

# The Pygmalion Complex

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks has observed that “The twin foundations on which Western culture was built were ancient Greece and ancient Israel...Greece was a profoundly visual culture. Its greatest achievements had to do with the eye, with seeing. It produced some of the greatest art, sculpture and architecture the world has ever seen...Judaism offered a radical alternative. It is faith in a God we cannot see, a God who cannot be represented visually...as Moses reminded the people when the Israelites had a direct encounter with God at Mt Sinai, “You heard the sound of words, but saw no image; there was only a voice.” (Deut. 4:12)...When God speaks, we listen. When He commands, we obey.”

It's the obeying that we Jews have had and continue to have most difficulty with. Blind obeying is problematic, especially when it comes to matters of visual art. Although the cultural distinctions as stated by Rabbi Sacks are in a general sense correct, in the sense that the Greeks worshipped the holiness of beauty, Judaism worshiped the beauty of holiness, however, on a deeper, more profound level Judaism is not really just a sound/word orientated culture. The apparent absence of Jewish visual art that Western historians have been pointing out (indeed have written Jewish art out of art history) is also a misunderstood phenomenon. In fact, just like Jacob struggling with the angel become Israel, this legacy is central to Judaism. Judaism can be seen as a culture in constant struggle (with God) and especially with its contradictory ideas about visual art. On the one hand, God Himself carved the first tablets (first Jewish visual art objects?) containing the ten-commandments on which the Hebrew letters were carved right through the stone so that some of them were held in place miraculously, suspended in space, with air all around them. On the other hand, the 2nd commandment seems to prohibit imagery of any kind. I would argue that this visual paradox can be identified as the beginning of Jewish art and contains within it all of the challenges and possibilities that we continue to struggle with. In my view, the struggle with this conundrum is the essence of Jewish art!

As if this wasn't enough of a frustrating challenge, the Torah, the Talmud and Jewish mystical texts happen to be so visually explicit, enticing and sensual that the temptation to express these spiritual ideas in visual form is as palpable as the sound of the shofar or the sound of 'the small inner voice' deep within each Jew. As the Torah records, the origins of Jewish visual art are not only inspired by God but commanded by God, so that He should have a 'dwelling' amongst the people! Other forms of Jewish art like the Golden Calf (regarded as idolatrous) or the later, more secular types were produced by Jews in order to test God, his prophets or the perceived limitations imposed by the rabbis. Since the beginning of the Jewish nation and the building of the Tabernacle in particular, Jews have struggled with the role that visual art should have in Judaism. I take my creative lead from Moses who was the fiercest, most argumentative of prophets yet one who was allowed to speak with God 'face to face'. My specifically Jewish artwork (struggle) is created by juggling and testing in the space between the 'fear of God' and the chutzpah kelapei Shemaya 'audacity towards heaven'.

This paper is an attempt to imagine how Jewish visual art differs from Greek art within the context of the above statement by Rabbi Sacks.

The classic, mythical narrative by the Roman poet Ovid describes Pygmalion, a Greek sculptor who carved a woman out of ivory. His statue was so real, fair and beautiful that he fell in love with it. During Aphrodite's festival Pygmalion made offerings on the altar of Aphrodite, wishing for a wife to be as beautiful as 'the living likeness of my ivory girl'. Back in his studio, hoping that Aphrodite would have granted his wish, he kissed and caressed the sculpture and to his surprise, it became soft to touch as it came to life.

Pygmalion marries the sculpture changed into a flesh and blood woman and they go on to have children. Notwithstanding the interpretation that these 'children' may indeed be Pygmalion's future works of art, idealised perfection, visual beauty, miraculous transformations enabled by gods in human form, perfection achievable within the human realm are the pinnacles of achievement in Greek art.

Judaism offers a radical difference.

God, the ultimate sculptor during His creating, on day 6, having just created all the living creatures says: “Let us make Man in Our image, after our likeness. They shall rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky and over all the animals, the whole earth, and every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth” So God created Man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them and said to them “Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea, the bird of the sky, and every living thing that moves on earth” and ...“God saw all that He had made, and behold it was very good. The prefix very of that exclamation was specifically uttered in relation to the creation of man. Like a sculptor, God looks at his creation with satisfaction of having created the pinnacle of His achievement = man, a kind of ultimate creation/perfection.

According to Jewish legend this first creation of 'male and female' (in some cases interpreted as androgynous and in others as male and female side to side or back to back) applied to the creation of Lilith and Adam being formed simultaneously. Being formed from earth, sculpted at the same time and in the same manner as Adam, Lilith expected equal rights and privileges. The problem with Lilith was that feeling equal to Adam from the start, she refused to be ruled by him and even insisted that she take the active role, be on top of him during sex. This kind of woman (in a (Godly?) patriarchal society) could not be tolerated to be the mother of all humankind so God decided to make a 'second draft' and created Eve (flesh of my flesh) from one of Adam's ribs as a 'help mate', subordinate to him.

