

The Shevatim and the Mazalot



The 12 Tribes of Israel and the Constellations of the Zodiac in 14 drawings

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I dedicate this project to my dear parents



The Art

The drawings in this article combine elements from the blessing of Yaakov in Bereshit 49, Sefer Yetzirah, and to a lesser extent the blessings of Moshe Rabbenu in Devarim 33: 6-29. Each drawing of a singular Tribe contains Yaakov's blessing in Bereshit 49, the name of the Tribe, and the name of the *mazal* (constellation, Zodiac sign).

- The artist made the title drawing long ago in High School (Holland, 1976). It shows the (animal) symbols of the Tribes as mentioned in Yaakov's blessing, King David playing his harp, and the Beth haMikdash (Temple).

- The other thirteen drawings were created specifically for the exhibition:

Hebrew Zodiac: 12 Tribes, 12 Months, 12 Astrological Signs,

The Palm Beach Center for Jewish Art, Florida, 2010.

The drawings are made in soft pastel and ink on paper and measure 24 X 18 inches, the title drawing is 18 X 12.12 inches; gouache on paper.

All drawings are framed.

I express my sincere thanks to the Gal Einai Institute for their website with HaRav Yitzchak Ginsburgh's commentaries on the months, the mazalot and the shevatim in Sefer Yetzirah (http://www.inner.org/hebrew_calendar/).

Rav Ginsburgh's music (Quill of the Soul and Music's Hidden Soul) inspired me while I was painting.

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The connection between the constellations of the Zodiac, consisting of the twelve *mazalot* and the 12 Tribes of Israel, the *shevatim*, has been established long ago. The twelve Tribes are the descendants of the twelve sons of Yaakov (Jacob). In Bereshit 49:1-28 they their father blessed them before his passing. Each son, and consequently the Tribe named after him, received a specific blessing in accordance with his character, abilities, destiny, and/or the region in the Promised Land they settled down after their forty year journey through the desert. For instance, Yehudah will produce kings and royalty, but Zevulun will live near the shore of the sea and be involved in ships and trade.

The majority of the symbols of the twelve Tribes in this blessing are animals, e.g., Yehudah is a lion, Dan a snake, Yissakhar a donkey. These symbols often decorate walls or ceilings of synagogues.

In Bamidbar 2:1-29 the Tribes traveling through the desert set up camp in a specific order around the Ohel Moed or Mishkan (the Tent of Meeting) to facilitate organizing such a large group of people. Each Tribe hoisted a banner or flag with its own signs or symbols, corresponding with the colors of the stones in the breast-plate (*choshen ha-mishpat*) of Aaron haKohen (Midrash Rabbah, Bamidbar 2:7):

In the South:

- **Re'uven** (ruby, red, mandrakes),
- **Shim'on** (topaz, green, castle),
- **Gad** (agate, blend of black and white, tent or troops).

In the East:

- **Yehudah** (carbuncle, cerulean blue, lion),
- **Yissakhar** (sapphire, black, sun and moon),
- **Zevulun** (emerald, white, sailing ship with oars).

In the North:

The sons of **Yosef**:

- **Ephraim** (onyx, jet black, bullock or a palm tree),
- **Menashe** (onyx, black, wild ox),
- **Benjamin** (jasper, all twelve colors used in the other flags, wolf).

In the West:

- **Dan** (jacinth, sapphire blue, snake),
- **Asher** (beryl, very light green, (olive)-tree),
- **Naphtali** (amethyst, light red, hind/deer)

In the middle:

The priestly Tribe of **Levi** (emerald, white/black/red, the Urim and Tumim).

Levi needs to be stationed close to the Mishkan to perform the service.

The two sons of Rachel, Yosef (represented by his own sons Menashe and Ephraim) and Benjamin stay together in the north of the camp. The sons of Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah, are located in mixed order in the other directions. Each camp is represented by a symbol:

The **East**: a Lion, the **South**: a Man, the **West**: a Bull, the **North**: an Eagle.

According to Sefer Yetzirah, an esoteric manuscript which emerged in the time of the Mishnah (?) and is attributed to Avraham Avinu or rabbi Akiva, each Tribe is associated with a **month**, a **letter of the Hebrew aleph-beth**, one of the **senses**, a **limb of the body** and a **sign of the Zodiac** (*mazal*).





RE'UVEN —*sartan* (Cancer)—Tamuz

Re'even, you are my firstborn, my might and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power: unstable as water, you shall not excel, because you went up into your father's bed; then you defiled it: he went up to my couch, (Bereshit 49:3-4).

