

Everlasting Freedom

"...the overarching objective of Shabbas, the Sabbath, is to demonstrate to ourselves that we are free to stop the mundane and halt time itself by doing so."

By Drew Kopf

In our busy and, at times, frenetic lives, it is very easy for us to miss key moments to where we feel enslaved to our schedules. That is why I believe Shlomo HaLevi came with his imperative: "Hitoreri Hitoreri" to implore his listeners to "Be as awake as you can be and stay that way; stay awake and aware." so, that they would remain vigilant with themselves to make certain that they kept all that they did in perspective by keeping the Sabbath as the focal point of their lives. I believe that were Rabbi Shlomo HaLevi here today, he would be alerting us with the same imperative he issued 500 years ago; to make the Sabbath the beginning, the end and the center of our week because, and, by doing so, we will protect and preserve our freedom, which will make the lives we live meaningful and worthwhile. My painting is to remind us in a glance that the Sabbath is coming and to even think of it is to help make the Sabbath a part of our everyday existence and give to us everlasting freedom.

The man whose work in social action and justice in America,

Argentina and, finally, again in NYC, made the stanza in the liturgical poem on which I focus my painting "his" stanza. The painting was my gift to one of his disciples.

Every week, throughout the world, the Sabbath is observed by people of faith; of all kinds, types and degrees of faith, and in more ways than can be enumerated here. In synagogues and temples on Friday evenings, Jewish congregations of all stripes welcome "the Sabbath bride" at the beginning of services by symbolically turning towards the back of the room where the entrance doors are located and bowing as if the "Sabbath Bride" was entering the building.

They do this while singing the liturgical poem, "Lecha Dodi," "Let us go my friend," that was written nearly 500 years ago in the year 1540 by Rabbi Shlomo HaLevi.

Doing something over and over again can become automatic. Lecha Dodi was Rabbi HaLevi's effort to help us stay on point and alert to what Shabbas, the Sabbath, is intended to do for those who chose to observe it.

The first time I attended Friday evening services at Congregation

B'nai Jeshurun on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, something unusual captured my attention. The clergy, who sang along with the congregation went quiet at the fifth verse of Lecha Dodi. Hearing the congregation sing without the strongly microphone augmented voices of the rabbis and the cantor had an unexpected and a very dramatic effect.

When I inquired why the clergy stayed quiet during the fifth verse of Lecha Dodi, I learned that in years gone by the fifth verse had always been sung by Rabbi Marshall T. Meyer, z"l, and, now, as a kind of memorial to him, the clergy does as it did when Rabbi Meyer was alive; they remain quiet during the fifth verse of Lecha Dodi, his verse.

Of course, that led me to wonder why the late Rabbi Meyer, who had returned to the United States after an extended and an amazingly successful career as a rabbi in Argentina, had chosen that verse, the fifth verse of Lecha Dodi, as his verse to sing along with the congregation.

My research into the matter resulted in my eventually creating a

watercolor painting focused on "Hitoreri Hitoreri," "Be awake as you can be and stay that way, stay awake and aware." Which is the beginning of that fifth verse, and a written commentary about Rabbi HaLevi's liturgical poem and what I refer to as an "illuminated" translation of his poem since most if not all standard translations of it go out of their way to honor the rhyme and meter but at the expense of Rabbi HaLevi's meaning.

My painting and the commentary were made to honor the memory of Rabbi Marshall T. Meyer, z"l, and as a tribute to his mentee, Rabbi J. Rolando Matalon, the Head Rabbi of Congregation B'Nai Jeshurun. Since the overarching objective of Sabbath, is to demonstrate to ourselves that we are free to stop the mundane and halt time itself by doing so.

For that reason, I refer to the painting as "Everlasting Freedom." It is my hope that even a brief glance at it, even during the week, will remind the viewer of Shabbas, the Sabbath, and that Shabbas is approaching and that in that infinitesimally small way it will bring Shabbas into our everyday life.

לכה דודי:

A POEM BY RABBI SHLOMO HALEVI ALKABETZ c. 1540 SAFED, PALESTINE

שולמה הלוי אלקבץ (1504 - 1584)

בס"ד



כבוד ה' עשירי נגלה
FOR THAT WHICH MAKES
THE LORD HOLY; SEPARATE AND
APART; SO VERY SPECIAL;
HAS COME NOW
TO YOU.

עורי עורי שיר דברי
GET UP RIGHT NOW
SINGING A SONG.

Be As AWAKE
As You Can Be

DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF RABBI MARSHALL T. MEYER, ז"ל, (1930 - 1993) AND AS A TRIBUTE TO HIS MENTEE RABBI J. ROLANDO MATALON IN APPRECIATION OF A WONDERFUL CONTINUUM OF TEACHING, GUIDANCE, LEADERSHIP AND INSPIRATION.

DREW KOPF 2011/5771 בער 2011