God did not destroy Lilith but condemned her to the other (under) world where she found remarkable powers, equal to any man. She became the bane of man's existence; man's thoughts turning to lust not for his wife, involuntary erections, wet dreams, masturbation in folkloric explanations suggest that Lilith has visited, searching for semen in order to become impregnated and generate more of her uncontrollable demons. In this strange, metaphoric image, Lilith becomes the 'mad', 'emotional', underworld/underground artist in opposition to God – the mainstream artist?

God as the ultimate artist seems to have adjusted, changed and manipulated his creation to fit His conceptual, expressive purposes.

According to Jewish teachings, God creates by using the Torah as a guide and through speech/utterances, using the Hebrew language/alphabet in particular configurations. Jewish tradition tells us that the purpose of creating the world was to create a place for man to dwell in. However, man is also directed to 'build a dwelling for God'. According to Kabbalistic teachings, the reason to build this specific 'dwelling place' for God was to enable God to be present amongst people without His presence destroying

1\_ Rabbi Sacks' weekly column Covenant & Conversation. Aish.com.au. Ekev. August 26, 2016.

2\_ Exodus 25:1-9.

3\_ Publius Ovidius Naso, Roman poet renowned for his most famous poem Metamorphoses 12 BC?

4\_ Genesis 1, 26:28 The Tanach. Menorah Publications, New York, Artscroll Series1996

5\_ Melvin Konner, The Jewish Body Shoken Books, New York 2009.

6\_ ibid

7\_ Idea suggested by Aaron Rosen in an email on the 7th August 2019.



everything within the human realm. Jewish mystical writings further describe that His direct 'light'/presence is of such strength that it is too powerful to be tolerated by a 'mere' creation. The purpose of creating man was to culminate the creation of the world and to fulfil God's purpose in using the Torah as the substance of life. Man was created in order to learn/study the Torah and by the knowledge gained from it 'complete/fulfil (look after and take care of) God's creation'.

God, in the manner of a sculptor collected (the required materials) the most precious bits of earth from all parts of the world (so no particular part could claim superiority) to shape Adam's arms and legs, from Bavel for his trunk and from Eretz Israel for his head. He placed these bits of earth on Mt Moriah, on the spot where Abraham will sacrifice Izaak and where the future altar of the Temple (in Jerusalem) will stand, and He mixed it with water from all the oceans of the world (again so no body of water could claim superiority) and from that clay modelled the figure of a human being – a golem. This mixture of earth and water resulted in Adam being red, black, white and green – bones and sinews white, intestines black, blood red, skin or liver green. Rabbi Johanan interprets Adam's name as being an acrostic of; ashes, blood and gall. While Adam was lying motionless on the ground, God showed him the Patriarchs, Moses, Aaron all of the righteous people of all generations.

The Torah goes on to describe how God (again, like a sculptor) fashioned out of earth each animal, fish, bird, crawling things and insects and brought them to Adam for him to name them. He named all of the creations except one "... but for the human no sustainer beside him was found..." It is at this point that God puts Adam 'to sleep' and out of one of his ribs fashions Eve because "it is no good for man to be alone" as the narrative concludes.

Having created man = Adam from adamah – earth in Hebrew) God pondered as to how to give him life: through the mouth? God decided against this as he might use it to speak slander, through the eyes? No, because he blinks with them for evil purposes as are his ears because he will use them to hear blasphemies. God decides on the nostrils because as they expel polluted air, so do righteous people remove themselves from foul smelling sin and cling to the sweet smell of Torah. Up to this point, Adam being 'formed from the earth' is said to possess the earthly or animalistic spirit. With the life giving utterance/'breath' of God was the entrance of the divine soul into man. This divine soul undergoes a process of 'completion' starting from its entry point, to circumcision (for boys), to the point of bar/bat mitzvah – thus reaching its 'maturation'. This divine aspect within man distinguishes man from all the other species. Adam is sometimes referred to as a 'speaking spirit' was created through speech and was endowed with it.

This 'coming to life', includes endowing Adam (human being) with 'free will' in order to help God complete creation. The unique nature of these two souls that are often in conflict are the bedrock of man's free will. Did God not realise the danger of giving humankind free will? Or was this 'free will' conditional? Not only were humans given the idea of choice but choice to make up their own mind which obviously was not to God's liking. It's as if the (man) sculpture comes alive and tries to pursue its own direction in life but God sets the limits at every turn. It appears that the human being is treated as God's living art 'object'/creation; manipulated, guided, sanctioned, berated, scorned and punished! Like any art object, humankind having been created expects to be let go of, separated from the creator and to be independent but like all art it is always connected to its source. Godly punishments notwithstanding, it seems that man continues to rebel against God's instructions at every turn. Man seems constantly torn between two extremes of his psychological self-image. The Talmud and Midrash offer several explanations as to why man was created only after every other creation was complete. One explanation is so that man would arrive in a world ready and complete and be immediately able to perform mitzvot (commandments) as this was his intended purpose to help complete God's creation. The other reason given is that if man's behaviour is not worthy and proper, he can be reminded that 'even a mosquito was created before you, even an earthworm preceded you'. These two explanations go some way to explain the internal struggle of man. On the one hand he is supposed to be the 'crown' of creation, on the other it stresses the relative unimportance of man as compared to all the other animals.

