

HALACHIC AND HASHKAFIC ISSUES IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

SERIES 2: 14 - ART, AESTHETICS AND IDOLATRY - PART 2 OU ISRAEL CENTER - WINTER 2021/22

- In Part 1 we began to explore some of the sources in Tanach which indicate a Torah perspective on art, beauty and the aesthetic.
- These include a focus on the Mishkan and its construction using Chochma, Bina and Da'at, which mirrors that of the universe.
- We also touched on the thought of Rav Kook, who invoked the mystical and Sefirotic concept of Tiferet (and by implication Chesed and Gevura) in the relationship between art, the tzadik and divine inspiration.
- In this shiur we will look to the thought of other key commentators - Rav Hirsch and Rav Soloveitchik - and also the positions of some contemporary thinkers.

A] RAV HIRSCH AESTHETICS, CULTURE AND DERECH ERETZ

A1] TORAH IM DERECH ERETZ

1. (כד) ויגרש את האדם וישכן מקדם לגן־עדן את־הפרבים ואת להט החרב המתהפכת לשמור את דרך עץ החיים.

בראשית ג'כד

After the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, the Tree of Life was no longer accessible directly, but only through a 'derech' - a path to acquire true life.

2. עץ־חיים היא למחזיקים בה ותמכיה מאשר

משלי ג'יח

Torah is now the 'Tree of Life'. Note that the Keruvim placed originally on the 'derech Etz Chaim' reappear on the top of the Aron Kodesh!

3. רבן גמליאל בנו של רבי יהודה הנשיא אומר - יפה תלמוד תורה עם דרך ארץ שיגיעת שניהם משכחת עון. וכל תורה שאין עמה מלאכה סופה בטלה וגוררת עון.

אבות ב'ב

4. רבי אלעזר בן עזריה אומר אם אין תורה אין דרך ארץ אם אין דרך ארץ אין תורה.

אבות ג'ז

Chazal propose a combination of 'Torah with Derech Eretz' - Torah without 'work' will eventually cease and lead to sin.

5. א"ר שמואל בר נחמני - גדולה דרך ארץ שקדמה לתורה כ"ו דורות. שנאמר לשמור את דרך עץ החיים. דרך - זו דרך ארץ החיים, זו תורה!

אוצר מדרשים (אייזנשטיין) השכם עמוד 241

Chazal also learn that 'derech eretz' must precede Torah and did so by 26 generations (from Adam to Moshe). In this context it is difficult to translate derech eretz as 'work'.

6. אח"כ ילך לעסקיו, דכל תורה שאין עמה מלאכה סופה בטלה וגוררת עון

שולחן ערוך אורח חיים סימן קנו"א

The Shulchan Aruch takes the position that 'derech eretz' means gainful employment and rules that a person should go out to work. Torah cannot be maintained without work and a lack of employment will bring a person to sin.

7. The concept of Torah im Derekh Eretz – universal and timeless – in the doctrine of Rabbi Hirsch has been defined as a synthesis of Judaism and modern culture, embracing art and literature to the extent compatible with Halakha. However, this synthesis is to be understood in a Hegelian sense: two contradictory forces contending with each other are reconciled and renewed on a higher level. In other words: Torah and life, Judaism and culture, do not just complement each other, but achieve complete identity.

Dr. Meir Hildesheimer, *Historical Perspectives on Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch* (June 2008)¹

8. The term Derekh Eretz includes all the situations arising from and dependent upon the circumstance that the earth is the place where the individual must live, fulfil his destiny and dwell together with others and that he must utilize resources and conditions provided on earth in order to live and to accomplish his purpose. Accordingly, the term Derekh Eretz is used primarily to refer to ways of earning a living, to the social order that prevails on earth, as well as to the mores and considerations of courtesy and propriety arising from social living and also to things pertinent to good breeding and general education.