Yaakov's oldest son is blessed and rebuked for the sin of taking his father's concubine Bilhah. In Gemara (TB Shab.55b) he merely removed Yaakov's bed from Bilhah's tent to the tent of his own mother, Leah. This would explain Yaakov's compassion for Re'even in blessing him anyway, putatively after a deed of deep disrespect. It also explains why Re'even lost his birth right to Yosef, the oldest son of Rachel.

Re'even's stone in the breastplate of Aharon is the *odem* (red ruby), which has a seductive red color. His month, Tamuz, is ominous for the Jews and full of mourning. It is associated with the sin of the Golden Calf and the onset of the destruction of the Temple by breaching the walls on the Fast of the Seventeenth of Tamuz, followed by three weeks of disaster and mourning till the Ninth of Av. In this drawing, this is expressed by the prophet Yirmiyahu lamenting the loss of the (burning) Beth haMikdash.

In the top right corner rebellious people are dancing around the Golden Calf. They have no distinctive facial features, because we cannot know beforehand who will be a sinner and who will be punished with death.

The letter *chet* ח, associated with Re'even and Tamuz, is the first letter of the word *chet'* (sin). Its shape shows a ligature of a *waw* and a *zayin* (the letters of the preceding months Iyar and Sivan) connected by a dash, symbolizing the spiritual light which comes from the eyes (*waw*) and the physical light which enables us to see (*zayin*). In Sefer Yetzira Tammuz is associated with vision, seeing, here represented as a yeshiva student with big eyes and his book, *Eyn Yaakov (The Eye/Well of Yaakov)*, a compilation of Aggadic material from Gemara. The eyes are both a wonderful and a dangerous organ, which can lead people to the Torah or to sin. One must guard them carefully.

Moshe Rabbenu said in Devarim 33:28, *betach badad 'eyn ya'akov, for sure, the eye of Yaakov is alone, betach* being an acrostichon for *berakhah tov chayim*. A person should turn his eyes toward wholesome and spiritual matters leading to life instead of materialistic or bad matters which plunges one into death and misery.

The *mazal* associated with Tamuz is Cancer (*sartan*) which “divides the year in half” with its claws, Tamuz being the sixth month counted from Tishri. In the drawing, it holds an old astronomical model used to show the different spheres, latitudes, etc. *Sartan* is an animal which lives in transparent water. It’s shy and generally disliked. In this context it stands for the ability to “see through” the physical world to behold the more important spiritual matter.



SHIM'ON—*aryeh* (Leo)—Av

Shim'on and Levi are brothers: instruments of cruelty are their swords. Let my soul not come into their council, to their assembly, let my honor not be united: because in their wrath they slew a man, and in their self-will they lamed an ox. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Yaakov, and scatter them in Yisrael, (Bereshit 49:5-7).

Shim'on and Levi took revenge on the Kenaanite prince Shekhem and his city, equally named Shekhem, after he had assaulted their sister Dinah (Bereshit 34). Therefore they are described as warriors. But because Yaakov feared devastating retaliation from the inhabitants of Kenaan he nearly took away their blessing .

The name Shim'on contains *sh-m-*, to hear. Under the letters of his name a man recites the traditional Shema' Yisrael prayer, covering his eyes with his hand. Listening is an essential feature in Judaism. In Shim'on's month, Av, Jews must rectify the sin of listening to the spies who slandered the land of Israel (Bamidbar 13:1-16). Sefer Yetzirah associates Shim'on with Av, the month in which both Temples were destroyed, on the same day, the ninth, but a few hundred years apart. The Fifteenth of Av is, however, an auspicious time to find one's *bashert* (one's destined soul mate). The drawing features a couple standing under the chuppah juxtaposed to the scene of the kohanim throwing the keys of the Beth haMikdash into the air, desperately imploring HaShem to take care of His house, because they are can't save it from the raging flames. Av is mainly associated with and remembered for the Destruction of the Temple.

Shim'on is associated with the letter *tet v*, which resembles a womb. There is a pregnant woman in the lower half of the drawing. Her unborn child studies Torah with an angel. Aaron haKohen died on the Ninth of Av; his name is associated with the word for pregnancy. Shim'on's *mazal* is the powerful lion (*aryeh*), whose numerical value (216) is equal to *gevurah*, (might). In Kabbalistic sources the lion is responsible for diminishing the Divine Presence in Av due to the destruction of the two Temples. Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian ruler who destroyed the first one, is called a "lion," (Yirmiyahu 4:7 et al). In gematria 216 adds up to three times *chesed* (72), the loving kindness on which the world is built (Teh. 89:3). In messianic times, *Chesed* which will rebuild the destroyed Beth haMikdash a third time. The colors of Av in this drawing are fiery red and yellow, juxtaposed to the peaceful blue of a starry night over the wedding canopy.

