



Art

An expression of the soul.



A Tool for Inspiration

While the art of carving certain forms isn't permitted by halacha, there remains an enormous potential for good within art. In this letter, the Rebbe explains the place of the visual arts within Judaism.

After a long delay, I received your letter, in which you ask how to understand the *possuk*, “You shall not make for yourselves an engraven statue or any image.” You ask, also, whether there is an essential difference between the visual arts and music.

Now, in regard to practical *halacha*, a local *rav* can let you know what is included in the [prohibition mentioned in the] abovementioned *possuk*, with all applicable details.

I will add an essential point: An artist, male or female, has a wide variety of ways to utilize his or her talents to their fullest extent, without trespassing on the laws of

the Torah, which is **the Torah of life**, i.e. instructions for life in this world—life that should be worthy of its name in every way. On the contrary; through the visual arts one can add enthusiasm, as well as a deeper understanding in matters of the world in general, and in particular a deeply-felt understanding of the words of Israel’s composer of sweet songs (Dovid Hamelech), “How great are your works, Hashem. How manifold are your works, Hashem.” In this way, one develops admiration, respect, and awe towards the Creator, in a wondrous way.

In numerous *sichos*, my father-in-law, the Rebbe discusses the impression and deep contemplation of his father, the Rebbe [Rashab], when he saw paintings that were the handiwork of an expert artist; to the extent that despite his every moment being precious, as is well-known,

nevertheless, while he was in Paris, he spent several hours visiting the Louvre, particularly the art gallery. He then told his son and successor, my father-in-law, the Rebbe, concepts in *Chassidus*, the sparks of which had entered his mind while viewing the paintings.

I hope that the fact that you quote the abovementioned *possuk*, which is at the beginning of the *Aseres Hadibros*—the foundation of the entire Torah, up until and including the most recent laws in the Oral Torah—shows that you’re structuring your life to be in fitting with these instructions, and that you do so in a true and deeply-felt way. Especially since this is the goal of a painter, to absorb and transmit the innermost aspects of the subject being portrayed, to the extent that even someone who isn’t an artist will feel the innermost aspects of it.



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THE REBBE VISITS THE EXHIBIT OF ARTIST BARUCH NACHSHON AT 788 EASTERN PARKWAY, 6 KISLEV 5739.

May it be Hashem's will that you will influence your surroundings in the abovementioned direction; influence in an appropriate way and with the appropriate words, and in particular, by being a living example.¹

Not Just A Painting

In this letter to an artist who had painted a portrait of the Rebbe, the Rebbe points out the powerful effect that a painting can have on a person.

...This point is also what leads to the next part of my letter—extending my heartfelt thanks to you for the attention you gave to the portrait that you painted and sent me, especially since besides the usual effort an artist would expend, you also had to take a photograph.

In addition to thanking you, I will also use this opportunity to express my hope that—based on the notion

that an artist imbues his painting with his own spirit and soul, and more so, [a work of art] is similar to an intellectual concept, where not only does the intellect grasp the concept, but the intellect is taken by the concept—since this portrait depicts a Jew with a beard, wearing a *gartel* (symbolizing Hashem girding the Jews with strength), with a *siddur* in hand, etc., it is certain that whoever sees the painting will be affected by it, and all the more so, the artist himself [will be affected by it].

However good and complete one's spiritual situation may be, there is always room for improvement in every good and holy thing—the Torah and its mitzvos, since they are infinite, being connected to Hashem who is infinite. From this [perspective] comes the instruction—[an instruction] which also gives a person the ability

to fulfill it—to improve in holiness and to go from strength to strength.

In light of the above, I hope that you will influence your wife, as well as your entire surroundings, in this direction.

May you be blessed with success in all of the above and may you share good news.²

True to Life

Reb Zalman Kleinman's depictions of life in Kfar Chabad in its' early days offer a glimpse into a world that was; a world of genuine chassidic life. In this letter, the Rebbe suggested that these paintings be produced, and explained why they should be as accurate as possible.

Mr. Zalman Kleinman,

I just received a newspaper article accompanied by some paintings of yours. These had an effect on me particularly because they portrayed



The rough draft for the cover of *Moshiach Times* (Nissan 5749) was given to the Rebbe for review. The clock on the draft showed a time that was earlier than the proper time to burn *chametz*. The Rebbe therefore asked whether the time to burn *chametz* was earlier than usual that year, and instructed that they clarify with a *rav* what the exact time would be. The final edition depicts a clock showing a later time.

things as they were—without artifice or even artistic embellishment. It is fitting, and it would be proper, that you create, in this manner, an entire album about Kfar Chabad. Not only [depicting] how it is now, but also how it was when it was first settled, so that this album will showcase the development of the Kfar. The contemporary illustrations will serve the same benefit, since it will hopefully soon develop yet further. If this line of paintings proves successful, it's worthwhile to consider publishing them as a series of postcards or as individual postcards.

The main thing is that the paintings be designed true-to-life, and you should not be swayed if someone says that for such a purpose, a photograph would be sufficient, and no painting is needed. In fact, the difference between a photograph and an expertly-drawn painting, even a true-to-life painting, is obvious.

Of course, if there are expenses associated with producing these

paintings, they will be paid from a special fund, along with compensation for your work. I await your positive response.

It's superfluous to mention that I don't mean [that you should paint pictures of] only the houses and the like [in Kfar Chabad], but rather also—and primarily—depictions of life in the Kfar, from the most spiritual to the most physical aspects.

Accurate Illustrations

In 5746, the Rebbe made a special emphasis that children should be brought to Shul on Shavuot to hear the *Aseres Hadibros*. Following this, Tzivos Hashem made a proclamation calling for children to do so. In the illustration on the proclamation, “modern”-looking men and women were depicted running to shul, and the Rebbe commented that at least one bearded man should be added to the illustration. ¹

1. Igros Kodesh vol. 26 p. 112.
2. Ibid. vol. 32 p. 127.



CHASSIDIC ARTIST ZALMAN KLEINMAN AT HIS STUDIO.