



[New exhibit opens at Kabbalistic Museum of Psalms](#)

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A new exhibit of paintings opened this week at the unique [Museum of Psalms](#) in Jerusalem. The exhibit, “The Sun Series: Meditations, Light and Healing,” consists of 42 new original paintings in which 83 year-old Holocaust survivor Moshe Tzvi HaLevi Berger expresses the Kabbalistic notions of healing, light and meditation. The museum’s unique focus is dedicated to a kabbalistic interpretation of each of the Bible’s 150 Tehilim ([Psalms](#)), the chants or songs attributed mostly to King David.

Berger’s one-man tour de force, the [Museum of Psalms](#), is located in a picturesque, historic courtyard built in 1873 in downtown Jerusalem. The building once constituted the private home and yeshiva of [Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook](#) (1865-1935), the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi in [Mandate Palestine](#) who played a seminal role in the development of the pre-state [Yishuv](#) (settlement). It’s worth a visit both to view the permanent collection of acrylic canvasses and to tour the [Rav \(Rabbi\) Kook Museum](#) upstairs. Admission to both is free.

No less fascinating is the opportunity to meet the charming painter, the quintessential Eastern European zayda (Jewish grandfather) with a twinkle in his eye, who might be compared to the Yiddish novelist [Isaac Bashevis Singer](#) or the artist [Marc Chagall](#).

Berger was born in Romania’s remote province of Transylvania in 1925. “Dracula country” he jokes in English, one of the eight languages he speaks fluently. He dismisses his suffering in a work camp during the Holocaust and chooses to focus on his art career and life’s passion which brought him to Jerusalem in 1992 after becoming a ba’al teshuva (a Jewish person who takes on an Orthodox lifestyle) a decade earlier.

Prior to that Berger had studied at Rome’s Instituto de Belle Arte and Paris’ Ecole des Beaux Arts. “But that is not important,” he says with a wave of his hand. His earlier work, inspired by Rembrandt, was just “commercial things,” he says. Yet [Berger’s website](#) notes he has had more than 100 one-man shows on three continents.

Psalm art influenced by the Zohar

With the patronage of Yehuda Meir Getz, the rabbi of the Western Wall, and a *bracha* (blessing) in 1988 from the Lubavitcher Rebbe Menachem Schneerson, Berger set out to create his series of kabbalistic masterpieces. The effort took him 15 years.

The semi-abstract canvases each depict a single verse from one of the 150 psalms - sacred texts which many Orthodox Jews recite daily.

Berger's colour schema utilizes the seven colors of the spectrum, based on the [Zohar](#), as a representation of the 10 *sefirot* (literally, counts, mystical aspects of God). "These paintings are in the metaphorical tradition of *ma'asei merkava* (Divine Chariot) rather than the realistic mode of the *ma'asei Breishit* (Creation) which most art work emulates," he explains. "To transliterate the Psalms from written poems to visual image was a difficult task. Just as each psalm is different, so is each painting. And yet, as each Psalm is inherently connected to the other 149, so too a unifying element had to run through the 150 Psalm paintings, a task accomplished through careful observation."

That process was augmented by Berger's years of study of the Psalms using Judaism's classic medieval commentators including Rashi, Radak and Malbim, among others, he says.

"All figurative representations are intended as metaphors. We know the world was created with letters; we know that Ha-Shem (God) is represented by fire in the Bible. Therefore in each painting there are letters, or fire, or both. Nothing happened by accident."

Besides fire and Hebrew letters, Berger has created a private language of sunbursts, crowns and images of the celestial Jerusalem. But it is his almost psychedelic abstraction that gives his canvases their powerful visual intensity.

Berger's original paintings are not for sale. But his hand corrected, limited edition signed lithographs are available for under \$150. Posters cost \$23.

Amongst the plethora of all types of Judaica available in Jerusalem, Moshe Berger's images of the Psalms seem inspired.

Getting to the Museum of Psalms

The Museum of Psalms is located at 9 Dr. Abraham Ticho Street at the corner of HaRav Kook Street, just north of Zion Square (on the same alley that leads to the Israel Museum's Ticho House). The hours are Sunday to Thursday 9 to 4, and Friday 9 to 1. For more information call (02) 623.0025 or visit [the museum's site](#). Admission is free.

Who wrote the Psalms?

Traditionally the Psalms were thought to be the work of King David, but many modern scholars see them as the product of several authors or groups of authors, many unknown. It is illogical to think Israelite shepherd turned warlord would have written Psalm 137 ("By the rivers of Babylon, where we sat down and wept") when the exile took place nearly 300 years after his death.

Most Psalms are prefixed with introductory words very different in the Hebrew Masoretic and Greek Septuagint traditions ascribing them to a particular author or

saying something about the circumstances of their composition; only 73 of these introductions claim David as author. Since the Psalms were written down around the 6th century BCE, nearly half a millennium after David's reign (about 1000-960 BCE), they doubtless depended on oral tradition for transmission of any Davidic material.

There are psalms with introductions connecting them to [Jeduthun](#), Asaf and the sons of Korah.

With minor variations Psalm 18 is also found at Samuel 2:22. In accordance with the naming convention used elsewhere in the historic parts of the TaNaKH (Hebrew Bible), it is known as the Song of David.