LEVI (no *mazal*, but the Urim and Tumim)—Adar II

Shim'on and Levi are brothers: instruments of cruelty are their swords. Let my soul not come into their council, to their assembly, let my honor not be united: because in their wrath they slew a man, and in their self-will they lamed an ox. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Yaakov, and scatter them in Yisrael, (Bereshit 49:5-7).

Levi is associated with the second month of Adar. The Tribe of Levi has no *mazal* of its own. It set up their tents in the center of the encampment, close to the Mishkan where they served HaShem. In the drawing Aaron holds up a pan in front of the *mizbeach* (altar), clad in the holy garments and wearing the *choshen ha-mishpat* adorned with the names and corresponding precious stones of all the Tribes (see above). Behind him are sacrificial animals and next to him the text from Shemot 28:29,30: *And Aharon shall bear the names of the children of Yisrael on the breastplate of judgement upon his heart, when he goes into the holy place, for a memorial before HaShem eternally. And you shall put in the breastplate of judgement the Urim and the Tumim; and they shall be upon Aharon's heart when he goes in before HaShem; and Aharon shall bear the judgement of the children of Yisrael upon his heart before HaShem continually.*

YEHUDAH — *taleh* (Aries)—Nissan

Yehudah, you are the one your brothers will praise: your hand will be on the neck of your enemies. Your father's children will bow down before you. Yehudah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, you have gone up: he stooped down, he couched like a lion, and as a lioness, who shall rouse him up? The staff shall not depart from Yehudah, nor the scepter from between his feet, until Shilo come, and the obedience of he people be his. Binding his foal to the vine, and his donkey's colt to the choice vine: he washes his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes; his eyes are red with wine, and his teeth white with milk, (Bereshit 49:8-12).



This is Yaakov's blessing for the son who will bring forth the kings of Israel, in this drawing represented by a *melekh we-torato*. A Torah scroll must always be at the side of the king to guide him. Sefer Yetzirah associates Yehudah with the month of Nisan, the letter *hayh* ה, the *mazal taleh* (Aries, ram or lamb) and with speech. Nisan, the first month in the Jewish calendar, contains the New Year of the Kings (Mishnah RH 1:1), Pesach and the liberation from Egypt with the first seder, the Pesach lamb (*taleh*), and the future redemption. The *mazal* of the lamb aroused pity by its voice, just like the B'nay Yisrael cried to HaShem and He redeemed them. Then they praised him. The name Yehudah contains praise. During Nisan speech is important, like talking about the liberation during the seder. It is a tool of kings, as in Teh.47:4: *He will cause us to lead many nations*, from the root *d-v-r*, as in *speech*. Sefer Yetzirah associates the fifteen so-called "stages" of the seder with the letter *hayh* (with the numerical value 5), and with the fifth stage, *maggid*, to tell the story, which is the essential part of the seder. It starts with the Aramaic invitation to the poor and hungry to come, eat and participate: *ha lachma anyah, this is the bread of poverty*. In the drawing, physically and spiritually impoverished people flock to the seder table upon which a traditional hanging European Shabbat lamp sheds its golden light. A golden *hayh* embellishes the king's mantle. Yehudah's symbol, the lion, holds a lulav, in reminiscence of the sukkah, the "hut of David," which will be restored in its former glory when Moshiach will rebuild the Temple *bimhayrah beyamenu, speedily in our days*.

ZEVULUN — *te'omim* (Gemini)—Sivan

Zevulun shall live at the shore of the seas, and he shall be a haven for ships; and his border shall be at Tzidon, (Bereshit 49:13).

Yaakov blessed Zevulun with prosperity. In his coastal territory, he engaged in trade and sent out ships to every part of the world. The descendants of Zevulun are merchants. Traditionally, they form a partnership with the descendants of Yissakhar, who brings forth scholars and Torah teachers. It was-and is-not unusual that two people work together, one to provide money and a livelihood, and the other to study Torah full time without having to worry about earning money. They share the outcome, the merchant has a share in the Torah study of the scholar, who in turn gets money for housing and food. Rambam and his brother lived like this till the brother drowned in a shipwreck. Rabbi Hillel's brother, Shebna approached R' Hillel with an offer to share his livelihood with him so he could study (BT Sotah 21a). On the arch in the center of the drawing two merchants with sacks filled with gems, money and other wealth walk towards the Beth Midrash (study house), where members of the Tribe of Yissakhar are discussing a difficult passage in Gemara under a crowned *aron* (Torah shrine). The crown has five arms, symbolizing the Pentateuch. The acronym *d'l'm'a" <*, *da' lifney mi atah 'omed, know before Whom you stand* (before the King of Kings, praised be He), is written over the Aron in many synagogues. Because Zevulun works diligently to support Torah scholars, he merits to be associated with Sivan, the month in which the Torah was given on Har Sinai.

