

Lofty goals

Art and the Almighty



22



Nathan Moskowitz's (Nahum HaLevi) "Passover"

Ambitious artist

Painter hopes work helps viewers grasp Judaism, God

by Aaron Leibel
Arts Editor

Nathan Moskowitz has lofty, even unworldly, ambitions for his complex, colorful paintings.

"My art is an attempt at understanding the transcendent meaning of Judaism and the ultimate essence of the *eyn sof*, otherwise known as God," says Moskowitz, 48, who paints under the name of Nahum HaLevi. He is exhibiting his work as part of a six-artist show, *Mystical Journey*, at the Dennis & Philip Ratner Museum in Bethesda through Feb. 27.

To reach his goal, the Silver Spring resident uses Hebrew letters and words, often turned into human form, trees, flowers, even Yiddish and Egyptian hieroglyphics, to produce works "to create new interpretations of Jewish holidays and biblical stories."

For example, Moskowitz points to his painting, "Passover," a rich work, the artist explains, because it is based on four *haftarot*, one Torah portion and the Haggadah.

The "springboard word, which is the essence of the painting," he says, is the Hebrew root *beit kaf ayin, bekah*. One form of the word is found in Exodus (*Vayibaku hamayim* — the water split) and another is in Ezekiel (*bekah* — valley, in which were found the "dry bones").

The fusing of the Exodus and valley of dry bones is the basis for the painting.

A member of both Kemp Mill Synagogue and Silver Spring Jewish Center who grew up in an Orthodox family in the Bronx, N.Y., he says he always was interested in art, but stuck to drawing until he got married.

Telling his bride that he wanted to paint, Moskowitz received a water color painting set from her on his first post-marriage birthday and began painting.

"I have always painted with Jewish themes because that was what was inside me," says the self-taught artist.

Busy with his practice as a neurosurgeon — he is also chief of neurosurgery at Shady Grove Adventist Hospital and an assistant professor of neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins Medical School — Moskowitz has painted sporadically over the years.

But, he says, in 1999 he did his first oil painting and in recent years has begun to "put more of his recreation play in the Goldman Gallery at the Jewish Community Center of Greater Washington in Rockville next January and at the Visionary Museum in Baltimore sometime next year. The Jewish Museum of Prague also has expressed interest in his works.

Moskowitz has a "lifetime project" — to produce paintings of the entire *Tanakh* and create a "post-modern Jewish literary, *mishnahic* illuminated Bible," and then, to take all those paintings to create a "Jewish Sistine Chapel" that visually interprets the Torah through Jewish eyes.

Washington JEWISH WEEK

Shevat 11, 5766/ February 9, 2006

www.washingtonjewishweek.com

Lofty goals

Art and the Almighty

