

Shoshannah Brombacher, PhD — Adar 1

בס"ד



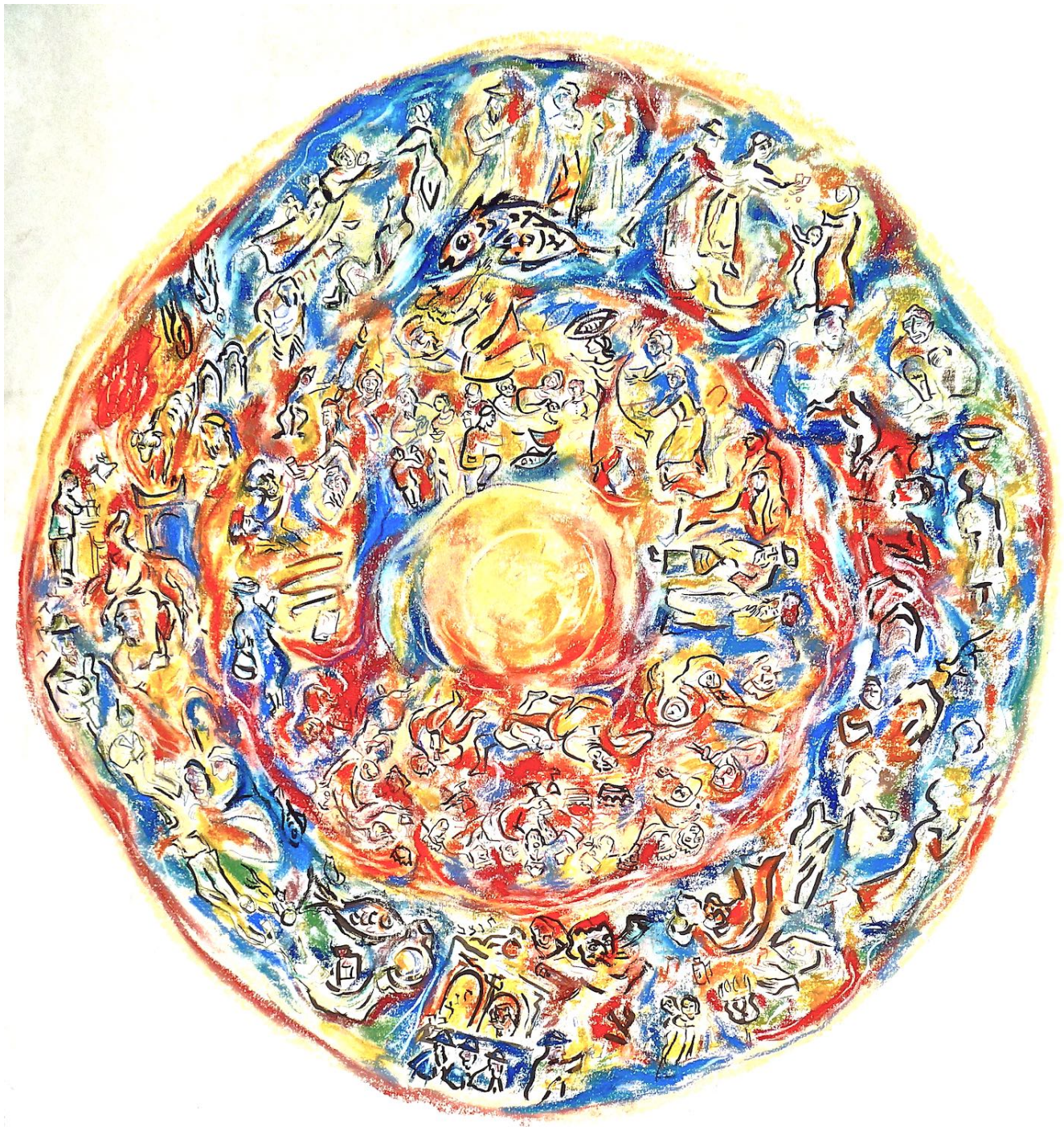
I once made a circle drawing for a calendar, the month of Adar 1. This is a month full of symbolism like a pomegranate with seeds. I started with this sketch, like all the oftener artwork shown in this article in India ink and pastel on paper:



Then I made a second sketch:



And after that created this drawing:



Adar 1 is the month of Purim and of transformations and *gilgulim*. This is displayed in the artwork in a plethora of forms and shapes.

