

A Table Leg for Shabbat

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This is a story from the past. When I was in high school, I became a *baalat teshuvah*, searching for my roots and connecting with my Jewish faith, inspired by the Chassidic stories of Martin Buber which I found in my father's study. For Shabbat, I wanted to have ritual objects of museum quality, not just what one could buy in the store or what we had at home. But there were hardly any stores selling



Judaica in the part of Holland we lived in after we left Amsterdam, and there was no Internet at that time. I started painting (with acrylic) dishes which I took from my mom's pantry, with her permission and the request to leave enough to eat from. This



resulted in wall plates, and a seder plate, for which I bought a new never used plate for reasons of kashrut. Part of them were decorated in the style of medieval miniatures which I love.



I embroidered challah *deckels* (covers), and a *mizrach* (a sign on the east wall of the room to indicate the direction for prayer, towards Jerusalem), that I unfortunately lost during my movings.

I made many other rituals objects, like a mezuzah of gilded cedar wood, decorated with medieval miniatures. The *klaf*, the parchment inside, came of course from a kosher store. Alas, it did not survive my many (in part) transatlantic movings, unlike most plates and the *deckels*, although some plates paid the price with chipped edges, and one broke. It looks antique now.

I needed a salt box for the challot and *besamim* (spice) boxes for Havdalah, the ceremony at the conclusion of Shabbat. I took mailing tubes, made mediaeval miniatures, and pasted velvet around. The pointed cap was made from a sweets box with silver-colored carton. The semiprecious stones one could save up for at gasoline stations. Every stamp collected on a special card brought one closer to the coveted box of those little colourful stones. I used a glass painted with a menorah until my dad bought me my own silver kiddush cup when he traveled to London and visited

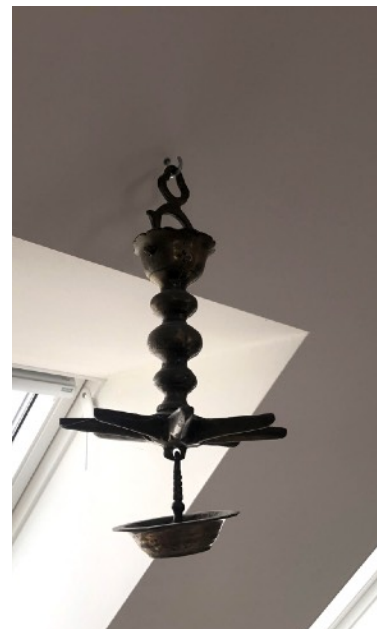


his beloved Judaica bookstore.

But one thing was still lacking. From an early age I loved the brass hanging Shabbat oil lamps in the shape of a star, the so-called “Judenstern.” We did not have one at home, I never found one for sale where we lived, and there was no Internet. I would not have been able to afford one anyway. I painted such lamps numerous times, and I was so happy to find one for an affordable price a decade ago, when I lived in New York. Most had been way out of my budget. It hangs now in my studio

in Berlin and I look at it every day. It will probably be on lone for a year or so in the Jewish museum next to the iconic Oranienburgerstrasse Synagogue, together with other objects described here. I will miss it, but it's for a good cause. I have used such a lamp in numerous drawings and paintings.

So, back then as a school girl, how would I ever find such a Shabbat lamp? That problem was solved when my little brother came home one day with a wooden table leg he had found. "Here," he said, "you are always making thing, can you use this?" Sure I could! I sawed it in half and took the thick round parts. I glued a triplex circle under the top part and added seven "arms" which I sawed from triplex. They ended in little circles to



hold the "candleholders." I covered the arms with blue velvet and golden ribbons with fringes and glued little vases for the candles on top, which I obtained at a local warehouse during their Spain-themed week. The Magen David I bought at that same warehouse. I found it in the aisle with Christmas decorations. The bottom of the arms, which one sees when one stands under the lamp, I adorned with images of the seven days of creation and the Hebrew text *Blessed are You, HaShem our G-d, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us to kindle the light of the holy Shabbat.* The large circle in the middle,

which holds the *magen david* and the second part of the table leg, shows an Ashkenazy medieval miniature of a shul. I glued some fake pearls and semiprecious stones on the lamp. Not all survived my many movings, alas. And one arm is missing, I hope to find or replace it one day.

A few times I actually used the lamp and lit the short candles in the little vases, for the Pesach seder. But only in apartments with high ceilings, and I was always aware





of the danger of fire. Is the lamp mainly decorative? Not for me, I find it highly inspiring and it is part of my life journey.