Rav S.R. Hirsch - Commentary on Pirkei Avot 2:2

9. In Vayikra Rabba 9 the Sages designate the road that leads to the Tree of Life ... as 'Derech Eretz', as the the way of culture - the way of that social refinement which results from people living together in the world, as being the first tutor and educator to morals, manners and order. ... 'Culture' starts the work of educating the generations of Mankind and Torah completes it; for the Torah is the most finished education of Mankind. ... **For us Jews, 'Derech Eretz' and 'Torah' are one** ... But in the general development of mankind, culture comes earlier. ... That is why the Jew rejoices whenever and wherever culture elevates people to a perception of true values and to nurture goodness. But, of course, where culture and civilization are used in the service of sensuality, the degeneration only gets all the greater. But still, such misuse of culture does not do away with the intrinsic value and blessing of Derech Eretz for תורה אין דרך ארץ אין תורה. Therefore, Jews too are to attach themselves to and love all good and true culture and by the ways and manner of their behaviour and demeanor appear as educated people, and show that being a Jew is only a *higher* stage of being a man. And, of course, on the other side too, דרך אין תורה אין דרך ארץ - if culture and education, instead of leading to Torah, take the place of it, then it is not the way that leads to the Tree of Life, but is the way that leads to degeneration.

Rav S.R. Hirsch - Commentary on Bereishit 3:24

Rav Hirsch defines 'Derech Eretz' here as culture and education which create an 'educated person' by building a person's morals and manners as a preparation for Torah.

10. וַיִּצְמַח ה' אֱלֹהִים מִן־הַגֶּדֶה כָּל־עֵץ נֹחֵם לְמַרְאֵה וְטוֹב לְמַאֲכָל וְעֵץ הַחַיִּים בְּתוֹךְ הַגֶּן וְעֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וְרָע

בראשית ב:ט

The Torah emphasizes that the fruit growing in the Garden of Eden was not only good to eat but delightful to look at.

11. It should not be overlooked that here, in the description of the laying-out of the garden for human requirements, נֹחֵם לְמַרְאֵה, satisfying the sense of beauty precedes טוֹב לְמַאֲכָל - that of the sense of taste and the requirements for food. It gives justification for, and dedication to, the aesthetic, the sense of appreciating beauty, and this too may confirm the higher state designed for Man. The abundance of beauty of every kind that we are given in this, our world, and the fact that - as far as we know - Man is the only creature that has been provided with the ability to enjoy beauty for itself, proves what value the Creator lays on this aesthetic sense for the spiritual-moral calling of Man. Indeed this beauty of nature showered in every form all over the world, and the sense of enjoyment which Man derives from it, is one of the first means to protect Man from complete brutalisation. Joy in the beauties of Nature and the beauties of form, which God has lavished especially on the plant-world, forms a bridge towards what is spiritually and morally beautiful. In surroundings where no consideration is given to harmony and beauty, Man too easily grows up wild and unruly. The feeling which gives one joy in harmony and order is related to the feeling for order and harmony in the sphere of morality, so much so that evil and bad appear to us as רע (from רעע - to break into pieces) as something broken, the harmony disturbed, where one single thought no longer rules the whole.

Rav S.R. Hirsch - Commentary on Bereishit 2:9

1. The full paper is available at https://web.stevens.edu/golem/llevine/rsrh/historical_perspectives_rsrh_hildesheimer.pdf. For more resources on Rav Hirsch and his thought see <https://web.stevens.edu/golem/llevine/rsrh/>

A2] THE BERACHA TO YEFET

12. יִפֶּתְ אֱלֹקִים לְיִפֶּת וַיִּשְׁכֶּן בְּאֹהֶל־שֵׁם

בראשית ט:כו

Noach gives his son Yefet (meaning beauty) a beracha that he should develop more beauty and then states - 'and HE shall dwell in the tents of Shem'.

13. יִפְתִּי יי לִיפֶת וַיִּשְׂרֵי שְׂכִינְתִּיהָ בְּמִשְׁכְּנֵי שֵׁם

אונקלוס בראשית פרק ט פסוק כז

14. וַיִּשְׁכֹּן בְּאֹהֶל שֵׁם - יִשְׂרָה שְׂכִינְתּוֹ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל

רש"י שם

Rashi, following Targum Onkelos, understands that verse is telling us that God will dwell in the tents of Shem - ie to the exclusion of Yafet!