The nucleus of the circle shows a group of people reading the Megillah, which winds itself around in a circle. Purim is the main focus of this month and the Megillah reading is the most important mitzvah of Purim.

The orbit around the nucleus shows impoverished, poor, and rich people mingling like fish in a river, either receiving or to giving *tzedakah*, with the letters $\pi \rho \tau \nu$ floating around. The closed river-like circle with floating figures infers that one can be a receiver of *tzedakah* at one moment, but turn into a giver the next moment, and, G-d forbid, become a poor receiver again. *Panta rhea, hagalgolim mistovevim*.

The outer ring of the art shows the Purim *seudah* (festive meal), in the top of the drawing. People are seated happily around a table. Upside down from this table is a scene displaying the opposite, the pendant of the Purim meal, i.e., the feast of Achashverosh. This was a drinking bacchanal that led to debauchery and the humiliation of Vashti that led ultimately to Esther being crowned Queen in Vashti's place.

With this festive meal, the Jews at the Purim *seudah* are celebrating that a month of imminent disaster has turned into days of *simchah*, joy.

Going downward with the circle from left to right, starting at the left side of the table, we see Esther, whose Hebrew name is Hadassah (myrtle) and who had a "greenish" myrtle-like skin and appearance. She is depicted as a nice Jewish girl, lighting candles for Shabbos. At the right side of the table, this same Hadassah has been transformed into the regal Queen Esther with a crown, Her veil symbolizes her hidden identity. She touches the scepter, a gesture that in her case literally means the difference between life and death, not only for her, but for her people, the Jews, as well.

Under Hadassah we see a whole row of *gilgulim*, reincarnations of souls needing to make reparations for former sins, into different human and animal bodies. These resemble the *mazalot*, the signs of the zodiac. According to Sefer Yetzirah et al., these signs are connected to the Jewish months, Festivals and practices, and to the Twelve Tribes, the descendants of and named after the sons of Yaakov (Bereshit 49).

The series of transformations starts with the Ram (Aries/*taleh*). This sign is connected to Yehudah. According to Yaakov's blessing in Bereshit 49, Yehudah is destined to bring forth the future kings of Israel. A king, however, must be careful not to

commit sins. If he does so, he risks being compelled to return as a *gilgul*, for instance, as a bull, the second sign of the zodiac. The ram is a favorable animal to be for a *gilgul*. In the time of the Beit haMikdash (the Temple) it was used for sacrifices. At the Akedah, Avraham Avinu sacrificed a ram instead of Yitzchak. A *gilgul* in a ram has several ways to redeem his or her sinful past. For instance, when the ram is eaten for specific purposes and with specific benedictions, like the Pesach lamb at the seder. The month of *taleh* (ram) is Nissan, the month Pesach, our liberation from slavery.

For a *gilgul* to be turned a bull is considered favorable as well, given Teh. 73:32: “HaShem, I do not care to be stupid, I don’t even care to be a beast, if only I can be with You.” The Taurus/*shor* is connected to Yissakhar, who diligently dives into Torah study. Its month is Iyar, which falls between the liberation from Egyptian slavery in Nissan and the giving of the Torah in Sivan.

The next *gilgul* has a human shape. The Gemini/*te’omim*, the Twins, are connected to Zevulun, the merchant tribe which forms a partnership with the Tribe of Yissakhar. The merchants share their money with the Torah students who in turn share their learning. This way, they both gain. Zevulun is associated with the month of Sivan, with *matan Torah*. The Twins also symbolize Yaakov and Esav, which means that one is ‘good,’ the other ‘bad.’ People have a *yetzer hatov* and a *yetzer hara*, a good and bad inclination. They have a choice how they act.

