

## Rabbi Matt Berkowitz's Menu of Programs

### ***Passover Landscapes: Illuminations on the Exodus***

*Passover Landscapes: Illuminations on the Exodus* represents a five year journey of Jewish learning and art. Illuminated and authored by Rabbi Matthew L. Berkowitz and inspired by an original commission for a new family Haggadah for Dedee and Stephen Lovell, *Passover Landscapes* offers a unique window into the seder experience. The project consists of three components: a portfolio of twenty-seven giclée prints (including three papercuts), a Haggadah, and a book of commentary. It is a piece rich with influences and history, bringing the experience of the Exodus to a deeper and more meaningful level. The portfolio is entirely produced in Israel, bound in Jerusalem with end papers made of parsley in Zichron Yaakov, inspired by manuscripts from the Rare Book Room of The Jewish Theological Seminary, and woven together by a painting of a characteristic Israel landscape. *Passover Landscapes* is currently in production as a Limited Edition of two hundred and fifty with twenty-five additional artist proofs.

An exhibit of the twenty-seven framed illuminations may be sent for the artist-in-residence program.

### ***Rembrandt and the Rabbis: Jacob Wrestling***

Genesis contains a cryptic and fateful narrative that has led to a flurry of conversation over many generations. Separated from his family and about to confront his brother Esau after twenty years of estrangement, Jacob prepares for the worst. In the darkness of night, he wrestles with a mysterious assailant. Who is this mystery figure? Through a close reading of the text, master artists, as well as rabbinic commentary, we will explore this fascinating and compelling episode that speaks volumes about who we are as a Jewish people.

### ***Imaging and Imagining the Exodus from Egypt: Crossing the Reed Sea***

This session explores one of the pivotal events of the Israelite narrative: the Exodus and specifically the Israelites crossing the sea. We will take a close look at the biblical narrative. Participants will be asked to identify with a character and emotion that is central to the story. From there, we will discuss the variety of responses, turn to artistic renderings of this moment, and then see to what extent rabbinic commentary dovetails with the personal and visual interpretations of this liminal event.

### ***The Four Children Unmasked***

The haggadah refers to Four Children: the Wise, the Wicked, the Simple, and the One Who Does Not Know to Ask. What is the origin of the Four Children? How have the Four Children been represented in *haggadot* throughout the generations? How might the Four Children be represented today? With which of the Four Children do you most identify? This session will begin to answer these questions and will encourage us to think creatively about addressing the Four Children at the seder.

### ***The Tree of Life Shtender\****

The Tree of Life Shtender was conceived and designed by David Moss and Noah Greenberg. Noah hand-carved numerous models of the pieces over five years until he and David were satisfied with the artistic statement. The result is a collection of the finest museum-quality work. Each piece is a treasure; the entire shtender is beyond description. Based on the traditional reading/prayer/study lectern, The Tree of Life Shtender is at the same time an intricate sculptural work of art, an elegant piece of furniture, and a treasure chest containing a complete series of the daily, weekly, and yearly objects of Jewish practice.

\*program contingent on availability of a shtender in sponsoring community

### ***Illuminating the Scribal Arts***

Art has the potential to open the door to Jewish tradition. And so, the illumination of sacred text in Judaism has a rich and complex history. As the largest repository for Hebrew manuscripts in the Western Hemisphere, the Rare Book Room of The Jewish Theological Seminary contains some of the most impressive examples of illumination and scribal art. This session will explore the history of illumination with a particular focus on the scribal arts in Judaism. How have the scribal arts animated sacred text and Jewish learning? What have been some of the traditional techniques? And how does this journey continue into the present day? In addition to some of the historic treasures that are part of the JTS Rare Book Room Collection, we will also explore some of the work of modern Judaica artists today.