15. וַיִּשְׂפֹּר יי תְּחִימָה דְּיִפֶּת וַיִּתְּגַיְרוּן בְּנֵי וַיִּשְׂרוּן בְּמִדְרָשָׁא דְּשֵׁם

תרגום יונתן בראשית פרק ט פסוק כז

Targum Yonatan understands, however, that the verse means that Yefet is given special beracha as long as he (ie Yefet) dwell in the tents of Shem - ie in the context of Shem. יון + צ = ציון

16. Separated, Shem² would be the thinking one, Cham the sensuous one, and Yefet the one who seeks after beauty.... Yefet, instead of being guided by the ideal of beauty, [is] to come to the ideal of goodness and become צדיק. For where the tendency Yefet is predominantly the directive, although, it is true, sensuality does become protected from coarseness by the application of the standard of decency and refinement, this standard applied to the general activities of life is still only a relative one.

Rav S.R. Hirsch - Commentary on Bereishit 6:10

17. But nations also appear which use their forces in the service of beauty, who characterize themselves in nurturing art, aesthetic beauty. They are conscious of some higher ideal up to which mankind is to work itself out of crudeness. This tendency teaches people to cloak raw sensuality in the garb of respectability and graciousness. Through grace and beauty, they foster a taste for more spiritual activities - music, poetry, art. All those nations who cherish that which appeals to feelings represents the 'Yefet' character.

But the education of raw unrefined humanity to the sense of beauty is not the highest. Wavering, unsettled is the culture which only gives Man the satisfying of his own higher standards as the criterion of the activities of his life, but gives him no ideal external to himself, glowing in its own lights, as a beacon, a goal and a criterion. Only that which can elevate the mind to a knowledge of, and the feelings to a recognition of what is good and true in itself, leads a man to the height of what he is meant to be. Nations who have made the contribution by cultivating the spiritual among mankind to a recognition of the Truth have worked in the 'Shem' character for the happiness and well-being of humanity.

Rav S.R. Hirsch - Commentary on Bereishit 9:27

18. Not in vain has God clothed His world in beauty, created the harmony of forms and sounds and given man eyes and ears to understand these harmonies and to enjoy them. Each time man experiences the grandeur of the star-studded firmament and the radiant diadem of the rising or setting sun, each time he enjoys the grace and beauty of a flower, he is elevated above the narrow range of mere materialistic usefulness and a note is struck in his heart which is very close to the even higher feeling for all that is morally beautiful and which carries him an important stage nearer to its understanding.

And the Creator, in His infinite goodness, has endowed the human soul with the sense of beauty which in itself is a first step towards higher perfection, and only in an existence enriched by the sense of beauty can man find happiness and serene enjoyment of his life on earth.

Hellenism, Judaism and Rome in "Judaism Eternal", (London 1959) p. 190

2. R. Hirsch explains in his previous comment that שם (the name) is related to designation of objects and function - a mental and discerning activity. חם means heat - the excited action of the senses. יפת means beauty - the feeling and imagination which is sensitive to the aesthetic.

A3] THE AESTHETIC AS A BLOCK TO TORAH

19. רבי שמעון אומר המהלך בדרך ושונה ומפסיק ממשנתו ואומר 'מה נאה אילן זה, ומה נאה ניר זה', מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו מתחייב בנפשו.

משנה מסכת אבות פרק ג משנה ז

Chazal state that if a person is involved in learning but they interrupt their learning to admire natural beauty, they are liable to forfeit their life!

20. He who, while studying, does not become aware of this higher beauty of God's teaching, so that he will break off his sacred work to exclaim over the beauty of nature, is as if he had sinned against his own soul, or rather, as if he had forfeited his own soul. For, despite his study, he thus shows that he has not come to understand the dignity and beauty of a human soul that is guided and enlightened by the spirit of God; a beauty and dignity that surpasses all earthly beauty by far.

R. Shimshon Refael Hirsch, Chapters of the Fathers (Avot) 3:9, tr. Gertude Hirschler [NY, 1967³]

- Certainly, after the First World War, there was a Zeitgeist which regarded culture and civilization as the necessary achievements to avoid any repetition of the barbarity of that conflict.
- This perception was shattered by the Second World War, when Germany - one of the most cultured, civilized and educated nations in the world, committed the greatest atrocities in human history. Since then, to some degree, the value of culture as a civilizing necessity has constantly been on the defensive, even resulting in an 'anti-intellectualism' in some circles.