The *mazal* of the Tribe of Zevulun is Gemini, the twins. In this drawing (top center) they are represented by Yaakov and Esav with his ruddy and rough complexion, holding a bow, a quiver, and a bird he just hunted. Esav is red (*adom*, hence his connection with Edom), sanguine and fierce. Next to him, Yaakov pours over a book. He is the scholar who studies the two Torah's from two books: *Torah she-bikhtav* (the written Torah, the Pentateuch), and *Torah she-be'alpeh*, the orally transmitted Gemara which was written down much later. Behind him stands a Torah scroll, next to a book with a classic Gemara frontispiece. The color blue reflects water, symbolizing the Torah in which the Jew lives like a fish: he can't survive outside of it. Fish are ubiquitous in this drawing of the Tribe that lives at the shore. They swim around the ship that adorned Zevulun's banner at the encampment in the desert.



The twins are compared to a *chatan* (groom) and a *kallah* (bride) on their wedding day, who are like “twins,” and the allegorical *chatan* and *kallah* at Har Sinai, HaShem and the Jewish people. In Sivan, HaShem handed two *Luchot* (stone tablets), two “twins,” to Moshe Rabbenu at Har Sinai. According to Sefer Yetzirah, each tablet contains a set of mitzvot for each of the traditional twins, Esav and Yaakov, which speaks to his nature and character. The first five mitzvot are the obligation to worship only HaShem, who delivered us from Egypt, refraining from idolatry and cursing, observing Shabbat, and honoring one’s parents. These are fit for the scholar Yaakov. The more explicit and shorter commandments, each expressed in one short sentence, are directed toward the crude and cruel hunter Esav, who has a much baser character: do not kill, commit adultery, steal, lie, bear false witness, or covet what is not yours. The Torah unites the Jewish people. Every Jew has to keep each and any of the ten special commandments, independent of whether his or her character resembles Esav or Yaakov.

Zevulun is associated with the number seven, the numerical value of the first letter of his name, *zayin* ז, a special and holy number in the Jewish tradition. Zevulun is the only Tribe with a *zayin* in its name. The shape of a *zayin* is a *waw* with a crown, a *keter*, which has the numerical value 620, which equals the number of letters of the Ten Commandments. The *zayin* is also expressed in the word *zeh* : *This, viz., is what the Almighty has commanded. If a man vows a vow*, Bamidbar 30:2. Moshe Rabbenu differs from other prophets in how he announces a word from HaShem to the B’nay Yisrael. Other prophets usually say: *Thus speaks the Almighty*, or a similar phrase. Moshe Rabbenu, however, addresses the Jews directly: *This is what the Almighty commanded*, without introduction. Sefer Yetzirah explains the letter *hayh* in *zeh* as follows. The verse: *This (zeh) is what he Almighty has commanded*, counts as one book of the Pentateuch of its own accord. Thus the text preceding the verse is “one book,” the verse itself is “one book,” and the text following Bamidbar 30:2 is also “one book,” three altogether; 3 is a holy number, just like 7. The Torah was given in the third month (Sivan) to a threefold people (Kohanim, Leviim and Yisrael) and Shabbat is the seventh day.

The letters *zayin* and *hayh* are standing like a couple under a chuppah in the shape of a crown. They hover over the seven pillars of wisdom which support the world (Mishle 9:1). The golden light reflects the atmosphere of Shabbat.



YISSAKHAR — *shor* (Taurus)—Iyar

Yissakhar is a strong donkey couching down between the sheepfolds: and he saw that rest was good, and the land that it was pleasant, and he bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant to tribute, (Bereshit 49:14,15).