The Torah was used as a blueprint for God's creation. However, it was only given to mankind 26 generations after the creation of Adam, at Mt Sinai.

With the 'giving' of the Torah, a 'marriage' took place and in this context the Torah is regarded as a 'ktubah' (marriage contract) between God, the Groom and the Jewish nation, the bride. Just like Pygmalion marries his creation, God weds his 'chosen' nation.

Did it take that long to decide/codify man's rules for living? Unlike the limitations of Pygmalion's idea of beauty, God in His unlimited capacity offered man perfection, eternal life and a peaceful paradise. However, man rejected eternal life by eating from the tree of Good and Bad. He corrupted the world as in the generation of Noah. He wanted to wage war against God by building the Tower of Babel, he worshipped idols, he rejected the providence of God by bowing to nature as the powerful god = in other words man did everything he could not only to challenge God's authority but to refuse the idealisation of life and choose instead a 'real', individuated human existence.

But God doesn't give up that easily. Seeing that man rejected eternal perfection, God takes a different approach and decides to use one (righteous in God's eyes) man and provide him and his offspring's with the rules and regulations for a proper/Godly life. Choosing one man Abraham as having the required qualities to finally fulfil God's 'mission', God's focus is upon that one man and his family as exemplars for humanity. But even that family, with all of God's directions and support decides to pursue their own life in their own fashion. And, sometimes even acting in opposition to God's wishes so the inevitable punishments seem to be directed specifically at Abraham's descendant Jacob's family who ends up enslaved by the Egyptian Pharaoh for 213 years. Again, God seems to be particularly obsessed with these by now 12 tribes of Israel = descendants of Jacob and Abraham.

Up to the giving of the Torah at Mt Sinai, it appears that creation was in constant combat with its Creator. Was God's reason for giving of the Torah as a legal document with which to create the Jewish nation so it would be bound by the legal and ethical content of this contract? Or was this the 'last resort' for God who in his merciful state decided to give man (Jews) one last chance? Or was it given that God's universal (Noahide) laws that operated until the giving of the Torah (and still applicable to all other nations today) weren't enough to achieve His desired influence upon mankind? So, was this the 'final' straw for the jealous God to try to 'control' His creation by choosing this specific people to be an example for mankind? Perhaps that is the reason that God provides man with detailed commandments (mitzvot) and detailed laws for a life in an 'imperfect' world?

It's interesting that "the Torah was given in a place that is not a place, at a time which is not a time - because the precise date and time of the Giving of the Torah is not mentioned anywhere in the Torah... the Torah which is not confined or limited by time or space – is given to human beings who live within time and space... For millennia, both as individuals and as a nation we have confronted one question: how can we, in the reality of our existence, attain eternal freedom and be (Shemot 19:5-6) members of a 'nation of priests' that is God's "special treasure", a nation that throughout its history is struggling to be holy?"

We are given a sense of God's intentions and a kind of 'psychological' profile of the Creator in parsha Yitro, in His 10 utterances/commandments; the 1st states categorically that "I am your God..." and goes on to remind the Hebrews that it was He who took them out of Egyptian slavery. The 2nd commands: "You shall not recognise the gods of others in My presence. You shall not make yourself a carved image of any likeness of that which is in the heavens above or on earth below or in the water beneath the earth. You shall not prostrate yourself to them nor worship them, for I am Hashem your God – a jealous God..." The 3rd commands "you shall not take the Name of Hashem, your God in vain, for Hashem will not absolve anyone who takes His Name in vain. The 4th refers to the holiness of Shabbat = the day on which God rested from creating. The rest of the commandments are societal and behavioural requiring honest communal coexistence. In 20:20 of this parsha Yitro, God talks to Moses about informing the people: "You shall not make (images

8\_ Exodus 35 - 40

9\_ The Midrash Says, Bnay Yakov Publications New York 1980. Book of Bereishis.

10\_ Robert Alter The Five Books of Moses Norton and Compaby Publishing 2004.

11\_ The Midrash Says

12\_ Lamplighter, 29 Adar 2, 2016

13\_ Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz. An insight into the festival of Shavuot. Australian Jewish News 10 June 2016.