B] RABBI JONATHAN SACKS - BEAUTY AS A TOOL FOR HOLINESS

21. דתניא: (שמות טו-ב) זֶה אֱלִי וְאֶנְהוּ - התנאה לפניו במצות אבא שאול אומר: וְאֶנְהוּ - הוּי דומה לו: (רש"י - ולשון אנוכי: 'אני וכו'). מה הוא חנון ורחום - אף אתה היה חנון ורחום.

שבת קלג:

Chazal expound the word 've'anvehu' in two ways - to beautify mitzvot and to stick to God. These ideas must come together - only if one is committed to cleaving to God can one enhance the external aesthetics of the mitzva. Otherwise, there is more likelihood that the adornment will take on its own aesthetic meaning. Behind every piece of artistic creation lurks the specter of the Golden Calf!

22. In his book *The Body of Faith* (1983), Michael Wyschogrod makes a stronger case for the aesthetic dimension of Judaism. Throughout history, he argues, art and cult have been intimately connected and Judaism is no exception. "The architecture of the Temple and its contents demand a spatial thinking that stimulates the visual arts as nothing else does. It must be remembered that among the many artifacts past civilisations have left behind, those intended for ritual use almost are always the most elaborate and aesthetically the most significant."

Wyschogrod says that postbiblical Judaism did not, for the most part, make outstanding contributions to art and music. Even today, the world of religious Jewry is remote from that of the great writers, painters, poets and dramatists. To be sure, there is a wealth of popular religious music. But by and large, he says, "our artists tend to leave the Jewish community." This he believes represents a spiritual crisis. "The imagination of the poet is a reflection of his spiritual life. Myth and metaphor are the currency both of religion and poetry. Poetry is one of the most powerful domains in which religious expression takes place. And the same is true of music, drama, painting, and dance."

An immense body of recent research into neuroscience, evolutionary psychology and behavioural economics has established beyond doubt that we are not, for the most part, rational animals. It is not that we are incapable of reason, but that reason alone does not move us to action. For that, we need emotion – and emotion goes deeper than the prefrontal cortex, the brain's centre of conscious reflection. Art speaks to emotion. It moves us in ways that go deeper than words.

That is why great art has a spirituality that cannot be expressed other than through art – and that applies to the visual beauty and pageantry of the service of tabernacle and Temple, including the robes and sashes of the priests. There is a poem in the reader's repetition of Mussaf on Yom Kippur that that expresses this to perfection. It is about mareih cohen, the appearance of the High Priest as he concluded his service and emerged from the Holy of Holies:

“As the brightness of the vaulted canopy of heaven, As lightning flashing from the splendour of angels, As the celestial blue in the fringes’ thread, As the iridescence of the rainbow in the midst of clouds, As the majesty with which the Rock has clothed His creatures, As a rose planted in a garden of delight, As a diadem set on the brow of the King, As the mirror of love in the face of a bridegroom, As a halo of purity from a mitre of purity, As one who abides in secret, beseeching the King, As the morning star shining in the borders of the East – Was the appearance of the [High] Priest.”

And now we can define the nature of the aesthetic in Judaism. It is art devoted to the greater glory of God. That is the implication of the fact that the word kavod, “glory,” is attributed in the Torah only to God – and to the cohen officiating in the house of God.

Judaism does not believe in art for art’s sake, but in art in the service of God, giving back as a votive offering to God a little of the beauty He has made in this created world. At the risk of oversimplification, one could state the difference between ancient Israel and ancient Greece thus: that where the Greeks believed in the holiness of beauty, Jews believed in hadrat kodosh, the beauty of holiness. There is a place for the aesthetic in avodah. In the words of the Song at the Sea: zeh Keili ve-anvehu, “This is my God and I will beautify Him.” For beauty inspires love, and from love flows the service of the heart.

The Aesthetic in Judaism, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks⁴

- In this light, it is clear why the Torah develops the idea of art SOLELY in the context of the Mikdash. There, it is clear that the art is unveiling the beauty of holiness and never becoming a thing of sanctity in its own terms.
- Hence, art is permitted full expression only in the Mikdash. And the MOST dangerous artistic form of all - a sculpted human image - is permitted ONLY in the holiest place of all - as the keruvim over the Aron Kodosh!
- So too, Betzalel’s name means ‘betzel E-I’ - in the shadow of God. His talent is only a reflection of God’s creativity and not for his own glory.