The letter associated with Iyar, the month of the Taurus, is the *vav* ם, which connects the spring month Nisan, at the beginning of the agricultural year, with the consecutive months Iyar and Sivan. These three months contain the liberation from the slavery in Egypt, the journey through the desert and counting the Omer for forty-nine days, and the *matan Torah*, the giving of the Torah on Har Sinai, (Wayiqra 23:15,16). Iyar's *mazal* is the *shor*, the bull, which is the left face on the mystical Merkavah (the Divine chariot), and symbolizes self improvement through introspection, especially while counting the Omer. Each day the Jews traveled through the desert brought them closer to Har Sinai and the Torah, and each day of counting the Omer is another opportunity to improve one's character. The Bull is associated with the Tribe of Yissakhar, which in Yaakov's blessing, however, is called a strong donkey. Yissakhar, traditionally associated with Torah study, practiced agriculture, and therefore had time to study after working in the fields. Yissakhar brings forth rabbis and scholars engage in the secrets of the calendar calculations, because he is associated with "thought." Yissakhar is an advisor to his brother, Yehudah, from which kings are derived. His organ/limb is the right kidney. The kidneys were considered to give advice, as in Teh.16:7: *At night my kidneys advice me*, and support introspection. The bull in a tallit in the top left corner alludes to Teh. 73:22, *I was a beast with You*, meaning that a person does not care to be dumb and stupid like a beast, as long as s/he can be with HaShem. The greenery around the Torah scroll and the houses around the Beth Midrash in the shtetl allude to the Torah as an *etz chayim*, a Tree of Life. Green and blue colors are peaceful, reminding of Yissakhar's agricultural life-style combined with study. The red around the donkey shows his passion for learning.



DAN—*gedi* (Capricorn)—Tevet

Dan shall judge his people, as one of the Tribes of Yisrael. Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, which bites the heels of the horse, so that the rider shall fall backward, I wait for Your salvation, HaShem! Bereshit 49:16-17.

Dan is depicted as a judge and a snake (*nachash*). This word has the same numerical value as Moshiach, whose army will be led by a man from the Tribe of Dan. Dan has a tendency to be immature and overly critical. From his critical attitude sprouts anger, which can be eliminated—or at least sublimated—by getting rid of angry energy through jumping up and down. Certain Chassidim included this in their rituals, because anger impairs and even prevents a close relationship with HaShem. If, however, angry energy is used for a worthwhile cause, such as being zealous for HaShem and His mitzvot, it becomes “holy anger.” Bad anger is the evil eye, like the venom of a snake, which has an “evil eye,” but good anger kills the snake and promotes the arrival of Moshiach and the rebuilding of the Temple. Jumping is associated with the *mazal* of Dan, the Capricorn, *gedi*, the goat which jumps from mountain to mountain. A goat is playful like an immature, ten year old child, which hops around till s/he grows up. The text between the jumping kids to the right and the jumping Chassidim is Teh.4:4: *Be angry and do not sin*, in other words, use your anger for a holy cause and don’t allow it to lead to destruction and sin.

The drawing shows the Temple in the center of Jerusalem, depicted as an eye (*‘ayin*). Sefer Yetzirah associates the letter ‘ayin ׀ and “sight” with Dan. His month is Tevet, which contains Chanukah and the Fast of the Tenth of Tevet commemorating the siege of Yerushalayim which led to the destruction of the first Beth haMikdash. But Tevet contains the word *tov* (good), therefore mourning over the destruction will be turned into joy over the rebuilding. Chanukah is closely associated with the ‘ayin, the eye, because it is a mitzvah to observe the Chanukah candles, the symbol of the ultimate victory over the enemy.

GAD—*betulah* (Virgo)—Elul

Gad, raiders shall maraud him, but he shall overcome at last , (Bereshit 49:18).

The Tribe of Gad is associated with the month of Elul, which precedes the important month of Tishri, which contains Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkoth. During Elul the B'nay Yisrael blow the shofar on a daily base, pray for forgiveness, repent, try fixing old wrongs, and prepare themselves for the high Holidays like a *kallah* (bride) prepares herself for her wedding. She starts a new life with a clean slate under the chuppah, knowing her sins will be forgiven on her wedding day.

Moshe Rabbenu climbed Har Sinai and stayed up there for forty days, from Rosh Chodesh Elul till Yom Kippur. Then he descended with the second set of *luchot* (Stone Tablets), after he had smitten the first ones when he discovered the sin of the Golden Calf. With this second set the B'nay Yisrael were ready to accept the Torah.

The gematria of the word Elul (in small numbering: 1-3-6-3) is 13, which is associated with the 13 principles of Divine Mercy which are bestowed on us in Elul. The letter representing Elul is the *yud* ך, with a numerical value of 10. It is an essential letter in the Divine name, and the number of commandments given at Har Sinai. The limb of the body associated with Elul is the hand, because it is a month of action, of doing repentance. The hand dons tefillin: *You shall carry these mitzvoth on your heart and on your hand*, which Jews recite daily during the Shema' prayer, (Devarim 6:5-9). With His left Hand HaShem created Earth and with His right Hand Heavens.

