



Sonya A. Loya, Artisan/Educator

Hosanna's Glass Works Gallery/Bat-Tzyion Hebrew Learning Center

Biography

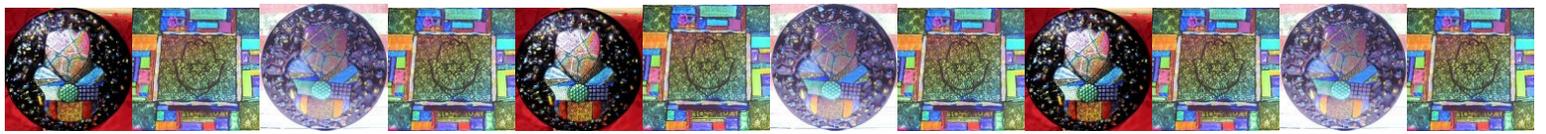
Sonya A. Loya's Hosanna's Glass Works, Inc. and the Bat-Tzyion Hebrew Learning Center, Inc. share a common space as well as a common purpose: that of self-discovery. In 1996, Loya opened Hosanna's Glass Works in Ruidoso, New Mexico to showcase her own and others' art. Ruidoso is located in the Sacramento Mountains of Southern New Mexico, centered in the triangulation of Albuquerque, Socorro and Roswell, and far from the beaten path.



Raised in Ruidoso as a Roman Catholic, Loya had always been deeply spiritual but never felt the connection to Catholicism—she felt something was missing or wrong. In 1999, Loya attended a messianic conference where she learned of her possible Jewish heritage. After conducting research and feeling the need to move forward with her findings, Loya went to her parents in 2002 to ask for their blessing to open the Bat-Tzyion Hebrew Learning Center. Her father then admitted that he had known he was Jewish since he was six-years-old and also revealed that he was the keeper of the family secret. DNA testing confirmed his connection to the Levitical clan, the last name “Loya” being the Spanish version of “Ha-Levi.” Loya was a province of Navarra, Spain, which was a prominent Jewish community during the Middle Ages. Loya formally reclaimed her Jewish heritage in 2005, thereby filling the void she felt growing up and ultimately fulfilling her destiny. Glass artistry has provided the means for many of Loya's self-discoveries; for example, she recognized the strong connection to her ancestry when a friend gave her the book *The Glassmakers: An Odyssey of the Jews: The First Three Thousand Years*.

Loya's creative talent surfaced at an early age—she easily took to crocheting, welding, working at the potter's wheel, beading, and leather goods, eventually finding her way to the beloved work of her ancestors: glassmaking, which encompasses the use of stained glass, glass blowing, precious metals and silversmithing. Loya's pieces are one-of-a-kind, with hidden Jewish symbols representing Crypto-Judaic heritage. The hidden symbols become visible with they're exposed to the light, just as the Torah's many hidden messages come to light when examined.





Loya's primary and favorite medium is dichroic glass, a NASA-developed processed glass in which the glass is spun in a high pressure vacuum chamber while 20 layers of vaporized mineral salts are sprayed on with ion guns. This process produces an art glass that exhibits "refraction," a dynamic effect whereby the colors change in appearance as they're viewed at different angles. Some pieces are fused together, others are hand-blown. Two or more layers of glass are fused and fired in a kiln at temperatures between 1480 and 2000°F, depending on the number of glass layers, then slowly and carefully cooled through a process called annealing to prevent the glass from shattering.

Loya expanded the operation of the Gallery to include education and outreach by founding the Bat-Tzyion Hebrew Learning Center, Inc.¹ with a mission to facilitate the education of descendants of Crypto-Jews or *anousim*² in learning about their history, ancestry, genealogy, and if they choose to pursue Judaism, to help them find an easier way back to Judaism (e.g., finding the right rabbi for them, as well as making Jewish publications available to them). Even in 21st century America, the need for secrecy is inherent in Crypto-Jews, and many of those who are drawn to the Bat-Tzyion Hebrew Learning Center are in the early stages of their journey. Learning consists of general scholarship, but the emphasis is on reclaiming and growing their Jewish heritage through study of Torah. Monthly speakers are featured at a first Friday monthly kabbalat Shabbat dinners, and gradually expanded to include special shabbatons with cantors and rabbis coming in from larger cities to help the Center's members celebrate, study and prepare for Jewish holidays and observances, as well as hosting annual *anousim* conferences featuring international leaders and experts in scholarship and spirituality. The Bat-Tzyion Hebrew Learning Center attracts individuals from all over Southern New Mexico, largely from word-of-mouth.



Whether through her art or through the Learning Center, Loya's charge is to encourage others to search for their own truths. Loya's ability to find symbolic parallels between her glasswork and her work with returning Crypto-Jews validates her journey.

¹ Bat-Zion or Bat-Tzion, from Hebrew, meaning daughter of Zion
² *Anousim* or *anusim*, meaning forced converts