23. והמצוה הל"ג היא שנצטוו הכהנים ללוש בגדים מיוחדים לכבוד ולתפארת ואז יעבדו במקדש. ומנין שאין אהרן לובש בגדים אלו לגדולתו אלא כמקיים גזירת המלך תלמוד לומר (ויקרא ט:לד) וַיַּעַשׂ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֶת־מֹשֶׁה - כלומר בגדים אלו. ואף על פי שהם בתכלית היופי שהם מזהב ושוהם וישפה וזולתם מן האבנים היפות, לא יכוין בהם היופי אלא לקיים הצווי שצוה האל למשה לבד. והוא שילבש אלו הבגדים תמיד במקדש.

ספר המצוות לרמב"ם מצות עשה לג

The Rambam stresses that the intense beauty of the Bigdei Kehuna was NOT the reason for their central importance. Aharon and his sons wore them because God commanded that the service could not be done without them, not because of their glory. This statement is not ‘anti-aesthetic’ but simply stresses that the aesthetic has no intrinsic value but only a purpose in serving the holiness of the mitzva.

24.

ה. וּכְאֲשֶׁר יִשִּׁים הָאָדָם מִטָּרְתּוֹ עֵנֵן זֶה יִהְיֶה פְּנוּי מֵהֲרִבָּה מִמַּעֲשָׂיו וַיִּתְמַעַט מִדְּבָרָיו הֲרִיבָה מְאֹד, כִּי מִי שֶׁמִּטָּרְתּוֹ עֵנֵן זֶה לֹא יִתְעוֹרֵר לְקַשֵּׁט אֶת הַקִּירוֹת בְּזָהָב אוֹ לַעֲשׂוֹת סָרֵט שֶׁל זָהָב בְּבָגָד, זוֹלָתִי אִם נִתְפָּוֵן בְּדָבָר זֶה לִישֵׁב אֶת נַפְשׁוֹ כְּדִי שֶׁתִּבְרִיא וְלִסְלַק מִמֶּנָּה חֲלִיָּה, כְּדִי שֶׁתִּהְיֶה בְּהִירָה וְזָכָה לְקַבֵּל אֶת הַמַּדְעִים.

כְּדָרְךָ שֶׁאֲמָרוּ (שבת כ"ה:), "דִּירָה נָא וְאִשָּׁה נָא וְכִלִּים נָאִים וּמִטָּה מוּצַעַת לְתַלְמִידֵי חֲכָמִים" (ברכות נ"ז:): "מְרַחֲבִים דַּעְתּוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם."

לְכִי שֶׁהִנָּפֵשׁ תִּלְאָה וְתִטְמָטֵם הַמְחַשְׁבָּה בְּהִתְמַדְתָּ רְאִיתָ דְּבָרִים הַקְּשִׁים, כְּמוֹ שֶׁיִּחְלָה הַגּוּף בְּהִתְעַסְקוֹ בַּעֲבֹדוֹת הַמִּינְיָעוֹת עַד שֶׁיִּנּוּחַ וַיִּנָּפֵשׁ, וְאִזּוֹר יִחְזוֹר לְאֲזוֹנוֹ, כִּךְ גַּם הִנָּפֵשׁ צְרִיכָה לְהִשְׁקֵט וְלְהִתְעַסֵּק בְּנִחְתָּ חוֹשִׁים, כְּגוֹן הַהִסְתַּכְּלוֹת בְּצִיּוּרִים וְדְבָרִים הַנְּאִים, עַד שֶׁתִּסְתַּלֵּק מִמֶּנָּה הַלְּאוֹת, כְּמוֹ שֶׁאֲמָרוּ, "כִּי חֲלָשֵׁי רִבְּנָן מִגְרָסָא." וְחוֹשְׁשֵׁנִי לֹא מִי לְכִי אוֹפְנִים אֵלָה לֹא יִהְיוּ אֵלּוֹ רַע, וְלֹא פְּעֻלוֹת לְבִטְלָה, כְּלוֹמֵר, הַהִתְעוֹרְרוֹת לְצִיּוּרִים וְכִיּוּרִים בְּבִנְיָנִים, בְּכִלִּים וּבְבָגָדִים.

