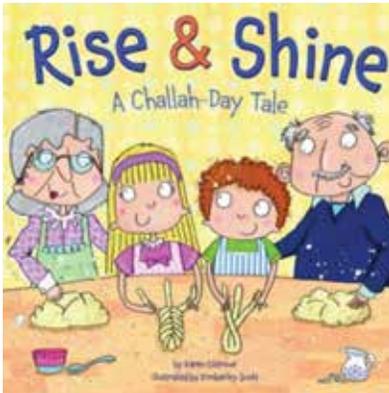


Global Day of Jewish Learning

Curriculum: Creating Together



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A Project of the Aleph Society

Written by: Daniel Rose, PhD

Introduction (10 minutes)



Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook, the first Chief Rabbi of Palestine and the spiritual father of Religious Zionism, found himself trapped in Europe for the duration of the First World War. He settled in London and became the rabbi of the *Machazikei Adass* congregation in London's East End. He would often visit the National Gallery to enjoy the masterpieces. His favorite artist was Rembrandt whom he called a *tzadik*, a righteous man (see Text #5 below). The Rabbi especially enjoyed visiting the gallery to examine Rembrandt's works, drawing spiritual inspiration from them. The painting to the left, entitled *Belshazzar's Feast*, is housed at the National Gallery to this day and would have been one of those paintings.

Information on this painting: Rembrandt's source for this painting, the Old Testament book of Daniel (Chapter 5), tells of a banquet Belshazzar, King of Babylon, gave for his nobles. At this banquet he blasphemously served wine in the sacred vessels his father Nebuchadnezzar had looted from the Temple in Jerusalem.

Rembrandt shows the moment when a divine hand appeared and wrote on the wall a phrase only Daniel could decipher. When transliterated the inscription reads: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. This is the interpretation: 'God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting; your kingdom is given to the Medes and Persians.' That very night Belshazzar was slain.

Rembrandt derived the Hebrew inscription from a book by his friend, the learned rabbi and printer, Menasseh ben Israel. Yet he mistranscribed one of the characters and arranged the letters in columns, rather than right to left, as Hebrew is written. The picture, painted circa 1635, is an example of Rembrandt's attempt to establish himself as a painter of large-scale Baroque historical paintings.

➤ Request that participants spend a few minutes looking at the painting.

➤ Ask:

1. Do you think art has a role to play in Judaism? How so?
2. What do you think Rabbi Kook saw when he spent time looking at Rembrandt's masterpieces such as *Belshazzar's Feast*?

We will revisit Rabbi Kook and his relationship to art a little later on, but in the meantime it is time to meet the first recorded Jewish artist: Bezalel.

Part 1: Introducing Bezalel (15 minutes)

These two sources present for us the biblical character of Bezalel, who was commissioned by God to be the creative inspiration behind the *Mishkan*, the portable sanctuary that accompanied the Israelites in the wilderness until they settled in the Land of Israel.

Text #1: Exodus 35:30-35

ל וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל רְאוּ קָרָא הָאֱלֹוֹקִים בְּשֵׁם בְּצַלְאֵל בֶּן אֲוִרִי בֶן חִיר לְמִטֵּה יְהוּדָה.
לֹא וַיִּמְלֵא אֹתוֹ רוּחַ אֱלֹוֹקִים בְּחָכְמָה בְּתַבּוּנָה וּבְדַעַת וּבְכָל מְלָאכָה.
לִב וְלִחְשָׁב מִחְשָׁבֹת לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּנִהָב וּבַכֶּסֶף וּבַנְּחֹשֶׁת.
לִג וּבַחֲרָשׁוֹת אֲבֹן לְמִלֵּאת וּבַחֲרָשׁוֹת עֵץ; לַעֲשׂוֹת כָּל מְלָאכָת מִחְשָׁבֹת.
לד וְלַהוֹרֵת נָתַן בְּלִבּוֹ: הוּא וְאַהֲלִיאָב בֶּן אַחִיסָמָךְ לְמִטֵּה דָן.
לה מְלֵא אֹתָם חָכְמַת לֵב לַעֲשׂוֹת כָּל מְלָאכָת חֲרָשׁ וְחֲשָׁב וְרָקַם בְּתַכְלֵת וּבְאַרְגָּמָן בְּתוֹלַעַת הַשָּׁנִי וּבַשֵּׁשׁ וְאַרְגָּ; עֲשֵׂי כָל מְלָאכָה וְחֲשָׁבֵי מִחְשָׁבֹת.

