

Baruch Nachshon

Baruch Nachshon was born in Mandatory Palestine in 1939, in the city of Haifa. Nachshon began to paint in early childhood, and developed his relationship to art and to artists throughout his youth. During his military service Nachshon herded flocks for the IDF, an experience that imbued in him a love and appreciation for nature which figures prominently in his work until today. Upon completing his military service the young artist was torn between the temptation to travel to Paris, then the cultural center of the art world, and his deep love of the land of Israel, the spiritual center of the Jewish world. Opting to stay in Israel, Nachshon studied under Shlomo Nerani, Cezanne's only pupil, with whom he had enjoyed a deep friendship extending back to his childhood. Nachshon, whom Nerani viewed as his spiritual heir, was the only one of his students allowed to see the master at work.

Nachshon's lifelong involvement in Lubavitch Hassidut began in his early adulthood, when he was drawn to the movement by its uniquely beautiful traditional melodies. In 1965 Nachshon was invited to an unprecedented three-hour private session with the Rebbe of Lubavitch, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, in New York. The young artist used the opportunity to share his concerns and misgivings about the role of the Jewish artist and the many inherent conflicts which confronted him. The Rebbe blessed Nachshon with the advice that for many generations the art of painting had failed to find its ultimate rectification in holiness, but that with the help of God he might come to bring about that long anticipated rectification. The Rebbe then offered to fund Nachshon's studies in New York on the condition that he would find a program of study acceptable to Jewish religious values. Despite the difficulty inherent in such a task, Nachshon gladly received the Rebbe's offer and devoted himself fully to the celebration of the wisdom of the Creator through visual art.

In 1967 Nachshon and his wife Sara, along with six other families renewed the Jewish presence in Hebron for the first time since the city's Jewish residents were massacred by Arabs in 1929. To underscore the significance of Jewish culture to the city, Nachshon opened a gallery of his art beside the Tomb of the Patriarchs. During this period Nachshon also used to visit the houses of Hebron's Arab residents in order to paint the city from unique angles. On one of his regular visits to the Tomb of the Patriarchs, Nachshon met an elderly Breslov Hassid. The hassid urged him to recite Psalms every night for forty days, and assured him that if he did so he would merit profound revelation. Nachshon did so, and as soon as the forty days had passed he saw the heavens open, receiving visions that would charge his art forever. Since that first time, Nachshon has seen the heavens open many times and, indeed, the opening of the heavens is a recurring motif in his work. According to Nachshon, "the open sky means going beyond what is reality, seeing through."

Each of his paintings can be studied in the manner of a sacred text, providing numerous and vivid insights into the workings of creation and the promises held for the future. Many of his paintings describe visions of the future, of the world after its final redemption, of a world where all is peace and joy and where the revelation of divine beneficence is clear to all. Until that time, Nachshon's paintings offer a glimpse of what could be, of what ought to be and of what will be when the work of humanity has reached its successful completion.

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