הקדמת הרמב"ם לפרקי אבות - 'שמונה פרקים', פרק ה

The Rambam understands the art and beauty, unlike science and philosophy, do not have a direct role in deepening one’s connection to God. Indeed, as that connection of Ahava and Yira deepens, he feels that one will be drawn less and less to the aesthetic. However, he sees art and the aesthetic - including a nice home, clothes, belongings etc - as playing an important role in relaxing a person to settle the mind in order to prepare for true spiritual endeavors.

4. <https://outorah.org/p/856/>

C] RAV SOLOVEITCHIK - REDEEMED AESTHETICS AS A TOOL FOR HALACHIC LIVING

- Rav Soloveitchik addresses the issue of art and aesthetics in a number of his seminal works, including - 'Confrontation', 'Lonely Man of Faith', and Halakhic Man.
- His position is complex and nuanced. In its breadth and depth, it is certainly beyond the scope of this shiur.
- Some commentators understand that R. Soloveitchik's took a basically negative view on the value of aesthetics and beauty.

25. By the mid-twentieth century, the idea that Jews do not have an authentic tradition of visual art, that paintings, photographs, and sculptures are not part of religious experience or halakhic life, was ingrained enough that Rabbi Soloveitchik could define the man of faith, the confronted man, at least partly by his lack of interest in the aesthetic and the visually beautiful. It did not necessarily have to be this way—a world that appreciated illuminated manuscripts, silverwork, or micrography as the finest and highest of art forms would not have believed that Judaism was “artless.”
If Kant or Hegel had read Rambam or the Shulhan Arukh, they might have known that Jewish law does not actually proscribe the creation of images. But that was not the way of history. It is important to reclaim visual culture and aesthetics for religious Judaism so that beauty can be allowed to inspire halakhically bound actions, to color worship, and give meaning to our rituals.

A Religion Without Visual Art? The Rav and the Myth of Jewish Art, Ranana Dine⁵

26. *homo religiosus* 'moves in a concrete world full of color and sound'. Having said his, however, Soloveitchik proceeds to describe the religious person as a cognitive creature, no longer swayed by the abstruse sentiment or ephemeral feelings that characterize the aesthete.⁷ From this point on in *The Halakhic Mind*, Soloveitchik says next to nothing positive about the religious subject as an aesthetic creature. Aesthetics and aestheticism now assume pejorative connotations. In this text, as in others, aesthetics assumes a precognitive value, but one that is overridden by ethics, cognition, and religion.

Joseph Soloveitchik and Immanuel Kant's Mitzvah-Aesthetic, Zachary Braiterman⁸

27. What does Abraham's personality symbolize in Judaism? Divine discipline, the strict Shulchan Aruch, the rigid halachoth and laws that obligate one to perform certain acts and to refrain from others.
What aspect of Judaism is represented by Sarah? The great love of the Jew for the Creator and the great happiness that he finds in being close to Him. Judaism is not only strict discipline, but also a song of songs proclaiming 'I am to my beloved and my beloved is to me'

The Jewish soul needs both Abraham and Sarah. It must submit and find happiness in submission. Of course there is much beauty in Judaism, much heart, much greatness and depth. But above all else, Judaism is a way of life of self-control and self-discipline.

R. Yosef B. Soloveitchik - 5 Derashot, end of Derasha 2⁹

28. I remember how once, on the Day of Atonement, I went outside into the synagogue courtyard with my father just before the *Ne'ilah* service. It had been a fresh, clear day, one of the fine, almost delicate days of summer's end, filled with sunshine and light. Evening was fast approaching, and an exquisite autumn sun was sinking into the west, beyond the trees of the cemetery, into a sea of purple and gold. R. Moses, a halakhic man par excellence, turned to me and said: 'This sunset differs from ordinary sunsets for with it forgiveness is bestowed upon us for our sins.' The Day of Atonement and the forgiveness of sins merged and blended here with the splendor and beauty of the world and with the hidden lawfulness of the order of creation and whole was transformed into one living, holy, cosmic phenomenon.

