

The Breslover Tikkun

artist: Shoshannah Brombacher

Oil painting on canvas, 48x36 inches, New York 2007

The Breslover 'Tikkun Kelali' (General Remedy) is a collection of ten Tehillim (in this order: 16, 32, 41, 42, 59, 77, 90, 105, 137, 150) which Rabbi Nachman of Breslov (1772-1811), who was the son of Faige, the daughter of Adil, who was the daughter of the saintly Baal Shem Tov, urged his followers to recite daily in times of need and distress. This practice has later been adopted by many others as well. In the Breslover works Zaddik (#229) and Wisdom (#141) it is told that the Breslover Rebbe made a promise to personally come down from Gan Eden after his death and save any sinner from Gehinnom, if this person had done the following during his lifetime: to visit the kever (grave) of Rabbi Nachman in Uman in Ukraine and to donate there at least a penny as tzedakah, to recite the 'Tikkun Kelali' with fervor and to commit himself to repent, and to stay away from his former sins and transgressions, whatever they had been. The Breslover Rebbe would then pull the sinner out of Gehinnom at his payot (his sidelocks).

This is the central theme of this painting. In the middle Reb Nachman with one hand grabs a Chassid at his payot, while holding a Torah scroll in his other hand. Other Chassidim in Gehinnom cling to their colleague like a cluster of grapes with panic stricken faces. They are illuminated by a red fire glow, because their averot (sins) are red, but they will be cleansed by teshuvah (repentance) and become white (... though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow ...), like the man dressed in white reciting the Tikkun at the right. At Reb Nachman's right a Chassid puts money in a pushka (charity box), and under him at the right a man beats his breast in repentance while reciting the Tikkun from a book. On top of Reb Nachman's feet many Chassidim wrapped in prayer shawls pray at his ohel, the little building in Uman which contains his tomb. One man just appears at the door after having poured out his heart. Reb Nachman, however, would not allow people to pray to him or to any other human being but to G'd alone. He loved to meditate on one short sentence or word, and his own personal meditation mantra was 'Ribboyno shel Oylam' (רבונו של עולם, Master of the Universe), which in this painting is written in the sky over his ohel.

A winged messenger with a Torah scroll in his arm over the head of the man reciting the Tikkun sings a 'song of redemption', which Reb Nachman mentioned in his Likutey Mohoran (II. #8).

On top of Rabbi Nachman is a big letter ש shin with a smaller א aleph inside, forming the word אש (fire) and looking like flames, a symbol of HaShem and of Reb Nachman's ardent faith: he prayed with hitlahavut (התלהבות) fervour, flaming enthusiasm). The shin is also a focus point for meditation, and it is the first letter of the pasuk from a Psalm (שׁוֹיֵתִי לַגִּדִּי תַמִּיד Teh. 16:8 "I have set the Eternal always before me") contained in the Tikkun.

There is a direct line upwards from the shin, past the singing Chassidim expressing their simchah (joy, a tenet of Breslov Chassidism), with songs (שירים), to the bays midrash (study hall) of the grandfather of the Breslover, the Holy Baal Shem Tov, in Medzhibush. Around the bays midrash are trees, because both the Breslover and the Besht loved to meditate in the woods. The famous wagon of the Besht flies over the roof. The chair signifies the waiting for moshiach.

This whole scene is circumvented by several bridges. The one at the bottom of the artwork shows the pillars on which the world is built (עמודיה חִיּוֹב 9:6), but an allusion to Mishle 9:1 fails, since the 'pillars of Wisdom' (חכמות בנתה ביתה חצבה עמודיה שבעה) Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn out her seven pillars) obviously have not sufficiently sustained the Chassidim who are rescued by the Breslover Rebbe in their plight in Gehinnom. Under the pillars are the deep waters which are traditionally situated under the world. Here an allusion is also made to the Mighty Waters (מים רבים) Teh.93: 3,4) with fish and a sea snake (a symbol of evil and the evil inclination יצר הרע yetzer hora). On the thin line between the two opposites, flames and water, the elements of which Heavens is composed (Chagigah 12a), a little shtetl represents Uman, the town where Reb Nachman studied in the bays midrash, and where he was buried. Uman stands for the study of Torah (hence the scroll and the crown with a כ kaf and a ת tav, כתר תורה keter Torah), which goes on even in difficult circumstances, even when water and fire touch. The name Uman sounds similar to emunah, faith. The big fish symbolize Torah study: like a fish in the water a Jew is in his right element when he studies Torah. The deep blue water and the red bright fire are juxtaposed in the painting to visualize the

difficulties and the beauty, the purification and the flaming fervour Reb Nachman's students go through.