If that choice turned out to be bad, a soul might be reincarnated into a crab. This zodiacal sign, Cancer/*sartan*, is associated with the month of Tamuz. It contains the Fast of 17 Tamuz to remember the beginning of the inauspicious events leading directly to the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash. *Sartan* is associated with Yaakov’s son Re’uven, who had illicit relations with his father’s concubine and consequently was punished. The episode of the Golden Calf took place in Tamuz. The letter associated with this month is *chet*, the first letter of the word *chet* (*sin*). All in all, neither the crab nor the month are considered very favorable. I once made a painting of the “bad son” in a series of the four sons mentioned in the Haggadah. The bad son here is an assimilated Jew sitting in a trayfe restaurant and enjoying a big lobster.



Still, in terms of *gilgulim*, who can fathom the human heart and its inclinations? If the *gilgul* crab attempts to be good, rectifying its past wrongs, it might return as a lion. This is a powerful animal, able to withstand temptation. However, Leo/*aryeh* is associated with the month of Av, in which two Temples were destroyed.

In the next *gilgul* the soul might return as a *betulah*, a young girl, a Virgo ready to step under the *chuppah*. She is innocent and pure. Her month is Elul, the month of *teshuvah* and introspection preceding Tishri, which contains the Days of Judgement, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. On these solemn Holidays man's deeds are weighed on the Heavenly Scales. Tishri is a month full of blessings, associated with Yosef's youngest son, Efrayim.

We have a choice to do good or bad deeds. If we are not good we might end up into a scorpion, the next animal in the zodiac. Scorpio/*akrav* is associated with the month of (mar-)Cheshvan which lacks any specific Holidays. This feels like a cold shower after the preceding month of Tishri, which counts seven full Yom Tov days and several Chol haMoed days. Cheshvan is the month of Yosef's oldest son, Menasheh, whose name reads *neshamah* (*soul*) when the letters are rearranged. This encourages people to do introspection, sincere soul searching, and *teshuvah*, repentance. The month of Cheshvan contains a crooked letter, the ן *nun* and the scorpion has "cold" venom. Moshiach will straighten both of them out. In the messianic era, Cheshvan will be full of holidays.

After the scorpion comes a human sign, an archer with a bow, like Benjamin, the ravenous wolf (Bereshit 49, Yaakov's blessing). He is associated with the month of Kislev which contains the light filled Chanukah festival. A *gilgul* who becomes an archer is lucky, for the most part.

The next sign, Capricorn/*gedi*, the mountain goat, is connected to the month of Tevet and to Yaakov's son Gad, the judge whose symbol is a snake. The word *nachash* has the same numerical value as *moshiach*, which is a redeeming quality. The habit to judge, however, can lead to arrogance, which in turn can lead to anger, which leads to sin. *Gedi* is a jumping animal, playful but immature. *Gilgulim* who return as a goat can go either way, be good and playful or be immature and jump to bad decisions.

After the goat follows Aquarius, the Waterman, in Hebrew is called *deli*, a pail. Water has redeeming qualities. It purifies, for instance, in a mikvah, and water symbolizes Torah. The Jewish People live with and in Torah like fish live in water, neither can go without and survive. *Deli* is connected with the month of Shevat. On the fifteenth day of this month trees, plants and crops are judged. They depend on water from HaShem.



There is one more sign, the Fish. Jews reincarnated into a fish hope that they will be caught, sold on the market, and be prepared in a Jewish kitchen, for instance as gefilte fish being served on Shabbat. The blessings said at the Shabbat table over the fish may redeem the *gilgul*.

Fish has many good connotations, as in Teh.121:4, “The Redeemer of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps.” The analogy of the fish refers to a lack of eyelids, a fish has always open eyes. Or, as in the night-time prayers, *wayidgu larov bekerev ha’arets*. Fish means abundance, and for some, *mazal*, luck.

The constellation of the Fish is connected to the month of Adar and to the most eloquent of Yaakov’s sons, Naftali, who speaks sweet words of Torah. Fish will end up on the table that started with Achashverosh’s banquet and will end with the table of Moshiach.

The circle is round. These visual references to gilgulim form a ring around the reading of the Megillah and the inner ring of people giving and receiving *tzedakah*.

Shoshannah Brombacher, Berlin, Adar 1-February 2024