14\_ Tanach Exodus, Yitro 20:1-4 and 20:7

15\_ Micah 4:5. Siddur Tehilat Hashem. Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch, Inc Brooklyn New York 1978.

16\_ Tanach, Leviticus 19:26-28.



of what is) with Me; gods of silver and gods of gold shall you not make for yourselves". This is a clear reference to idols that are like 'other gods' that are forbidden to be worshipped by Jews. During the daily morning-prayer Shakerit we say; "House of Jacob, come let us walk in the light of the Lord. For all the nations walk each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the Name of the Lord our God forever and ever". The implication is both; that even if other nations have their gods, we Jews have our God that we should be faithful to. To emphasize the ritual worship of other nations that have used bodily 'enhancements' and magic incantations, God orders the Jewish people "... you shall not indulge in sorcery and you shall not believe in lucky times. You shall not round off the edge of your scalp and you shall not destroy the edge of your beard. You shall not make a cut in your flesh for the dead and a tattoo shall you not place upon yourself..."

However, starting with Abram while he was 99 years of age, God commanded him to circumcise himself as a covenantal symbol/sign that would apply to all his future male descendants as well. God changes his name from Abram (father of your native land Aram) to Abraham (father of many nations) and promises him that by ensuring the performance of this mitzvah his children will inherit Eretz Israel. It is interesting to contemplate Thomas Mann's postulation that Abraham and his descendants had the word God carved into their penises. Although not a Jewish idea, nonetheless the deviant and art possibilities are very tempting. While Abraham was questioning and objecting to this command, God having finally found/selected the only person worthy of this covenant and who has the temerity to question God's edict, God become furious and threatened to destroy the world and return it to nothingness unless Abraham acquiesces. The numerical value (gematria) of the name Abraham is 248, the equivalent to the 248 limbs in his body. In a mystical sense, by performing this mitzvah Abraham achieved mastery over all the limbs of his body – a kind of spiritual covenantal purification. "The root meaning of the verb leTZaVot (to command) is "to bind". When we perform a mitZvah we bind ourselves and the world around us to God. The Torah contains 613 mitzvot: 248 positive commandments and 365 prohibitions... The human form also has 248 limbs, corresponding to the 248 positive commandments and 365 connecting tissues, veins or sinews, corresponding to the 365 prohibitions of the Torah (Zohar 1. 170b). Thus, man was fashioned in the pattern of the Torah. Not only his soul, but the very body that seemingly prevents him from rising above the physical limitations of this world, is itself "a Torah".

It is interesting to compare the Jewish body being created and analogous to the Torah (law) whereas Pygmalion's '(or Greek generally) 'body is created according to man's desire! According to Jewish philosophy man was created in the "image" of Torah in order to observe the mitzvot. If man is a Torah and there is an accepted tradition within Judaism that one should beautify the Torah, the 2nd commandments trepidation seems to be the fear of idolising man. This concept epitomises the difference between Greek and Jewish art. So, if Jewish art is created with that spiritual respect for man as Torah, there is no reason why even images of man cannot be used without defiling that commandment. In Jewish art the emphasis will always be on the 'total' beauty of man, not just on the external, physical appearance as in Greek art.

According to Midrash, Adam was created circumcised and Moses as well as some other major Jewish sages were supposedly born that way. Were they circumcised by God in their mothers' womb or is that just a precursor to the 'perfect imperfection' of the Jewish (male) body? Due to the birth precedence of these holy men, any child born circumcised today has the full weight of cultural expectations upon him.

There are other references to circumcisions in the Torah: when Moses confronts the burning bush and pleads with God that he is not 'fit' for the task commanded of him, he refers to himself as "heavy of mouth and heavy of speech" This is often interpreted as him being of "uncircumcised lips". God assures him that He will be "...with your mouth...and teach you what you are to do." In Deuteronomy 10:16 we are encouraged to "... cut away the barrier of your heart and no longer stiffen your neck". Often interpreted as the circumcision of the heart, this is a reference to and a requirement for a kind, welcoming heart that will inevitably lead to spiritual purity. The final perfection of the whole world and humankind will be through the 'circumcision of the foreskin of the heart' at the time of the final redemption

when the Messiah will reveal the full context/meaning of the Torah and remove all temptations from the world by rectifying it for all time.