The *mazal* for Elul, Virgo, *betulah*, symbolizes the virginal earth of Eretz Yisrael which was given as a bride to the B'nay Yisrael. The letters of Elul form the acrostichon of '*ani le-dodi we-dodi li, I am for my beloved and my beloved is for me*, (Shir haShirim 3:16), the allegorical bridal song about Israel and HaShem.

The word *betulah* is applied to Rivkah before her marriage to Yitzchak, (Bereshit 24:16 et al). After Rivkah became a mother, she was associated with *binah* (understanding), one of the Divine qualities in the kabbalistic Sefirot Tree, because a mother constantly does *teshuvah* and has virginal qualities.

The Tribe of Gad, the *Betulah*, and the month of Elul belong together. Gad's special letter is the *zayin* ז, which has the numerical value of Gad. The *gimel* and *dalet*, 3+4), in Gad can be substituted for the *zayin* (7) in the word *mazal*, thus creating *migdal* (77): *A tower of strength* ('oz, also 77) is the Name of HaShem, (Mishle 18:10). The tower is the bride,



which he *tzaddik* wants to enter with his power, refers to Gad's blessing in Bereshit 49:19: *A troop will troop upon him.*

In this drawing, Gad is represented by a fierce troop of warriors with spears, shields and swords, storming forward in a cloud of earth colored dust, ready to protect the *betulah*, the etherial bride hovering over them in tender blue and pink hues. She is wrapped in a veil, like Rivkah, and surrounded by flowers. The blood red of the warrior spirit is in stark contrast with the deep peaceful and innocent blue of the bride.

ASHER -- *deli* (Aquarius)—Shevat

Out of Asher his bread shall be fat, and he shall yield royal dainties, (Bereshit 49:20).

The root of the name Asher means "rich". His father blessed him with abundance of his fields. In the drawing, a woman lifts huge challot made from nice fat grain, *likhvod shabbat* and the Divine King. The people in the bottom right corner carry huge baskets with produce, olives, grapes, and grain to the king's table. The olive tree, its fruit and golden oil are associated with Asher and Israel. They also symbolize the *tzaddik*, the righteous of the generation, who is like the Tree of Life in Gan Eden.

Water, rain, is extremely important for fields and crops. The *mazal* of the month of Shevat is Aquarius, *deli* (pail), in the top left corner personified by a man spilling water from a jug. From his watery blue territory, abundantly filled with fish, he looks down benevolently at the lush green and golden fields below. Water also symbolizes Torah, in which a Jew lives like a fish in the water, combined with the sweet and rich fruits of Asher, the wisdom of Torah study.

Sefer Yetzirah associates the letter of Shevat, *tzade* ז, with the 'ayin of the preceding month: *deli* is connected with the word *to lift*, as in Yeshayahu 38:14: *dallu eynay le-marom, My eyes fail to look upwards.* When the 'ayin of the eye comes together with the *tzade* of the *tzaddik* in the following month (Adar), they form the word 'etz, tree. The souls of the righteous (*tzaddikim*) correspond with the trees in Gan Eden. The shape of the letter *tzade* resembles a man (a *tzaddik*, a "tree in the field," Devarim 20:19) and a tree. The gematria of 'etz *ha-sadeh* is 474, the same as *da'at*, knowledge, which implies that a Jew must cleave to a Tzaddik, e.g., a Rebbe.



The special mitzvah of Asher and the month of Shevat is eating nice meals. The fifteenth day of the month of Shevat is a holiday in honor of nature: Tu Bishvat, the New Year of the Trees, when the tithing of blossoming fruit is regarded. People conduct a seder with seven particular fruits which grow in Israel. In the Kabbalah, the number 15 of Tu Bishvat is connected to the Tree of Life.

NAPHTALI -- *dagim* (Pisces)—Adar

Naphtali is a hind set loose, he gives goodly words, (Bereshit 49:21).

Naphtali is associated with eloquence and sweet words of Torah, with the *maggid* (religious story teller and preacher), and the Torah teacher. The light-footed hind, a symbol of mellifluous eloquence, jumps in front of a wall. The moon behind it refers to Shir haShirim, a collection of one of the most outstanding love poetry in the world, *See, he stands behind our wall, (Shir ha-Sh.2:9)*. Naphtali's *mazal* is Pisces, the fish, which adds a dreamlike atmosphere to the composition of the drawing. Fish are often used as a symbol of the Jewish people, who are home in the world of Torah like fish in the water. There, they feel concealed and well hidden to live up to their true potential. They are, in fact, unable to live outside of the water. Fish is the *mazal* of the month of Adar, which contains the Purim festival celebrating the victory of the Jewish people over the evil decree of the anti-Semite Haman. When Adar comes in we increase joy. It is the month of merrymaking and laughter.