30 And Moses said unto the children of Israel: 'See, the LORD hath called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah.

31 And He hath filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship.

32 And to devise skillful works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass,

33 and in cutting of stones for setting, and in carving of wood, to work in all manner of skillful workmanship.

34 And He hath put in his heart that he may teach, both he, and Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan.

35 Them hath He filled with wisdom of heart, to work all manner of workmanship, of the craftsman, and of the skillful workman, and of the weaver in colors, in blue, and in purple, in scarlet, and in fine linen, and of the weaver, even of them that do any workmanship, and of those that devise skillful works.

➤ Ask:

1. What gifts does God give to Bezalel? How do these attributes help Bezalel become an artist?
2. What attributes surprise you on this list? Are any attributes missing?

Text #2: Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 55a

אָמַר רַבִּי שְׁמוּאֵל בַּר נַחֲמָנִי אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹנָתָן:
בְּצִלְאֵל עַל שֵׁם חֲכָמְתוֹ נִקְרָא. בְּשָׁעָה שֶׁאָמַר
לוֹ הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְמֹשֶׁה: לֵךְ אָמַר לוֹ
לְבַצְלָאֵל עֲשֵׂה לִי מִשְׁכָּן אֲרוֹן וְכֵלִים, הֲלֵךְ
מֹשֶׁה וְהִפְךָ, וְאָמַר לוֹ: עֲשֵׂה אֲרוֹן וְכֵלִים וּמִשְׁכָּן.
אָמַר לוֹ: מֹשֶׁה רַבִּינוּ, מִנְהַגוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם – אֲדָם
בוֹנֵה בַּיִת וְאַחַר כֵּן מְכַנֵּס לְתוֹכוֹ כֵּלִים, וְאַתָּה
אוֹמֵר: עֲשֵׂה לִי אֲרוֹן וְכֵלִים וּמִשְׁכָּן! כֵּלִים שְׂאֵנִי
עוֹשֶׂה – לְהִיכֵן אֲכַנִּיסֶם? שָׁמָּא כֵּן אָמַר לְךָ
הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא: עֲשֵׂה מִשְׁכָּן אֲרוֹן וְכֵלִים.
אָמַר לוֹ: שָׁמָּא בְּצִלְ אֵל הָיִיתָ וְיָדַעְתָּ!

Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmani said that Rabbi Yonatan said: Bezalel was called by that name on account of his wisdom. When the Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Moses: Go say to Bezalel, “Make a tabernacle, an ark, and vessels” (see Exodus 31:7–11), Moses went and reversed the order and told Bezalel: “Make an ark, and vessels, and a tabernacle” (see Exodus 25–26). He said to Moses: Moses, our teacher, the standard practice throughout the world is that a person builds a house and only afterward places the vessels in the house, and you say to me: Make an ark, and vessels, and a tabernacle. If I do so in the order you have commanded, the vessels that I make, where shall I put them? Perhaps God told you the following: “Make a tabernacle, ark, and vessels” (see Exodus 36). Moses said to Bezalel: Perhaps you were in God’s shadow [*betzel El*], and you knew precisely what He said. You intuited God’s commands just as He stated them, as if you were there.

It seems clear from both sources that while Bezalel was chosen because of his talent and ability, these gifts came directly from God (רוח אלוקים).

Ask:

1. While the texts make clear that Bezalel’s talents are from God (רוח אלוקים), does this mean that because our talents are God-given we cannot claim any credit for them? Can we claim credit for our achievements? What is the difference between not using a talent that you have and using a talent that you have to accomplish great things?
2. What do you think being “in God’s shadow” could mean? How does this affect the quality of Bezalel’s work?