According to the Jewish idea of 'perfection' Jewish males are required to be circumcised on the eighth day of life yet other bodily incisions are prohibited. It's interesting to compare that with other nation's sense of bodily 'beauty', perfection or required ritualistic performances as for instance torso scarring during initiation ceremonies amongst Australian or African Aborigines or facial and other ritualistic tattooing amongst Polynesian tribes and other indigenous people. God imposes specific limitations on such activity for his chosen people. The Torah is very specific about the 'holiness'/purity required of the Kohen's (priest's) appearance in the sanctuary: "They shall not make a bald spot on their heads, and they shall not shave an edge of their beard; and in the flesh they shall not cut a gash." Furthermore, Leviticus 21:18 prohibits any male offspring (future priests) of the Kohen "in whom there will be a blemish shall not come near to offer the food (sacrifice) to his God". And as for any ordinary Jew, Leviticus 21:19-21 continues: "...in whom there is a blemish shall not approach (the Temple for sacrifices); a man who is blind or lame or whose nose has no bridge, or who has one limb longer than the other; or in whom there will be a broken arm; or who has abnormally long eyebrows, or a membrane on his eye, or a blemish in his eye, or a dry skin eruption, or a moist skin eruption, or has crushed testicles." There is a very specific idea of a required 'perfection' in the priest as well as any ordinary person when it comes to the ability to enter the sanctified place of God.

Although we were all created 'in God's image', God seems to have a definite requirement (aesthetic expectation?) for the physical appearance of people who used His holy space. Did God, like a fickle artist only allow certain people to come into or use His holy Temple/'studio'?

As the Torah was created before anything else, I am left with a persistent mystery as to the exact meaning of such strict purity requirements. Were such human purity/perfection requirements even possible? Were there minimal purity requirements? Who comprised the 'purity' police? How was it applied? Unresolved questions spin around in my mind - how would God deal with a priest who went through Auschwitz and was tattooed? Would he have to relinquish his inherited right to this high office? Would a survivor of the Holocaust on whom medical experiments were carried out resulting in a range of life long scars be forbidden to enter the Temple? Would medical interventions to 'normalise'/fix the imperfections be acceptable in God's eyes? While on the mystical level the Torah makes perfect sense, on the practical level however and particularly in terms of relevance to contemporary reality it may require human interpretations as to its details in the manner of past Talmudic disputations. Until the arrival of the Messiah who will no doubt resolve all such incomprehensible matters, we mere mortals are left to ponder, argue with, scream at and come to terms with God's edicts for ourselves, individually.

The mystical explanation for circumcision to be performed on the 8th day is that seven days signify natural laws or the world as God created it with its time and space. The 8th day is super nature, beyond nature, it's the Godly time. As Rabbi Sachs has noted, this is why the Mishkan – Tabernacle (cosmos in miniature) was inaugurated on the eighth day. Likewise, circumcision is to take place on that day as human contribution to creation. There is an unmistakable parallelism between the language the Torah uses to describe God's creation of the universe and the Israelites' creation of the Sanctuary. Thus, Genesis begins and Exodus ends with stories of creation, the first by God, the second by the Israelites.

Was this a method of differentiating between nations or a further sense of 'creative' control by God the ultimate artist in charge of his 'chosen'/selected art work which is now embodied within the Jewish people? God as the sole 'artistic director', guiding and controlling his chosen creation seems to have intentionally not wanted His people to compete creatively with Him and therefore attempted to limit their capacity for visual expression. However, nowhere in the Tanach is there a prohibition against the creation of art, only against objects that are to be worshipped = idolatrous objects! Even the 2nd commandment which seems to imply a prohibition against sculpting

17\_Thomas Mann. Joseph and his Brothers. Secker and Warburg 1956.

18\_The Midrash Says. Bnay Yakov Publications, New York 1980. Book of Bereishit.

19\_Anatomy of the Soul, Rebbe Nachman Of Breslov. Chaim Kramer with Avraham Sutton. Breslov Reaserch Institute, Jerusalem/New York 1998

20\_Tanach Exodus 4:10

21\_Tanach Exodus 4:15

22\_Tanach Leviticus 21:5

23\_Rabbi Lord Sachs on Leviticus, Tazria. Conversation & Covenant Aish. Com 2016

24\_Tanach Chukat 21:8



anything that is in nature is superseded by God's decree as for instance in His instruction to create the Cherubim upon the Tabernacle or His directive to Moses; "Make yourself a fiery serpent and place it on a pole..." Could this be because three dimensional images are more likely to become more 'lif like' and as they have been historically objects of idolatrous use? Or could this also be one of those impulsive utterances out of jealousy? If man could fashion out of clay or rock emulating the things that God has created, it could pose the possibility of mistaking the first creation by God for the one by man. Or could this specifically imply a sense of 'perfection' contained in God's creations and therefore it is simply a prohibition against a competing 'perfection'? Would imperfect art images/objects be excluded? I have had it put to me by rabbis that providing there was a slight nick, smudge or any other tiny imperfection or blemish that even a human figure is permissible to be imaged through art as this would be sufficient to differentiate it from God's creation and therefore even according to the strictest observance of the prohibition against carved images 'permissible'.

Another clue perhaps is in parsha Shmini where dietary laws get introduced and sources of contamination and purification are discussed. In 11:33 there is a specific reference to earthenware utensils being contaminated need to be broken and in order for them to be purified, after a specific process they need to be put together again. The re-constituted, re-formed, broken, imperfect seems to be regarded as the Jewish way to art making.

