

The Liberation Garden
A Visual Installation by Cheselyn Amato
Afikomen Judaica, Berkeley, CA



Liberation Garden: Healing and Redemption after Slavery by Cheselyn Amato appearing in the windows of Afikomen Judaica at 600 Claremont Avenue in Berkeley is an embodiment of that moment and after when the Israelites arrive at the Red Sea and behind them they see the armies of those who want to defeat them. At that moment, the most powerful choice before them is to trust and believe in the Love of Yud Hey Vav Hey – G-d – who has promised that if the people Israel trust in G-d, then all means to survival and sustenance will be provided. And so, even defied by so many who still show suspicion, G-d parts the Red Sea...and the people are given a way to continuance – to life. And, this is always enough – the gift of renewed opportunity to become wholly human and a fulfillment of our reason for being.

Who expected that the sea would part, but enough did trust that a way would be given, one to follow leading to freedom. And so, as this garden, Shekinah, Indwelling Presence, descends amongst us. Adonai joins us as Shekinah – this garden of delight that triggers in us the memory that all is written and freewill is given. By leap of faith and by the magnificence of what appears, so is our covenant renewed over and over and over again.

This is a garden filled with unexpected embodiments of the flower – blossoms made of intertwined fabrics from around the world with the Israelite/Jewish story woven amongst the stories and experiences of the world-at-large – blossoms like headdresses and hats – wraps to crowns – slave rags to ennobled and bejeweled anointment. These are headdresses that reveal histories of slavery and sovereignty, literal and figurative; these are headdresses encouraging global healing and this is a garden looking forward to the time of global harmony. The Tree of Life – Etz Chayyim – in all its aspects is given form in these fabrics. Will/Desire, Wisdom, Intelligence, Understanding, Ingenuity, Compassion, Generosity, Discipline, Rigor, Beauty, Grace, Fertility, Capability, Victory, Splendor, Abundance, Effect, Action, Actualization – all these aspects/emanations of the Tree of Life – are engaged and interacting in the interacting and cooperating fabrics that constitute these blossoms.

The blossom with the symbols of the Israeli flag with the Star of David and the Palestinian kuffiyeh with its black and white checkered pattern is an invitation to healing and redemption on all these levels: specifically for the Israelis and the Palestinians; and for the destructive negative forces that ignite amongst Jews, Christians and Muslims; and for the remembrance and healing of a deeply wounded diversity that is actually connected by profoundly shared origins; and for all the destruction that can arrive when the darker side of identity prevails.

The flower stems are made of electrical pipes and grounded in electrical fittings with extensions of bamboo and milled wood, like the reeds that have served as protection over and over again – stems of steel – of strength – grounded. The fulfillment of our calling whose form is given in the Etz Chayyim – the Tree of Life – is fueled by the electricity that flows, the energy that is transmitted and received through the conducting channels. This is a garden of reception and transmission. And so may each of us be(come) a garden of reception and transmission.

About the black iridescent-centered blossoms, we humans play a significant role in creating the circumstances that invite in the positive light of presence or that assure the blight of absence. We absolutely and actively participate in the causes and effects of good and evil. Black is a color that contains all color – that marvelous spectrum can be liberated in a magnificent, giving, healing, fulfilling and positive way, or it can be kept enslaved in a dark, withholding, selfish, self-righteous and negative way. The existence of iridescence is the liberating and healing force in black – iridescence is as luminous, potent, vital, healing and revealing as black can be consuming, subsuming, sublimated, imploded, withdrawn and concealing. What is fantastic about black is that it can be full or empty, liberated and liberating or enslaved and enslaving; it holds the potential for both beginnings and ends, of both good and bad trajectories. Black has a unique character because it carries the potential for both life and death. Black can be beautiful or terrible. Absence can be beautiful or terrible. Iridescence is expressed luminous light and empowering antidote that can match the dark and voiding aspect of black. Light – the force of enlightenment and construction – overcomes the force of ignorance and destruction.

And, on an ordinary plane, on a lighter and lower level, sometimes it takes a plunger – like the all-orange new-fangled plastic version/special in the middle window – to get the job done.

We are a beautiful shadow of the divine – reflection and projection of the magnificent spectrum and the white light that holds all differentiated frequencies. Events of colored light reflecting from and projecting through forms and symbols – images and words – operate as signs and carry meaning therein.

Seder Plates – represented in the garden as round aluminum-screen splatter covers with handles and with words on radiant film – are mounted on the wall. The six components/compartments of the Seder Plate are represented by Hebrew (here transliterated into English) and the word translated into English: Maror (Horseradish, Bitterness of Slavery), Chazeret (Romaine lettuce, Bitterness of Slavery and how we can use the experience for strength combined with the charoset to endure to freedom), Charoset (Sweet, binding paste, Mortar), Karpas (simple green vegetable like parsley in salt water, Tears of Hardship and of Thanksgiving for Survival and Opportunity to Thrive), Z'roa (shankbone, Sacrifice, Remembering the Covenant), and Beitzah (hard-boiled or roasted egg, symbol of mourning and/or the persisting force of life).

The Magen David, the Star of David, the six days of creation, is an incredibly imbued six-pointed star, revealing sanctity through geometry.

Manna - food from heaven – is made of ordinary materials, transformed. Everything, anything is imbued if we allow it to be revealed. The manna here is made of clear rigid plastic and styrofoam packaging as well as all of the 8 ½” x 11” sheets of paper that cross my path – from the daily mail to memos to reproductions of selected pages like the recipe in Hebrew for the making of a golem (an artificial being) or the stripes of the concentration camp prison uniforms or the face of Anne Frank or of myself and my child or that of some I do not know – together the ordinary and the extraordinary, the every day and the special, the known and unknown, the sacred and the profane meet – the trees of life and knowledge – working together to provide what is needed and what we want – both for survival and to effect thriving; maintenance and sustenance.

And in the garden is the great ladder – the Double-Helix DNA spiral – that connects above and below in the marvelous relationship that is humanity’s very reason for being.

The Pharaoh in all of our lives is the resistance and the clinging that limits us – from each individual to global humanity as a whole. From each individual to the whole collective of humanity we are all given the opportunity to exercise freewill – that is, to make authentic and unconditional effort – in concert with G-d to fulfill our destinies spiritually, intellectually, emotionally and physically, and to overcome threats to that fulfillment. If we choose who we are completely, we have the very greatest shot at becoming whole, of becoming liberated and of entering the land where we belong. We do not assign the land where we belong, but we must choose it to receive it. The early Israelite experience of exile/enslavement, exodus/liberation, and healing (tikkun olam)/redemption is given as a mirror for the very choices each one of us can make each and every day in response to the most minute to the most macroscopic choices that present.

Liberation Garden is given on this Pesach 5770/Passover 2010 to honor and fulfill our calling to Tefillah (Prayer, Celebration, Honor, Respect, and Thanksgiving); Teshuvah (Repentance and Supplication) and Tzedakah (Contribution, Sharing).

Listen for Yud Hey Vav Hey, if so, then you will Hear Yud Hey Vav Hey Who will reveal the path to freedom that is love and Who will assure and reassure our steadfast commitment to the covenant of service: Israel to Yud Hey Vav Hey, Shema Israel, Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Echad (Hear, Oh Israel, God Our God is One) – for us and all.

May we all be blessed to become free of our pharaohs in time for ourselves and all who depend upon us, and by six degrees of separation, that means each and every one of us on this planet is in some way affected and impacted by each and every other’s condition wherever it may rest between enslavement to liberation.

Omen and Shalom,

Cheselyn