Text #3: Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz: *Opening the Tanya*

Each soul has a specific role, unique to it alone, which it should set as its highest priority and to which it should devote itself with an extra measure of diligence and care, with the awareness that he is absolutely indispensable to this role—no other soul could possibly take his place in regard to it.

Rabbi Steinsaltz encourages us to consider our own gifts and abilities. There is a uniqueness and individuality that we each possess and our job is to carve out our own paths. Certainly that is what we are seeing with Bezalel.

We will now turn to three contemporary thinkers whose thought encourages us to see three models of how art can be seen as a medium for the spiritual development of man: Art and *Imitatio Dei* (Rabbi Soleveitchik); Artist as Prophet (Rabbi Kook) and Art as a Path to Understanding God (Rabbi Sacks).

Part 2: Art and *Imitatio Dei* (10 minutes)

➤ Ask:

1. Most people have a hobby or passion that helps their spiritual development. For some it may be listening to a great piece of music. Others may find a hike inspiring. How do you nurture your spirituality? Does art play a role?

➤ Ask participants to read texts #4 and #5.

Text #4: Genesis 1:27

בראשית א, כו:

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ, בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ: זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה, בָּרָא אֹתָם.

And God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them.

Text #5: Rabbi J. B. Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith*

(Bolding added for emphasis)

What is Adam the first out to achieve? What is the objective toward which he incessantly drives himself with enormous speed? The objective, it is self-evident, can only be one, namely, that which God put up before him: to be 'man', to be himself. Adam the first wants to be human, to discover his identity which is bound up with his humanity...

The brute's existence is an undignified one because it is a helpless existence. Human existence is a dignified one because it is a glorious, majestic, powerful existence...

Man of old who could not fight disease and succumbed in multitudes to yellow fever or any other plague with degrading helplessness could not lay claim to dignity. Only the man who builds hospitals, discovers therapeutic techniques, and saves lives is blessed with dignity. Man of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries who needed several days to travel from Boston to New York was less dignified than modern man who attempts to conquer space, boards a plane at the New York airport at midnight and takes several hours later a leisurely walk along the streets of London. The brute is helpless, and, therefore, not dignified. Civilized man has gained limited control of nature and has become, in certain respects, her master, and with his mastery he has attained dignity as well...

Adam the first is not only a creative theoretician. **He is also a creative aesthete. He fashions ideas with his mind, and beauty with his heart. He enjoys both his intellectual and aesthetic creativity and takes pride in it.**

The Talmudic source above (Text #2) described Bezalel as being "in God's shadow", hence having Divine inspiration in his creative work. This is a play on his name, Bezalel = *B'zel El*, in the shadow of God. The words that are used to describe the creation of mankind in Genesis, are *Bezelem Elohim*, "in the image of God". The word *Bezelem* is both etymologically and thematically linked to *B'zel*. When the Torah describes man as having been created in the image of God, it cannot be referring to a physical likeness, because this is philosophically problematic. There must be some other likeness between man and his creator.

Bezalel's Creativity: Art as an Expression of the Divine

Rabbi Soloveitchik, a 20th century Rabbi and philosopher (Russia and United States), notes in his important work of Jewish philosophy, *The Lonely Man of Faith*, two paradigms of what it means to be a human. The two paradigms reflect the two versions of creation of mankind found in the first two chapters of Genesis. The first paradigm, which he terms Adam One, or Majestic Man, is a creative genius. He himself is created in the image of God and is like Him in many profound ways. Who is the God we encounter in the first chapter of Genesis where the narrative of the creation of Adam One is found? He is the God of creation. And thus, so too is Adam One a creator of worlds. And in the act of creation, man is fulfilling the critical task of *Imitatio Dei*—the philosophical concept of imitating God. In contrast to Adam One, who is seen as the creator, Adam Two, who was created from the dust of the ground, has a profound sense of humility as he realizes he is but a small part of creation. Rather than the majestic striving to create and dominate the world of Adam One, Adam Two, the Lonely Man of Faith, is commanded to serve and protect the world, and embarks on a perpetual quest to find meaning in the universe.