### ***The "Art" of Love: Exploring the Illumination of the Ketubbah Through the Ages***

From the fifteenth century, Jewish communities developed a rich tradition of the illumination of Jewish marriage contracts. Languages, styles, and iconography of *ketubbot* are as diverse and as animated as the breadth of Jewish history itself. What is the *ketubbah*? How did this central document to Jewish life evolve? And what are the exquisite techniques and styles that evolved in the creation of *ketubbot* over some five hundred years time? This is a lively informative, informative session that highlights JTS's collection of illuminated *ketubbot*. We will also explore the works of modern Judaica artists and see how they have reappropriated classical themes into a contemporary context.

### ***Illuminating Esther: Creating a Community-Wide Scroll of Esther***

One of the most popular decorated texts in Jewish tradition is *Megilat Esther*, The Scroll of Esther, which is read on the holiday of Purim. In this three-day seminar program, students will learn about the rich history of *megilah* illumination. The program opens with a visual feast of *megilot* (scrolls) through the ages, showcased from different lands and cultures. We then turn our attention to some contemporary visual interpretations of Esther. Participants then receive a selection of verses which they are tasked with illuminating via the medium of their choice: colored pencils, gouache, or collage. The

images are placed and mounted into a scroll produced in the Jerusalem Fine Art Print Studio – framed around the scribal writing of Rabbi Berkowitz and printed on a canvas with the feel of parchment. This project is ideal before Purim. The *megilah* may then serve as permanent decoration in the synagogue-day school community and/or may serve as a fundraiser if scrolls are reproduced with the permission of the sponsoring organization and Rabbi Berkowitz.

***Akeidat Yitzhak: The Binding of Isaac Through Our Voices, the Rabbis, and Art***

We will begin with an in depth study of a classic text of terror and defining narrative of the Jewish journey, *Akeidat Yitzhak*, “the Binding of Isaac.” What are the central issues raised by the story itself? By us? By classical and modern commentators? And how do artistic representations transform and deepen our understanding of the text?

***The Politics of the Western Wall***

The arrest of Nofrat Frankel, a Jewish woman praying at the Western Wall (Nofrat was arrested for the “crime” of wearing a *tallit* and carrying a *sefer Torah*), raises critical issues of religious pluralism, the meaning of the *kotel* for the Jewish people, and Israel-Diaspora relations. What is the Western Wall? From when have Jews been praying in this location? And how should a committed American Jew and the larger American Jewish community respond to Nofrat and the rabbinate that controls the Western Wall? All of these important issues will be explored in this session.

***The “State” of Israel: Democracy or Theocracy***

With the recent freeze of construction on settlements in the West Bank, tension has risen between the religious and political leaderships of Israel. One rabbi of a *hesder yeshivah* (committed to army service) even called on his students to resist any evacuation orders or commands to dismantle settlements. How is modern Israel to wrestle with this tension? Much of this debate is rooted in disparate ideas of the nature of the Jewish State. What are some of the competing visions of the modern State of Israel? Is Israel simply a “State for the Jews” or is it a “Jewish State”? And if it is a Jewish State, who’s “Jewish” is it?

***“Jerusalem of Gold”: The Biblical, Rabbinic and Medieval Roots of a Modern Lovesong***

Since the Six Day War, Naomi Shemer's "Jerusalem of Gold" has been recognized as the second anthem of Israel. It is a song that captures the poetic imagery of Jerusalem -- and the deep longing for a people to return to its source. What are the biblical and rabbinic wellsprings from which Naomi Shemer drew her inspiration? How do these literary and historic sources shed light on our understanding of the song? And to what extent does this moving work resonate in the ears of an American-Israeli living in Jerusalem today?

***The Delicate Dance: Exploring Judaism's Artistic Interplay with Other Cultures***

“Exile” and “the Diaspora” are often considered to be an unnatural and unsafe place for the Jewish people. Joseph is one of the first biblical characters to unwillingly end up in Egypt as he is sold into slavery by his brothers. How are we to understand the exile of Joseph? And what does his personal *galut* (exile) teach us about the experience of the Jewish people in the Diaspora? Has our history of exile enriched or diminished Jewish identity? This lecture will explore examples of cultural syncretism from the Biblical, Rabbinic, Medieval, and Modern Periods.