There is a wordplay on *dag* (fish). The letters *d-g* are a *tikkun*, an amelioration or rectification of sorrow. Sadness, worry (*d-‘-g*, with an aleph in the middle), and depression without a good reason are by many rabbis, such as the Breslover, considered sinful.

The letter *quf* ק, associated with Adar, is the first letter of the word *quf*, monkey, an animal playing pranks and making people laugh. Monkeys look a bit like silly dressed up humans, or a person in disguise. Purim is the festival of “hiding one’s face,” wearing a mask.

A *quf* is also the eye of a needle. On Purim and many other occasions in history, the Jewish people passed through “a needle” when HaShem turned their fate around just in time.



EPHRAIM— *me'oznayim* (Libra)—Tishri

Yosef is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a well: whose branches run over the wall; the archers fiercely attacked him, and shot at him and hated him: but his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made supple by the mighty hands of the G-d of Yaakov; (from thence from the shepherd, the Stone of Yisrael:) by the G-d of your father who shall help you, and by the Almighty who shall bless you with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that couches beneath, blessings of the breast and of the womb; the blessings of your father are potent over the blessings of my progenitors to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills. They shall be on the head of Yosef and the crown of the head of him that was separated from his brothers, (Bereshit 49:22-26).

Together with his older brother Menashe, Ephraim represents the Tribe of Yosef, Rachel's beloved son, whom Yaakov gave a long, sweet blessing. Part of it is recited at the conclusion of Shabbat. Yosef himself is not mentioned in the order of encampment of the B'nay Yisrael in the desert, because he had died in Egypt long before the Exodus. But his sons, Ephraim and Menashe, placed their banners in the North side of the camp, together with Yosef's full brother, Benjamin. Ephraim's banner shows a bullock with a horn, which reminds of the shofar. When Yaakov blessed Yosef's sons before he died, he crossed his hands and put his right hand on the head of the younger son, Ephraim, because this one was destined to play a bigger role in the future of Israel than Menashe. Therefore, he needed a bigger blessing. This scene dominates the painting. Ephraim is associated with fruitfulness, as his name suggests in Bereshit 41:52 where Yosef exclaims: *For HaShem caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction* (Egypt). The drawing shows lush branches, referring to Sukkoth, and a man with a horse and a plough. Sefer Yetzirah associates Ephraim with the seventh Jewish month, Tishri, and the *mazal me'oznayim* (Scales). They are a reminder of HaShem's judgement which is written in the Book of Life on Rosh haShanah and sealed on Yom Kippur. *Tzedakah*, *tefillah*, and *tzom* (charity, prayer and fasting) save a person from a harsh judgment, and these words are written on one of the pans. The Ten Days in between Rosh haShannah and Yom Kippur, people can influence the outcome with prayer, charity and fasting. The Torah in the left scale refers to Simchat Torah, the last of many Holidays in Tishri.



MENASHE— *agrav* (Scorpio)—Cheshvan

Ephraim's older brother Menashe is associated with the month of Cheshvan, which follows after Ephraim's month of Tishri. Not filled with Holidays, happiness and *simchah* like Tishri, Cheshvan is called *mar-Cheshvan*, *bitter* Cheshvan. The *mabul* (the Flood of Noach's time) started in this month. The *teva* (ark) in the drawing is surrounded by fish and rainstorms under a dark and ominous sky, next to the Cheshvan's letter, *nun* נ. The letters of the name Menashe(h) can be rearranged as *neshamah*, soul, admonishing a person to inspire his soul by himself to the service of HaShem this month, since there are no specific holidays to do that for him, except, of course recurring Shabbat. The man in the middle of the artwork is *davening* (praying) without any holiday symbols such as were ubiquitous just one month ago in Tishri, like the shofar and the lulav.

The soul (*neshamah*) refers to the soul of Israel, which will reveal itself in messianic times, when there will be plenty of celebrations. Till then, Cheshvan remains a somber month at the beginning of the cold winter season. Its *mazal* is the Scorpion, *agrav*, an unpleasant and dangerous animal with a poisonous tail. Its poison is "cold," unlike the "hot" poison of the snake. In gematria both animals are connected to Moshiach, who will straighten out their poison and bad influence, just as he will straighten the "crooked" letter *nun*.

