

Jews in the Desert and Szabo Lajos' Calligraphies

By Mia Shandell

People look for faces in natural things, like trees or in man-made things, like paintings, because we look for ourselves in it. And this, the collection of calligraphies is where we find it.

Intensified. In many of SzL's calligraphies my eye is drawn to facial features. This very basic human form – the face – does not appear with the realism of a photograph and is more of an impression. So when I look at a pile of SzL calligraphies in front of me on the table, I am drawn to the ones that I see myself in. The wildly looping ones that slowly bend upwards. The collection of crazy eyes. I also see the ones I want to be. The direct line slashed vertically into the page, leading surely to a pool of swirls below. **I want to cut into the page and go directly to the heart of things, just like that.**

When viewing the calligraphies individually I am immediately **struck** by them. Like lightning is cutting through me to show me a flash of something. I don't yet know of what. But it's not just a singular strike. There are starts and stops and one strike can begin, fade and return again. When I imagine how these drawings were made, like a dance, the strokes are flying across the page in a few strikes. Like Zorro's sword on cloth curtain – quick and decisive. SzL's strikes have weight associated with the immediate choice of light or heavy strike, a long or short strike, up or down, diagonal, right or left. And not just on one page; a collection of pages must go by to complete this part of the dance. I say this because I am lucky to have received some insider information that SzL composed these calligraphies much in the manner that I imagined he did. Each individual drawing taking a few seconds to a couple tens of seconds. What I did not know, however, was that after an individual drawing, he composed another and yet another, until reaching the 100th page. And I thought – wow – yes, this is what I needed to know, because this shows me even more that this process, this work, was *quicker* than intellect. It had to be for him a rapidly intuitive, instinctual process. These strokes are the physical dance of his thoughts being formed as they are etched and looped into page after page. On each individual page, the strokes must form a beginning and ending, but as in amazing conversation that brings two

people to the same points on the same page, the endings are never quite ending and the beginnings are all singular instances of many beginnings.

This is not to say these beginnings or endings are incomplete or haphazard. Contrarywise, they are quite deliberate beginnings and endings. They have so much weight, however, they always point to more. The beginning point of the drawing **necessitates** the next point. The end point of the drawing **necessitates** the beginning of the next. What I am most interested in right now are the spaces between, the discontinuities. For SzL, this is the instantaneous moment residing immediately after the rest from the previous drawing and immediately before the beginning of the next. It is also the “moment” after the previous series and before the next. It could also be the “moment” after the previous stroke and before the next! Just different time scales. **This moment, to me, is the desert.** This is where he has to become **thirsty**. Thirsty for the next strike, the next round, the next exploration. Otherwise, why continue? Being the desert, without drawing, without work, without struggle, **just empty space**, maybe hating the previous drawings and potentially dreading the next, it is an uneasy place that can dehydrate (even the strongest of us) to the point where you forget that you were thirsty. A thirst for more drawings, more work, more decisive moments of cutting through the space to reach a new one is **necessary to keep elevating, to keep seeking self-revelation, WHICH begins the path to redemption. As a result, each time we embark on the next stroke, the next drawing, or the next series, with its infinite stream of continuities and discontinuities, we drink that next drink – of thirst.** And judging from the clarity and weight of SzL’s calligraphies, I suspect he was super thirsty.

This option that SzL emphasizes - to drink the drink of thirst - is the path to redemption. I understand redemption to be the act of I, the individual spirit, becoming identical to and part of the One spirit. The individual spirit wants and drives toward redemption. This is the fact and meat of spirit – its nature is to rise to the One. It was Easter almost a week ago. “He is risen.” We are all *waiting* for him to rise again say the Christians on my Facebook wall...and that *waiting* is the ultimate death, isn’t it? Because we do not *rise* while we *wait*. We do not have symbiotic organisms hanging out in us that take care of that most crucial process while we

check out, like the yeast we add to flour and water. *This* is being defeated by the desert. *This* is losing the thirst. I, in myself, must rise. I must become big enough to turn part of myself into the yeast. During Passover, we literally remove the yeast – from our diets and our homes. We remove that which works to explain the rituals that have been repeated for centuries to remember the time of the Jewish person-to-people transformation. Without the individual yeast though, how can this transformation occur?! This must truly be a holy moment because maybe it is not that we REMOVE the yeast. In a way, the parts of ourselves that we have worked to make into the yeast that helps our psychological and spiritual growth for the rest of the year are, at this special point in time, joined by divine intervention with that Yeast of God which effects the transformation from one to One. The yeast is no longer our own small package that we have concocted, at this time of the year, it becomes identical to and joined with the grand effector of transformation that God has made inside himself. In the story of Exodus, you know, the Jews left so quickly, their bread had no time to rise, the yeast could not act and they go into the desert, the dry, lacking desert where they are thirsty and hungry. They were stressed not being surrounded by the known, not having the things they thought they needed to survive. They have only this dry sustenance which is constantly running low. And they complain and they turn away from their leader, Moses, and they turn away from the God that has brought them into this dry, lacking land. **But they had to go there.** They had to clear away the material and lose everything in order to build anew because the roofs they had built over their heads were also built over their spirits, creating a warm and cozy coffin. So God, through miraculous intervention, made it possible for them to undergo this clearing. In the face of the oppression of another people, of the haters, they could have conformed. The other people in the world wanted to conform. Middle-class existence. The Mammon. God sees the Jews as those who could be strong enough not to conform and to follow him. Not to follow him blindly but to very acutely understand what it means to take on the task of speaking the unspeakable Name. The whole living life is spent in the act of knowledge of this one act -the sounding of the Name. *This*, Jewish religion asserts, can happen only at redemption. *This* infinite END goal of sounding the name must needs BEGIN with hearing. That we are to, always, first “Hear” Sh’ma y’Israel “Hear,

O Israel"! And at the end, there is the One Name ...adonai ECHAD "The Name is One". (*I think I derived something that has already been derived. Is my "yeast" the Logos?*)

How do we hear? How do we begin to hear? First there is silence. Is there? First, silence must be created. This has to be true. In reality, in the world out there, there is entropy. There is noise. And it's background noise. And how are you supposed to hear when surrounded by all this noise? You can't. First, there needs to be the clearing. Maybe Passover has to happen more than once a year. Maybe a type of Passover has to happen for SzL and ourselves when we have to do artistic, psychological, spiritual work. First, there needs to be created a blank canvas. A blank page. **An empty space.** And the strokes are performed in quick succession as I mentioned before. The calligraphy definitely indicates a process occurring in that moment – artist connecting with space through ink in an infinitesimal instant! And this act is the artistic, psychological, spiritual work. Other artistic pieces can look like relics of thoughts that could have been exciting but fragmented on their way from brain to page. Not instantaneous at all. And these fragments were merely rearranged into a form reminiscent of something the artist has seen before. But the SzL calligraphies are unlike anything I have seen before. And they awaken in me this sense of time that is other worldly to me, an infinite moment created and 'ended' just to exist as the question that inspires the next question represented by the next infinite moment that is strokes on a page – again, the endless cocktails of thirst. **The moments before the drawing, the discontinuities, have to include the clearing and the hearing, the development of the thirst. The drawing is the answer which, when it becomes discontinuous, leads to more hearing.** And so more calligraphies must be made. More creative moments must be explored by SzL, by I, and there is no end to this collection of Hearings until redemption, when the answer (the question?) is the Name.