Thus, the artistic process is a fulfillment of God's expectations for man, that man should be creative as God is creative. Art and creativity can and must be utilized as a form of divine worship and spiritual growth.

► Ask:

1. This discussion comes in a place where we are watching God create the world (Genesis chapters 1 and 2) and seeing a creative process unfold. It is interesting to note that Adam is part of the creative process but is the only creation described as being in the image of God. How might that be significant? What might being created in the image of God mean?
2. According to Rabbi Soloveitchik, how can art be seen as a form of divine worship and a medium for spiritual growth?

Part 3: The Artist as Prophet (10 minutes)

► Ask participants to read texts #6 and #7.

Text #6: Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook, Rembrandt and Divine Light, Jewish Chronicle of London, Sept. 13, 1935, p. 21

When I lived in London I used to visit the National Gallery, and my favorite pictures were those of Rembrandt. I really think that Rembrandt was a *Tzadik*. Do you know that when I first saw Rembrandt's works they reminded me of the legend of the creation of light? We are told that when God created light, it was so strong and pellucid, that one could see from one end of the world to the other, but God was afraid that the wicked might abuse it. What did He do? He reserved that light for the righteous when the Messiah should come. But now and then there are great men who are blessed and privileged to see it. I think that Rembrandt was one of them, and the light in his pictures is the very light that was originally created by God Almighty.

Text #7: Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook: *Ein Ayah*

The true talent of a visual artist, when he is at the peak of his abilities—and especially one whose talent has been sanctified by the Spirit of God—is to be able to see the depths of existence, both in their physical and spiritual dimensions....

All these things which are said generally of the Creator—as we value the wonders of the creative wisdom altogether, we must find a model in a wise and whole man devoted to purposeful creation. The highest and most blessed of all artists was Bezalel, who created with the Spirit of God. He completed a real picture, which demands a great wisdom of positioning the physical parts in it, positioning its lights and shadows, its buds and flowers, etc., the intention and extreme attention to detail to reach the essence of the purity of existence.

When Rabbi Kook saw art, he felt he was looking at an expression of the divine light in the world. He believed an artist has the spiritual skills to see the light of the divine in this world, and the artistic skills to translate what he sees into an aesthetic expression that those without these skills and abilities can benefit from. When Rabbi Kook would visit the National Gallery to admire the work of Rembrandt “the *tzadik*” he felt that he was experiencing the world of a prophet who could see things that Rabbi Kook couldn’t see himself. Bezalel was chosen because he had both these skill sets. He could understand what Moshe could not (as reflected in the way he corrected Moshe’s relaying of the divine injunction to build the *Mishkan*, which he understood through spiritual intuition, or prophecy) and had the ability to translate it into the work of the *Mishkan* using his creativity.

➤ Ask:

1. Rabbi Kook made a point of visiting the National Gallery regularly. Are there any places you visit regularly where you feel inspired?
2. Why do you think he described Rembrandt as a *tzadik*? Is there an artist you have found inspiring? Who? Why?
3. Do you think, according to Rabbi Kook, there is some link between Rembrandt and Bezalel? What is it?

Part 4: Art as a Path to Understanding God (10 minutes)

Text #8: Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Future Tense*

We can now state the difference between the two modes of knowledge. *Chokhmah* is the truth we discover; Torah is the truth we inherit. *Chokhmah* is the universal heritage of humankind; Torah is the specific heritage of Israel. *Chokhmah* is what we attain by being in the image of God; Torah is what guides Jews as the people of God. *Chokhmah* is acquired by seeing and reasoning; Torah is received by listening and responding. *Chokhmah* tells us what is; Torah tells us what ought to be. *Chokhmah* is about facts; Torah is about commands. *Chokhmah* yields descriptive, scientific laws; Torah yields prescriptive, behavioural laws. *Chokhmah* is about creation; Torah is about revelation...