The idea of shattering vessels seems to parallel the mystical shattered vessels of Godly light during creation of this finite world. The purpose of humanity in that context seems to be to rectify that process by 'ingathering' these lights. Rabbi Luria's teaching is based on a story found in the Midrash Genesis Rabbah 3:7 where at the time of creation God created worlds and destroyed them as they 'didn't please Him'. Rabbi Kalonymus Shapira transformed this myth of Shattering Vessels and Gathering of the Sparks into the shattered vessels with which that God created our present universe. In his view, instead of the prior worlds simply having been destroyed, they are the basis for the subsequent, present universe known as *olam ha-tikkun* = world of repair.

The more commonly known Japanese art of Kinsugi (in Japanese, *kin* = gold, *sugi* = put together) where broken vessels are put together by lacquer and the seams covered with gold leaf, could have had its beginning in the biblical text? The Kinsugi craftsmen refer to their process as having 'spiritual' significance. I wonder if there was a Jewish mystical connection in their past?

The idea of shattering and re-combining seems to be central to the creative process both in science and in art. According to current research in neuro-science the creative process seems to go through three stages; bending = taking an existing object/idea and twisting, stretching or bending it thereby transforming it, breaking = breaking/shattering the object/idea thereby getting to the essence of it or to its components and eventually blending = merging the rearranged and shattered 'bits' into a new creation. There seems to be a necessity in all creation to break with the past/existing order and blending the rearranged new reality into existence. This applies to God's creation as much as to mans. The shattering process results in imperfection out of which new creation can come about.

Where imperfection was forbidden as in the priestly community in relation to carrying out God's work in God's place (the Temple), however when the priest became contaminated (by contact with a dead body for example) a sacrifice of a perfect red heifer was required and the ashes from it were used to cleanse that contamination. The use of 'perfection' to cleans an imperfection, seems to be the remedy however, when it comes to man's work/art, imperfection seems to be a pre-requisite, a fall default position of earthly reality. The spectrum between God's purity/perfection and man's impurity/imperfection is the parameter within which Jewish art oscillates.

As stated previously, man was created 'in God's image'. Although there are numerous interpretations of this statement, the most commonly referred to interpretation is that God endowed man with the ability to create. A creative being. However, with a distinction: where God creates 'something out of nothing', man creates 'something out of something'. All creativity is 'inspired'

and inspiration could be the connecting thread between man and God. In that sense "we are essentially spiritual beings inhabiting physical bodies as opposed to physical beings possessing souls".

Obviously, man has been given the talents for all crafts and architectural structures as Torah attests to in Betzalel (the first Jewish artist?) who was 'spiritually' inspired in his creation of the Tabernacle which was a condensed replica of everything that God has created. In this endeavour Betzalel couldn't go wrong as he was making a 'dwelling place for God' amongst the Jewish people, based upon Godly instructions. Given that he was inspired by God, I often wondered if he was also familiar with the creation of humans as so many future 'Godly inspired' artists/rabbis tried to create according to legend? And was he to make art outside of Godly instructions, for himself or others, would a different outcome have resulted? Artists have been pushing these 'ungodly' boundaries since the beginning of humankind. Art and divinity often go hand in hand: "painters also could create all things from idyllic landscapes to mighty mountains, to raging oceans. The divine character of painting means that the mind of the painter is transformed into an image of the mind of God". Not only was man given the talents to make images, create 3 dimensional objects and structures but he was also given the 'holy language', speech (Hebrew) with which God created and continues to create by continuously speaking existence into being. So, man has all of the tools to create 'in the manner of' God. Was this the reason for Gods jealousy or fear? Having created man only to discover that His creation has the means with which to compete with Him? Or was His creation and especially that one family, that one nation His ultimate art creation and therefore no other, visual art would be permissible by them (Jews) specifically? It's a conceptually interesting puzzle. God's place amongst man is in non-space or every-space, the holy of holies in the Temple comprised of an 'empty' space. Although we refer metaphorically to God's 'outstretched arm' or 'strong hand' or His 'back', the fact is that God has no identifiable 'body' and although man was created 'in His image', God is impossible to be seen "for those who see My face will die..." God's 'body' is beyond description, it is often described as a purely spiritual entity. Notwithstanding the attempt by some interpreters of the esoteric, mystical texts, the accepted understanding of God is that God is beyond gender, image, size, time and space. Was the prohibition against images therefore a factual statement of the impossibility of depicting God's 'true' reality, a verbal/visual conundrum? Does this therefore imply that everything that God created has the potential of being idolatrous in man's limited understanding – therefore an injunction was deemed necessary to prohibit man from that possibility? I constantly struggle with these ideas.

