drawing on page 7 is based on a phrase from the prayerbook which quotes Berakhot 64a: "Do not read your children (banayikh) but your builders (bonayikh)," meaning that Torah scholars bringing peace to the world will hasten messianic times and the ultimate Redemption. Children praying at the

Kotel, the remnant of the destroyed Temple, add the beginning word(s) of a prayer to each stone, and already the Temple is visible behind the wall. One of the prophets who predicted this rebuilding is present to the left, and King David sings his praise over the scene. The blood-red color which initially symbolized fire now announces the dawn of hope.

The last drawing shows the words ani ma'amin (I believe), which initiates each of the Thirteen Principles of Faith of Rambam (Maimonides) found in every siddur. In this case, it refers to the twelfth principle about the coming of moshiach and the messianic era of peace.

I wish you all a meaningful fast and mourning, and inspiration to turn you feelings into art.

Shoshannah Brombacher, Canada, August 2019

Shoshannah Brombacher PhD is a Dutch artist living in New York. She will regularly add articles to this blog. You can reach her at her Facebook page or at shoshbm@gmail.com.