We can now state the following: *Chokhmah* has an honourable place within the Jewish worldview. It has religious dignity. It is the gift of God. It is available to everyone, because everyone is in the image of God. We can also hazard the following definition: *Chokhmah* is what allows us to understand the world as God’s work (science) and the human person as his image (the humanities).

Bezalel's Creativity: Art as an Expression of the Divine

Rabbi Sacks (born 1948) is the former Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth. In his book *Future Tense* he presents his approach to the relationship between secular culture/knowledge (which he terms *Chokhmah*) and Torah. He says truth is contained in both. *Chokhmah* is a universal truth available to all of mankind, and Torah is the truth that God gave through the Torah to the People of Israel.

Chokhmah, according to Rabbi Sacks, is both Science and the Humanities. The Humanities are a way of understanding the human person as created in the image of God, and are available to all humans as all are created in this way. Art, as a discipline of the humanities, is therefore a path to understanding mankind. Bezalel, our paradigm artist, was not only created *B'tzelem Elokim*, but his very name (and the narrative of the story in Talmud about him) attests to his understanding of the world, as he is someone who is in the shadow of God.

Rambam says in his Mishneh Torah (Laws of the Foundations of Torah 2:1–2), that the path to love of God is through knowledge of His work (because we can't truly know an infinite God, but we can know and understand the things He does). This, both Rambam and Rabbi Sacks agree, is through exposure to both Torah and *Chokhmah*. Art, as a human science, is a path to understanding God's creation, and therefore God, and thus a path to love and relationship with God.

➤ Ask:

1. What is the relationship between *Chokhmah* and the image of God within all of humanity?
2. How can understanding humanity help us understand God? Do you think art can play a role in this process?

Conclusion (5 minutes)

Much like Rabbi Kook's appreciation for Rembrandt's art, Judaism gives us a true sense of the beauty and creativity found in the world of art. Bezalel is the paradigm for a creative artist in Judaism. The Talmud describes him as being "in the shadow of God". In this session three models for using art as a vehicle for spiritual development were encountered. Each of the three models plays on the notion of Bezalel being in the shadow of God, and/or man being created in the image of God. Rabbi Soloveitchik says that God expects man to be a creative aesthete because he is created like God, and should strive to be like God (*Imitatio Dei*). Rabbi Kook says that Bezalel could see the world in a way that few others could, and he also had the skills to translate that into his art. These are the skills of the prophet-artist. Finally, Rabbi Sacks sees art as an element of the humanities, which is the way that man can understand humanity as a creation of God, and therefore understand the creator, and grow to love Him. Man has this ability because he is created in the image of his creator.

Rembrandt's Belshazzar's Feast



Information on this painting: Rembrandt's source for this painting, the Old Testament Book of Daniel (5: 1–6, 25–8), tells of a banquet Belshazzar, King of Babylon, gave for his nobles. At this banquet he blasphemously served wine in the sacred vessels his father Nebuchadnezzar had looted from the Temple in Jerusalem.

Rembrandt shows the moment when a divine hand appeared and wrote on the wall a phrase only Daniel could decipher. When transliterated the inscription reads: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. This is the interpretation: 'God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting; your kingdom is given to the Medes and Persians.' That very night Belshazzar was slain.

Rembrandt derived the Hebrew inscription from a book by his friend, the learned rabbi and printer, Menasseh ben Israel. Yet he mistranscribed one of the characters and arranged the letters in columns, rather than right to left, as Hebrew is written. The picture, painted circa 1635, is an example of Rembrandt's attempt to establish himself as a painter of large-scale Baroque historical paintings.