Man being created with a necessary, creative ability in order to 'complete' God's creation, had always had the urge and potential to make art. Jews have always made art in compliance with or in direct opposition to the 2nd commandment. To begin with as Jewish ritual evolved and moved from the Temple to the synagogue to the home, different types of art objects were required. From synagogue decorations, arc and Torah coverings, Kiddush cups, spice boxes, etc, to the more purely aesthetically oriented ideas like clothing for special festivals, masks and costumes for Purim for instance, the Shabbat or Seder table settings, illustrating Haggadot and Megillot of various kinds, Kabbalistic and or scientific charts/diagrams and other expressions of the naturalistic or mystical content of the Torah, etc, etc.

Even to the point of the continuous preoccupation with the controversial attempts at the actual or mythical creation of a version of a 'living sculpture' man in the manner of God's earthly Golem Adam. In these attempts, according to legend man trying to emulate God by "...saying certain prayers and observing certain fast days they make the figure of a man from clay or mud and when they pronounce the miraculous Shemhamphoras (the name of God) over him, he must come to life. He cannot speak, but he understands fairly well what is said or commanded....on his forehead is written in Hebrew, the word 'emet' (truth); every day he gains weight and becomes somewhat larger and stronger...regardless of how little he was to begin with. For fear of him, they therefore erase the first letter, so that nothing remains but 'met' (dead body), whereupon he collapses and turns to clay again..."

27\_ Anthony Brandt and David Eaglman, *The Runaway Species*, Canon Gate Books Ltd, Great Britain 2017

28\_ *Anatomy of the Soul*. Chaim Kramer and Avraham Sutton. Breslov Research Institute, Jerusalem/New York 1998

29\_ Rabbi Byron L. Sherwin *The Golem Legend: Origins and Implications* New York University Press of America 1985.

30\_ Attributed to Leonardo DaVinci.

31\_ *Ma'aseh Merkabah Literature*, Sh'ir Qoma from the *Sefer Raziel HaGadol*. Work of the Chariot 2001

32\_ Gershon Sholem *ibid*.

25\_ Teachings of Rabbi Yitzhak Luria.

26\_ Noted in *Tree of Souls, The Mythology of Judaism*, referencing Esh Kadosh, *The Holy Fire: The Teachings of Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, The Rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto by Nehemia Poleb* pp, 124-126.



The word golem is only mentioned once in the Tanach, in the book of Psalms: "Thine eyes have seen mine unformed substance". It was understood to mean something in a state of being unformed, like an embryo or what came to be known in legend as the Golem made of various materials, especially the earth and water - mud. There are legends of Golems being created as animals for consumption during Shabbat meals, Golems as both female and male. The most famous of these is the Golem created in Prague, Bohemia in the 16th century by Rabbi Loew in response to the threat that the Jews of Prague faced from the accusations brought against them that they used Christian blood for baking the matzahs. This Golem was created as a defender of the Jews but also as a philosopher and one who asked eternal questions. Just like this Golem has been created to defend the meek that were unable to defend themselves, the Golem legend also comprises of the possibility of it growing to huge proportions and with super human powers of destruction if allowed to continue to grow or if unchecked to the point of destroying its creator.

In the Jewish myth of creation of the Golem, it is given the potential of its own life, individuation, whereas Pygmalion's female sculpture is subservient to and for the male gaze and touch alone. The Jewish creation has the potential to act 'morally' or if unchecked, the potential for destruction, the Greek creation is a benign, aesthetically idealised and objectified form, purely for the sculptor's pleasure.

The idea of a Golem having a conscience, being the defender of what's right or being the powerful supporter of the 'underdog' in society or as a powerful force that has moved to the destructive 'underworld' or the negative human potential is what fuels our contemporary comics, films and especially computer games. This legend of the Golem seems to have generated countless versions of 'superheroes' through art. Through the illusions of illustration, computer generated imagery and film the golem variations 'come to life'. Like the original Adam, these illusionistic creations symbolically possess the powers for good or for bad – animalistic or spiritual souls. The underlying content of this imagery is a combination of the idea of Greek gods exterior appearance with the Jewish Golem's moral values. In a world which is increasingly technologically complex, these mythical human art creations and their comic book offspring superheroes seem to provide both entertainment and a sense of allusion to moral justice in a cynical and chaotic world. In this clear and often simplistic good versus evil dramatizations of reality, God's creation is replaced by god like half human, half computerised machine hybrid pseudo-humans, robotically programmed that provide order through 'magical' or supernatural powers. If this art form represents one extreme of man's search for understanding and meaning, I suggest the other is the conceptualisation of reality and reliance upon scientific and technological innovations that transform God's 'creation'. These human achievements can be seen as intentionally positive, for the common good of mankind as in various medical technological advances, through ever more inventive prosthetic and natural transplants, growth of human organs, molecular surgery and many other therapeutic innovations thereby improving and prolonging human quality of life and performance. Through digitised global communications, satellites and various robotic devices to ease and transform domestic duties, work and leisure activities are accessible virtually on demand. Advances in future technology will provide possibilities for inter stellar travel and the colonization of other planets, even unimaginable possibilities for human expansion physically, intellectually and spiritually, and so on, and so on.

