

## Light Insight

### *The Inside of the Outside*

“See, G-d has proclaimed by name Betzalel, son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Yehuda. He has filled him with G-dly spirit, wisdom, insight, and knowledge and with every craft.” (Exodus 31:2-3)

Judaism has always had an uneasy relationship with art and artists. The Greeks made temples of great beauty to their gods. The Vatican heads a mighty throng of churches from Venice to Sienna to Notre Dame to Florence bespeaking the artist’s striving to express his connection with that which is beyond.

If you look at the average synagogue, seemingly Jewish art has never attained the level of its non-Jewish counterparts, and in many cases has merely aped the non-Jewish world.

But it wasn’t always that way.

The Talmud (*Bava Batra 4a*) tells us that if you never saw the Second *Beit Hamikdash* (Holy Temple) which Herod built, you never saw a beautiful building in your life. Its walls were con-

structed from blue-green marble and white Marmara marble. One layer was indented and the next protruded so that the plaster would have a “key” to adhere to. Herod thought to cover the whole edifice with gold plate. The Rabbis told him to leave it as it was — unplastered and ungilded — for it looked better in its natural state — the different levels of blue-green and white resembling the waves of the sea.

When was the last time you saw a rabbi called in as an interior decorator? Did you ever hear of a rabbi invited to give his hal- lowed opinion on a building by Frank Lloyd Wright? What do rabbis have to do with architec- ture?

Herod wanted to impose an external beauty on an intrinsic beauty. He wanted to cover the natural beauty with a painted beauty. He wanted to cover the sea with gold. Herod was gilding the lily.

In Jewish thought, only that which reveals the inside is beauti- ful. The word in Hebrew for “inside” is *p’nim*. The letters of

*p’nim* are identical to the word *panim*, which means “face.” The face is the only part of a person where flesh radiates the internal life, the soul. By looking at the face you can see what is inside.

The Hebrew word for “ugly” is *achur* which also means “opaque.” Ugliness is defined as that which covers up the inside — however beautiful that surface might be.

In this week’s *Parsha* the Torah speaks at length about the *Mishkan*, the Tent of Meeting. The *Mishkan* was like a portable *Beit Hamikdash*. Both were places where Heaven meets Earth, where the spiritual meets the physical, where G-d’s pres- ence was manifest and over- whelming.

The true beauty of the *Beit Hamikdash* was that it revealed the “inside” of this world. By showing the world’s “face,” it revealed its spiritual dimension. The *Beit Hamikdash* proved that existence is not bound by the physical constraints of space and time. It demonstrated that the world has a soul, that the world is connected to that which is beyond and eternal.

THE OHR SOMAYACH HOME PAGE

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## THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

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Giving people the benefit of the doubt

*Failing to judge favorably can ruin friendships. The following incident, sad but true, shows the outcome of...*

### Thinking Ill

Dear Ohrnet,

*Here is a true story told to me by my son. My son heard it from the "boy" in the story, who is today my son's Rosh Yeshiva:*

**R**abbi Friedman (name changed) had an elderly friend who became ill and was hospitalized in Jerusalem's Sha'arei Tzedek Hospital. The sick man wondered why Rabbi Friedman had not come to visit him, and he was upset about that.

Finally, one Shabbos, Rabbi Friedman (who had 18 children of his own and struggled to make ends meet) decided to visit

his ill friend, and started walking to the hospital.

Shortly thereafter, unbeknownst to Rabbi Friedman, his son fell down the stairs and was bleeding profusely. Rabbi Friedman's wife grabbed the boy and hurried to the hospital.

Meanwhile, Rabbi Friedman arrived at the hospital and found his way to his sick friend's room and greeted him. But the sick man said to Rabbi Friedman, "I know you wouldn't have come here to visit only me. It must be that you came here for something else and while you were here you dropped in for a visit."

Rabbi Friedman answered, "No, no, no! I came to visit only you."

A minute later, to Rabbi Friedman's great surprise, his wife suddenly appeared in the room with their bandaged child. "See!" said the sick man. "I told you! You came here because of your son! Why did you lie to me?" The sick man refused to listen to Rabbi Friedman or his wife's explanations.

And from that day on, the sick man refused to talk to Rabbi Friedman.

## Response Line

From: Name@Withheld

*As a Jew and IBM employee, I feel very uncomfortable about the recent revelations about IBM's involvement in supplying computer equipment to the Nazi regime. I have a lot of conflicting thoughts about it. What are your views on this? Thanks.*

Dear Name@Withheld,

I think this is more a matter of feeling and sensitivity than a matter of Jewish law. I can't tell you how to feel; I can only tell you how I feel.

I personally do not find the idea of working for IBM to be reprehensible. If you scratch the surface of a myriad of different companies that were in business during the Second

World War, I have no doubt you will find many that had connections to the Nazi regime. Also, even if you were to leave IBM and go work for Microsoft, for example, established years after the war, the company itself is based on IBM technological know-how. Where do you draw the line?

I feel the same approach applies to buying German goods. Some wonder, "After the holocaust, how can a Jew buy German goods?" I understand this sentiment, but if so, we shouldn't buy Spanish goods either, or goods from any country where anti-Semitic atrocities were public policy. (That doesn't leave too many countries.)

I took my family to Disneyland a few years ago and we had a wonderful time, even though Walt

Disney himself was an avowed anti-Semite and did not hire Jews or blacks. Today, of course this is not the case, and even the CEO of Disney is Jewish.

### En-Graved Invitation

Sheldon Mermelstein wrote:

*Would you discuss the custom of visiting deceased relatives in the cemetery before getting married? Thanks very much.*

Dear Sheldon,

There is a widespread custom that one visits deceased parents and grandparents before marriage. The reason is first that they should intercede in Heaven for the success of the marriage, and also to "invite" them to the wedding. It is traditionally known that their spirit comes to the wedding and partakes of their descendant's joy.