Part 1: Introducing Bezalel

Text #1: Exodus 35:30-35

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 לֹא וַיִּמְלֵא אֹתוֹ רוּחַ אֱלוּקִים בְּחֻמָּה בְּתַבּוּנָה וּבְדַעַת וּבְכָל מְלָאכָה.
 לִב וְלִחְשָׁב מִחֻשְׁבַּת לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּנֹהֵב וּבְכֹסֶף וּבְנִחְשָׁת.
 לֵג וּבְחֻרָשׁוֹת אֲבָן לְמִלֵּאת וּבְחֻרָשׁוֹת עֵץ; לַעֲשׂוֹת כָּל מְלָאכַת מִחֻשְׁבַּת.
 לִד וְלַהוֹרֹת נְתֹן בְּלִבּוֹ: הוּא וְאַהֲלִיאֵב בֶּן אַחִיסָמֶד לְמִטֵּה דָן.
 לֵה מְלֵא אֹתָם חֻכְמַת לֵב לַעֲשׂוֹת כָּל מְלָאכַת חֻרָשׁ וְחֻשָׁב וְרָקֵם בְּתַכְלֵת וּבְאַרְגָּמָן בְּתוֹלַעַת הַשָּׁנִי וּבַשֵּׁשׁ וְאַרְגָּ; עֲשִׂי כָּל מְלָאכָה וְחֻשְׁבֵי מִחֻשְׁבַּת.

- 30 And Moses said unto the children of Israel: 'See, the LORD hath called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah.
- 31 And He hath filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship.
- 32 And to devise skillful works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass,
- 33 and in cutting of stones for setting, and in carving of wood, to work in all manner of skillful workmanship.
- 34 And He hath put in his heart that he may teach, both he, and Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan.
- 35 Them hath He filled with wisdom of heart, to work all manner of workmanship, of the craftsman, and of the skillful workman, and of the weaver in colors, in blue, and in purple, in scarlet, and in fine linen, and of the weaver, even of them that do any workmanship, and of those that devise skillful works.

Text #2: Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 55a

אָמַר רַבִּי שְׁמוּאֵל בַּר נַחֲמָנִי אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹנָתָן:
 בְּצִלְאֵל עַל שֵׁם חֲכָמְתוֹ נִקְרָא. בְּשַׁעֲרֵהּ שָׂאמֵר
 לוֹ הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְמִשְׁחָה: לֵךְ אָמַר לוֹ
 לְבִצְלָאֵל עֲשֵׂה לִי מִשְׁכָּן אֲרוֹן וְכֵלִים. הֲלֵךְ
 מִשָּׁה וְהִפֵּךְ, וְאָמַר לוֹ: עֲשֵׂה אֲרוֹן וְכֵלִים וּמִשְׁכָּן.
 אָמַר לוֹ: מִשָּׁה רַבִּינֵנוּ, מִנְהַגוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם – אָדָם
 בּוֹנֵה בַיִת וְאַחַר כֵּן מְכַנֵּס לְתוֹכוֹ כֵּלִים, וְאַתָּה
 אָמַר: עֲשֵׂה לִי אֲרוֹן וְכֵלִים וּמִשְׁכָּן! כֵּלִים שָׂאֵנִי
 עוֹשֶׂה – לְהֵיכָן אֲכַנִּיסָם? שָׂמָא כֵּן אָמַר לֵךְ
 הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא: עֲשֵׂה מִשְׁכָּן אֲרוֹן וְכֵלִים.
 אָמַר לוֹ: שָׂמָא בְּצֵל אֵל הֵייתָ וַיִּדְעָתָ!

Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmani said that Rabbi Yonatan said: Bezalel was called by that name on account of his wisdom. When the Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Moses: Go say to Bezalel, "Make a tabernacle, an ark, and vessels" (see Exodus 31:7–11), Moses went and reversed the order and told Bezalel: "Make an ark, and vessels, and a tabernacle" (see Exodus 25–26). He said to Moses: Moses, our teacher, the standard practice throughout the world is that a person builds a house and only afterward places the vessels in the house, and you say to me: Make an ark, and vessels, and a tabernacle. If I do so in the order you have commanded, the vessels that I make, where shall I put them? Perhaps God told you the following: "Make a tabernacle, ark, and vessels" (see Exodus 36). Moses said to Bezalel: Perhaps you were in God's shadow [*betzel El*], and you knew precisely what He said. You intuited God's commands just as He stated them, as if you were there.