Just like any new invention in the past, these scientific and technological leaps have the capacity for the opposite, catastrophic results as in climate change, extinction of numerous species through reclaiming their natural habitats for agriculture or real estate, chemical warfare, viral mutations, creation of life in the laboratory, intelligent robotic constructions, nuclear accidents and such like. Man seems to be under the delusion that humanity is finally in such technological advance that it can, not only compete with but improve upon God's creation. We have enough weapons with the capacity to extinguish all life on earth and at the same time we are close to being able to improve upon Pygmalion's efforts by creating a life like sculpture/cyber that will for all intense and purposes be human or at least have the capacity to replace human beings. The Pygmalion complex is alive and thriving! Through art and or science, we seem to be in pursuit to emulate God. Do we want to become God?

It seems to me that there are clear and contrasting distinctions between the Greek and Jewish approaches in this goal and in the pursuit of an ideal of art and beauty.

Epitomised and contained within the physical attributes of Pygmalion's sculpture is the Greek concern with idealised features, perfect proportions without any blemishes – a figure whose external beauty represents a feast for the eyes and a longing for the heart. Greek art seems to be in pursuit of an externalised ideal of the physical conception of a human being. This even extends to the depiction of Greek gods whose powers are super-human yet they have a human form. All reality is conformed to the physical appearance and an idealised, perfected human specimen perfectly proportioned and with bulging muscles, capable of upholding the world and everything within it. This Greek sculptural ideology is typified by embracing the physical aspects of reality in both form and substance; smooth, permanent, durable, often manifested in stone or marble.

The Jewish idea of art on the other hand, like a reflection of God who is omnipotent and therefore beyond description seems to be concerned with a more intangible, ephemeral and more abstract ideas such as freedom and holiness. Since the Exodus from Egyptian slavery over 3000 years ago, the account of which is recounted daily by Jews, during morning prayers and of course during the Seder on Passover, Jews have been obsessed with the idea of freedom. The obsession is with freedom from all kinds of enslavements be they physical, psychological or political. It's a quest to be free from any shackles that may inhibit our human potential. This obsession with freedom, even freedom from God in some anarchic cases is none the less being guided by a sense of morality, ethics and a sense of social and political justice that begins with the Torah. Grounded very much in the day to day, here and now, earthly reality and hand in hand with the pursuit of freedom is the constant struggle to achieve a sense of holiness – an appreciation of realities beyond the physical and an appreciation of a more spiritual sense of existence/being. Furthermore, as an extension of Judaism being grounded in earthly reality, Jewish art is also preoccupied with the contradictory ideas of temporality and permanence, perfection/purity and human imperfection, oscillating constantly between self-expression and the idea of elevating expression and the means of art making from the ego driven to the Godly inspired. The nature of God verses human nature and all possible permutations in between. Even the golems that were supposedly created were made specifically of temporary materials: sand/dust and water. They were created as physical entities purely for holy purposes; to protect the Jewish population, to act as arbiters of good, to allow Jews to worship without fear of death by the local, Christian populations. In that same spirit, all Jewish art is made with physical materials but its function is to reflect the intangible complexity of reality, beyond the limitations of the materials. In Jewish art what you see is only the first layer of what you get. Just like the Torah has numerous layers/levels of meaning/understanding from the literal to the hidden/'secret', good, Jewish art contains all these levels also. The more you look/think, the more you understand, the more you get!

We question, argue, berate and wonder with and about God. Why should we matter? As the Yizkor prayer states "we are like a breath; our days are a passing shadow; we come and go like grass which in the morning shoots up, renewed, and in the evening fades and withers. You cause us to return to dust (like a golem) saying, "Return, O mortal creatures!" Our transient reality/life which is so brief is none the less of importance and value. Each life is precious and valuable. Each of us is here for a particular purpose. The trick is to decipher one's purpose and find meaning within this brief breath that is a life. This struggle between holiness (within oneself) and freedom within and outside of oneself, between Godly perfection as an ideal to strive towards and man's imperfection that is full of limitations is the balance with which humanity 'completes' creation. The Jewish body or specifically the Torah of the body epitomises that creative existential struggle. This is also the purpose and the intent of my art.

The struggle continues!

V. Majzner 2017-2019©

33\_Isaak Bashevis Singer, Forward to the catalogue Golem! Danger, Deliverance and Art The Jewish Museum New York 1988.

34\_Yizkor memorial prayer recited during festivals.