Menashe(h) is associated with Moshe (minus the *nun*) and the Mishnah. Cheshvan is a month for study.

The bull in the bottom left corner represents Menashe's banner in the North side of the camp, where he stayed with his brother Ephraim and his uncle Benjamin. The bull was used for *qorbanot*, sacrifices, and thus connected with the sense of smell, which is traditionally attached to Cheshvan. A sacrifice is a *reach nikhoach lifnay HaShem*, *a pleasant odor in front of HaShem*, Shemot 29:18 et al).

The traditional color of Cheshvan is violet. The colors of this drawing reflect the cold, somber month of Cheshvan and the menacing scorpion.



BENJAMIN —*qeshet* (Sagittarius)—Kislev

Benjamin is a ravenous wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and in the evening he shall divide the spoil, (Bereshit 49:27).

The Biblical verse Devarim 33:12 is written under the name Benjamin: *And of Benjamin he [Moshe Rabbenu] said: The beloved of HaShem; he shall dwell in safety by him, he shall cover him all the day long, and he shall dwell between his shoulders.*

Sefer Yetzirah associates Benjamin with sleep, which one can only truly enjoy when feeling safe. Benjamin is protected by HaShem. His letter is *samekh* ט, which is associated with *semikhut*, support. Benjamin was the only son of Yaakov who was born in Israel, therefore he felt specifically protected by HaShem, living a tranquil and peaceful life, free of stress and happy with his share. All important dreams recorded in the Torah happened in Benjamin's month, Kislev, therefore the ladder from Yaakov's dream with the angels climbing up and down is seen behind the sleeping person in the drawing.

Kislev contains the Festival of Chanukah which celebrates the victory of a few Jews who put their complete trust in HaShem over the huge, and well trained hellenistic army. The Makkabim were freedom fighters who won.

The *mazal* of Benjamin is *qeshet*, the bow, Sagittarius. Benjaminites were known as a good archers going straight to their goal, literally and figuratively. According to Sefer Yetzirah Benjamin's color is violet blue, which is expressed in the tender colors the art.



Shoshannah Jeanne Brombacher (Amsterdam, Holland 1959) studied Semitic Languages, Ancient Middle Eastern Culture and Codicology at Leyden University (Holland) and specialized in medieval Hebrew poetry with a Ph.D. thesis (illustrated by herself) about the Spanish-Portuguese (Marano) Jewish Community in Amsterdam, participated in codicological projects (manuscripts, tombstones and books) in Amsterdam, Jerusalem and Germany, and lectured at the Free University of Berlin (Germany). She attended art classes (University of Leyden and the Free Art Academy of The Hague, Holland) but considers herself mainly self taught and sees her academic background and extensive traveling as an invaluable tool for her paintings, which delve deeply into Jewish lore and legends. After her marriage she moved to New York (1992). She is the author of several books, illustrator, lecturer, *maggidah* (ordained preacher/storyteller/guide), and visual artist. Her favorite medium is oil, pastel, crayons and/or ink. She makes work in any size from small miniatures to wall panels or murals. Calligraphy, text, and colors are important. Brombacher's subjects are mostly Jewish life, holidays and (Chassidic) tales, classical music, travel impressions, poetry, and political activism (OWS). Sets she created include *The Golem of Prague*, *The Tikkun of the Breslover Rebbe*, the Twelve Tribes and other biblical sets, the Haggadah, the Hebrew Aleph-Beth, and *The Dybbuk*. She is currently working on a project about a medieval kabbalist on Sicily, Avraham Abulafia. Her custom art includes ketubot, tikkunim, kaddish, bar and bat mitzvah, verses of one's name, wedding, etc.



Shoshannah Brombacher is the vice-president of the American Guild of Judaic Art and a member of the Jewish Art Salon, The Creative Soul, and Atara. She is internationally recognized and was awarded several prizes for her work, which is represented in Europe, North and South America, Israel, South Africa, Egypt, and New Zealand in museums, private institutions and collections, synagogues, yeshivot, hospices, corporations, and features in blogs (jewishart.org), websites (e.g., chabad.org, The Midrash archive of M' Brule, 2009) films, book/CD covers, children's games, and posters (OWS, YiddishRep Theater, NY). She participates in many exhibitions (group and solo) and curates.

Artist statement:

Art makes the world within visible. My art is a tribute to music and to our heritage, especially the Chassidic world.

The Kotzker Rebbe listened once to a story-teller in the street, and stated, "He told what he wanted and I heard what I needed." That is art. Art connects people!