Text #3: Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz: *Opening the Tanya*

Each soul has a specific role, unique to it alone, which it should set as its highest priority and to which it should devote itself with an extra measure of diligence and care, with the awareness that he is absolutely indispensable to this role—no other soul could possibly take his place in regard to it.

Part 2: Art and *Imitatio Dei*

Text #4: Genesis 1:27

בראשית א, כז:

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ, בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ: זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה, בָּרָא אֹתָם.

And God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them.

Text #5: Rabbi J. B. Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith*

(Bolding added for emphasis)

What is Adam the first out to achieve? What is the objective toward which he incessantly drives himself with enormous speed? The objective, it is self-evident, can only be one, namely, that which God put up before him: to be 'man', to be himself. Adam the first wants to be human, to discover his identity which is bound up with his humanity...

The brute's existence is an undignified one because it is a helpless existence. Human existence is a dignified one because it is a glorious, majestic, powerful existence...

Man of old who could not fight disease and succumbed in multitudes to yellow fever or any other plague with degrading helplessness could not lay claim to dignity. Only the man who builds hospitals, discovers therapeutic techniques, and saves lives is blessed with dignity. Man of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries who needed several days to travel from Boston to New York was less dignified than modern man who attempts to conquer space, boards a plane at the New York airport at midnight and takes several hours later a leisurely walk along the streets of London. The brute is helpless, and, therefore, not dignified. Civilized man has gained limited control of nature and has become, in certain respects, her master, and with his mastery he has attained dignity as well...

Adam the first is not only a creative theoretician. **He is also a creative aesthete. He fashions ideas with his mind, and beauty with his heart. He enjoys both his intellectual and aesthetic creativity and takes pride in it.**



Bezalel's Creativity: Art as an Expression of the Divine

Part 3: The Artist as Prophet

Text #6: Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook, Rembrandt and Divine Light, *Jewish Chronicle of London*, Sept. 13, 1935, p. 21

When I lived in London I used to visit the National Gallery, and my favorite pictures were those of Rembrandt. I really think that Rembrandt was a *Tzadik*. Do you know that when I first saw Rembrandt's works they reminded me of the legend of the creation of light? We are told that when God created light, it was so strong and pellucid, that one could see from one end of the world to the other, but God was afraid that the wicked might abuse it. What did He do? He reserved that light for the righteous when the Messiah should come. But now and then there are great men who are blessed and privileged to see it. I think that Rembrandt was one of them, and the light in his pictures is the very light that was originally created by God Almighty.

Text #7: Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook, *Ein Ayah*

The true talent of a visual artist, when he is at the peak of his abilities—and especially one whose talent has been sanctified by the Spirit of God—is to be able to see the depths of existence, both in their physical and spiritual dimensions....

All these things which are said generally of the Creator—as we value the wonders of the creative wisdom altogether, we must find a model in a wise and whole man devoted to purposeful creation. The highest and most blessed of all artists was Bezalel, who created with the Spirit of God. He completed a real picture, which demands a great wisdom of positioning the physical parts in it, positioning its lights and shadows, its buds and flowers, etc., the intention and extreme attention to detail to reach the essence of the purity of existence.

Part 4: Art as a Path to Understanding God

Text #8: Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Future Tense*

We can now state the difference between the two modes of knowledge. Chokhmah is the truth we discover; Torah is the truth we inherit. Chokhmah is the universal heritage of humankind; Torah is the specific heritage of Israel. Chokhmah is what we attain by being in the image of God; Torah is what guides Jews as the people of God. Chokhmah is acquired by seeing and reasoning; Torah is received by listening and responding. Chokhmah tells us what is; Torah tells us what ought to be. Chokhmah is about facts; Torah is about commands. Chokhmah yields descriptive, scientific laws; Torah yields prescriptive, behavioural laws. Chokhmah is about creation; Torah is about revelation...

We can now state the following: Chokhmah has an honourable place within the Jewish worldview. It has religious dignity. It is the gift of God. It is available to everyone, because everyone is in the image of God. We can also hazard the following definition: Chokhmah is what allows us to understand the world as God's work (science) and the human person as his image (the humanities).



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