

## Itshak Holtz, A"H

Throughout its existence the Washington Heights Congregation has been blessed with a number of outstanding individuals. Among them is the world renowned Jewish painter Itshak Holtz, A"H. Itshak was born in Poland and immigrated, with his parents, to Palestine, as it was known then, as a child. He grew up in what is known today as the Geula/ Meah Shearim section of Yerushalayim and fought in the Hagana. He attended the world famous Bezalel school of art. As a young man he was encouraged to go to New York to study art. In New York he met the love of his life, Ruth, who would be his partner for 68 years, was his major cheerleader and eventually his caretaker. Ruth shared a similar background to Yitzchak. She was born in Czechoslovakia, immigrated to Israel with her parents as a child and ended up in New York. They settled in Washington Heights and together raised a beautiful family. Both of their children inherited their father's creative spirit. Aliza is a well known photographer, who is currently being exhibited at the Berkshire Bank on 187<sup>th</sup> St. Ari is an engineer who lives with his family in Yerushalayim and travels the world to oversee his projects.

Both Itshak's parents and his in-laws were concerned that he would end up just another one of the starving artists that populate the streets of New York. However, Itshak stuck to his dreams and soon became a very highly regarded artist. His works adorn many private collections throughout the world and have been exhibited throughout the United States and Israel. Many of us can still remember the extensive exhibition at the Yeshiva University museum that took place 26 years ago. It was one of the largest exhibitions of his work, and as a result many of us learned that Itshak's repertoire was far greater than we had ever imagined.

Itshak's ability to capture a scene is legendary. When he painted a person engrossed in learning or davening you could feel the intensity of the moment. You knew that the artist was not simply trying to capture the scene but was portraying the feeling and emotion that was being experienced by the subject. This was true of his paintings of musicians, tailors and shopkeepers, as well. You can feel the level of concentration and care with which these people were going about their tasks.

Itshak has memorialized many of the small shuls in Yerushalayim and Tzfat as well as the Washington Heights Congregation. Many of us are fortunate to have a print of the original shul that was on 161 St. and Amsterdam Ave., which he used as a fund raiser for the shul, and a poster of his painting of the shul on 179 St., which features another of our famous Mispalalim, Pinny Bulman.

Although Itshak's fame grew in New York and he was blessed with a number of wealthy patrons there, his heart always remained in Yerushalayim. Eventually, the Holtz's would come to spend half the year in New York and half the year in Yerushalayim. Finally, in 2010, they made the break and returned to Eretz Yisrael. I never saw Itshak as happy as he was in Yerushalayim. Every day for him was a miracle. Although by the time we made Aliya he was no longer in his prime, nevertheless he saw each day that he could walk the holy streets of Yerushalayim as a blessing. Every time we called or visited the first words that came out of his mouth were, "Chasdei Hashem", "it's the kindness of G-d." In our conversations he

would constantly remind us of how lucky we were to be living here in Yerushalayim, where every step taken is on holy soil.

Itshak Holtz was the “Poshater Yid” par excellence. He was the simple Jew, who had complete faith in the kindness of Hashem. He was meticulous in his observance of Mitzvot, particularly of daily prayer. He was always one of the first at Minyan, no matter what the weather. Even in the last few years, as his memory and eye sight were failing him and he often had difficulty getting out of bed at an early hour, he would make sure to pray. He had a number of people that he would call on a regular basis to check as to exactly what prayers were to be said on a given day. If he got up late he would ask if he could still say Shema and put on Tefilin.

He had a great voice and he would often be called upon to daven Musaf when our chazzan was away. Itshak was a very modest individual. If you introduced him to a stranger as “the well known,” he would deny it. He treated everyone who crossed his path with respect and good cheer. If you were interested in his work, even if you were someone of modest means who couldn’t afford one of his paintings, you were invited to his studio and treated like one of his wealthiest patrons. wiggle his ears and stick his tongue out in order to put them at ease and would in just a few minutes have

Finally, I would be remiss if I didn’t mention Itshak’s sense of humor. He was the quintessential “kibitzer”. His warm smile and the mischievous glint in his eye let you know he was up to something. He loved children, especially his grandchildren, and would dandle them on his knee. I want his closest confidants to know that up to the very end Itshak’s love of dinosaur eggs and chocolate never waned.

תהי זכרו ברוך