



Bs”d

A tribute to Rabbi Kerry Baker, z”l

Artist: Shoshannah Brombacher, PhD

Pastel and ink on paper, 23.23 X 16.54 inches (59 X 42 cm), 2021

Commissioned by Naomi Lyons Freedman

This drawing is a tribute to Rabbi Kerry Baker z"l from Austin. His great love and passion was studying and teaching Torah, bringing people closer to HaShem. We see him in the center of the drawing, seated at a table and surrounded by students, all wrapped in a tallit to show their commitment to the Torah, because wearing tzitzit is tantamount to fulfilling the 613 mitzvot. The rabbi holds a little scroll close to his heart and his hand, raised in an explanatory gesture. The palm shows the lines that resemble a *w shin*, the divine letter, the first letter of the Shekhinah, the Divine Immanence. To the rabbi's left we see the text from Joshua 1:8, *And you will study it [the Book of the Law, the Torah] day and night*. The lions on both side of the Aron Kodesh watch the study session with keen eyes. They carry two important symbols which are often juxtaposed to lions in Jewish iconology, a lulav and ethrog (right) and a shofar (left), both alluding to the Ultimate Redemption, *restoring the fallen sukkah of [King] David*, i.e., the Temple. The curtain of the Aron Kodesh is embellished with a Tree of Life, symbol of the Torah, the Crown of the Torah, and the letters *kaf* and *taf*, (*Keter Torah*).

Over the rabbi's head hovers the angel which is connected to the verse of Rabbi Baker's Hebrew name, Chaim, that starts and ends with the same letters as that name, Ps.34:8: תִּנְהַג אֱלֹהִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִחַלְצֵם: מִלְּאֲדֵי יְהוָה סָבִיב לִירְאָיו וְיִחַלְצֵם, *The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them*. This verse is written near the angel's red wing. The other wing is blue. Together they represent fire and water, the two elements the earth is composed of according to the Mishnah (Chagiga 12a).

Colors play an important role in this work of art. The four corners each represent one of the four traditional Euclidian elements: the green lush Earth (bottom left), the deep blue Water (bottom right), the ephemeral bluish Air (top left), and the red Fire (top right). Each of them explains an element of Torah study in the following manner.

The element of Earth shows a happy family sitting around a table, as in Micah 4:4: *But every man shall sit under his grapevine or fig tree with no one to disturb him*, which is written around the scene. The jars contain the produce of the land as promised in Yosef's blessing in Gen. 27:28: *Now may God give you of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth, and an abundance of grain and new wine*. In Psalm 128:2, the righteous and god-fearing man is promised that he will *eat the fruit of your labor; blessings and prosperity will be yours*, and in the next verse the wife is compared to a fruitful vine and his children to olive shoots. Torah study leads to refining one's character and *middos*, to being truly free in mind and spirit. It automatically promotes *shalom*

bayit, peace in the home, and a happy family, with challot representing Shabbat hovering over the table and a menorah filled with pure olive oil lighting up the scene at the bottom of the drawing. The perfect color for this state of mind is a peaceful and fruitful green.

The fish in the element of Water represent the Jews. They are in their Torah mindset and an environment of Torah values like a fish in the water. It is impossible for them to live outside of the waters of the Torah without losing the possibility of fulfillment, just like a fish can't live on dry land where he will perish. The figure holding a Sefer Torah resembles Rabbi Baker and the water is allusion to his name, Chaim (*life*), because the Torah is living water. The text under the fish reads: *O all who thirst, come for water* (Is. 55:1)

The element of Air shows a women holding a siddur and looking back, as if to connect to all the generations before her leading all the way back to Mount Sinai. She doesn't raise her head upward to the sky, because *לא בשמים היא*, *she* [the Torah] *is not in Heaven*, but here, with us, and therefore a scroll is placed under her and not on top of her.

The element of Fire shows the burning enthusiasm of Rabbi Baker for the Torah. The word *hitlahavut* (enthusiasm) has the same root as *lahav*, flame. The rabbi davens with his students, his fellow Jews, and exclaims, *because a candle is a mitzvah and the Torah light*, Prov. 6:23. Light and fire are represented by big golden and red circles. The divine letter *shin*, which resembles flames, hovers in front of him, in reminiscence of Ps.16:8, *I have set HaShem always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved.*

May Rabbi Baker's legacy be a blessing for all.