The bridge in the upper part refers to Reb Nachman's famous song: כל העולם כולו גשר צר מאד : והעקר לא לפחד כלל "The whole world is a very narrow bridge and the most important thing is not to be afraid". People climb, walk, toil, trudge and proceed on the bridge of life, men, women and children. In the top right corner a woman lights Shabbat candles, as stated in Avraham ibn Ezra's song "because if I safeguard Shabbat HaShem will safeguard me..". (כי אשמרה שבת אל ישמרני). The big letter ת tav (for Tikkun and Torah) over the bridge on the left side is written in a circle of light.

The four elements and their transmutations of which our world consists are represented in the four corners of the canvas: from the top right clockwise: the fire of the Shabbat candles and of the flaming fervour of Reb Nachman's prayers, the earth, symbolized by the man saying the Tikkun, in reminiscence of an explanation of the Karliner Rebbe of Ber.28:12 (the ladder of Yakov's dream): a man must stand firmly on the ground (or earth) with his feet, his head raised up to heaven. The fish and the sea in the bottom left corner represent the element water, and the sun and sky in the top left corner represent the air.

The structure resembling a cochlea around the shin, the kever and the scene with Rebbe Nachman dominates the composition. It shows waves of sound and singing, whirling in circles, like the dancing Chassidim who express their joy about the Torah, their Rebbe and his teachings, and like a joyful mother, now with many children (אמ־הבנים Teh.113:9). The shell-like segments open up in the contrasting colors of red fire and blue water, thus creating tension.

The full (unvocalized) texts of the 10 Tehillim of the Tikkun Kelali are scattered over the canvas in letters which sometimes seem to fade or are absorbed by dark lines and spots in the background and barely visible, but all the letters are present nevertheless, like the sometimes wavering and sometimes strong and growing faith and trust of the people reciting the Tikkun. The 10 Tehillim contain basically themes like sin and repentance, HaShem's mercy, catastrophes which befell the Jewish people, and praise for HaShem.

Teh.16 (... שמרני אל ...) is written on the right side near the border next to the winged messenger. It states in pasuk 3: "For the sake of the holy ones interred in the earth (... לקדושים אשר-בארץ ...) all my desires are fulfilled because of them" and is a clear reminiscence to the Breslover and his kever in the middle of the painting. The "own intellect which instructs me in the nights" (pasuk 7: אף-לילות יסרוני ... כליותי ...) is written next to the Torah scroll which invites to and leads to (intellectual) study.

Teh.32 (... אשרי נשוי-פשע ...) is written on the right side of the bays midrash of Medzhibush (under the arches of the upper bridge, in the middle), and talks about repentance and joy, and is positioned close to singing Chassidim and the joyful mother with her children. It states: "Be not like a horse, a mule"; so the horse in the painting is not close to the singers.

Teh.41 (... אשרי משכיל אל-דל ...) is to the left of the bays midrash, and talks about HaShem's love for those in distress.

Teh.42 (... כאיל תערג ...), about the exile of Israel and the longing for HaShem, is written in the arches of the lower bridge and in the foaming water, because it mentions the mighty roaring seas, waves and breakers and "the watery deep (... תהום-אל תהום קורא ...) which calls to watery deep".

Teh.59 (... הצילני מאיבי ...) undulates over the upper bridge through the golden circle of light in the top left corner. It contains many *pesukim* about the punishment of the enemies which continue to threaten the Jewish people, seen here walking on the narrow bridge.

Teh.77 (... קולי אל-אלהים ...) which refers to the sea, mighty waters and the crossing of the Sea (בים דרךך ושבילך במים רבים) after leaving Egypt is half hidden in the waves near the big fish.

Teh.90 (תפלה למשה איש-האלהים) describes the power of HaShem over His creation and is written in the left border, where the upper and the lower bridges meet.

Teh.137 (... על נהרות בבל ...) is the classical lament about the Babylonian Exile and is written under the lower bridge, in the water but close to the flames engulfing Gehinnom.

Teh.105 (... הודו לה ...) starts in the top right corner and flows down. It tells us about the exile and redemption of Mitzrayim, and is written close to the people and the bridge and the woman lighting Shabbat candles, which is a direct result of the Exodus, which led to the giving of the Torah, which implies the Shabbat.

Teh.150 (... הללו-אל בקדשו ...) is written near the feet of the repentant sinner in his white tallit who now can say words of praise; over his head are some introductory words about Rabbi Nachman which are said before reciting the Tikkun Kelali.

This painting is not the only work about the Tikkun, it was preceded by several pastels and will be followed by many more artistic renderings of Reb Nachman of Breslov's life and work.

The artist is planning to make posters available of the Breslover Tikkun, and she sells originals and takes commissions. To contact her look at her website:

www.absolutearts.com/portfolios/s/shoshannah, or at: Shoshbm@aol.com / 718-339 2779 (Brooklyn, NY)