R. Yosef B. Soloveitchik - Halakhic Man p38

29. Stepping back a moment allows one to chart the following movement in Part One of *Halakhic Man*. Soloveitchik takes the reader from the beauty of Shabbat and Yom Kippur to the halakhic sublime and back to judging the beauty of halakhic ethics. Note, however, that this ethical thrust, the notion that 'halakhic men' study and observe halakhah *li-shemah*, does not annul aesthetic judgment.

Joseph Soloveitchik and Immanuel Kant's Mitzvah-Aesthetic, Zachary Braiterman p15.

5. <https://thelehrhaus.com/commentary/a-religion-without-visual-art-the-rav-and-the-myth-of-jewish-art/>

6. *Halakhic Mind: An Essay on Jewish Tradition and Modern Thought* p39.

7. *ibid* p40-41.

8. *AJS Review* 2000-2001 Vol 25, No. 1 pp 1-24.

9. *The Rav Speaks*, p91, 94

30. The Rav elaborates a kind of structural psychology in which human experience can be divided into three parts: the intellectual/cognitive gesture, the ethical gesture, and the aesthetic gesture. This division, though not explicit in Kant, is clearly Kantian in origin. The paradigm of the cognitive gesture is the pursuit of scientific knowledge, particularly physics. The ethical gesture involves the formulation of a priori norms that transcend experience and the implementation of those norms in life. The aesthetic gesture involves the encounter with the sensual world. This experience is understood through the analysis of the idea of beauty¹⁰.

In the typological approach that he favors, the Rav describes an ideal aesthetic type. The aesthetic type, or “aesthetic man,” is one whose world view is founded upon aesthetic experience, on the flow of sensory input, and thus whose values are defined in aesthetic terms. While the intellectual is concerned with the true as opposed to the false, and the ethical person is concerned with good versus evil, the aesthete finds his or her values expressed in terms of the beautiful and ugly. Thus, the aesthetic has the whole of sensory experience at its object, but its evaluation remains focused on the judgment of beauty.

Prayer and the Beauty of God: Rav Soloveitchik on Prayer and Aesthetics, R. Joshua Amaru¹¹

31. the object of the aesthetic type's interest is not some abstract theoretical realm Rather, he or she is concerned with the qualitative experience of reality in its multifarious flux. Permanence holds no attraction to the aesthete. The object of the aesthete's attentions is his or her own self in the continual stimulation of his or her hedonic consciousness.

.... aesthetic consciousness accepts a view of the world as constantly in flux. Patterns, repetitions, and abstractions are of no significance. The pride of place granted to knowledge and understanding is replaced with the stimulation and satisfaction of fleeting desires. The aesthete is entirely self-centered, but despite (and because of) this he is neither self-aware nor self-critical. In contrast, the ethical and cognitive types are constantly examining themselves critically. Are they mistaken? Are they using the correct methodology? The aesthetic type does not perform the self-objectification necessary to examine himself

The absence of a transcendental element in the aesthete's existence means that it is not meaningful. It leads nowhere and realizes nothing. He or she pursues no objective standard that would involve the recognition of something besides himself or herself ...

Prayer and the Beauty of God: Rav Soloveitchik on Prayer and Aesthetics, R. Joshua Amaru¹²

32. Up until this point, one could use the Rav's analysis of the ethical, cognitive, and aesthetic gestures to support an argument for asceticism, for the suppression of the aesthetic gesture that is the source of sin. The Rav does not take that route. Despite its potential for sinfulness, the aesthetic gesture may be redeemed by introducing into it the teleological element that it is lacking.

Though the aesthetic, in itself, never ventures outside of immediacy and contiguity, it is more than that: it is an incessant search for the beyond for a finer, better, and purer existence which has been purged of the ugliness of ordinary, unredeemed existence¹³.

It is possible to conceive of aesthetic experience in a new way, not merely as the satisfaction of transient desires and cravings, but as the reflection of the larger human desire to experience transcendence. The experience of beauty is fleeting, but that fleetingness is a function of human limitation. There in fact exists a permanent, eternal source of beauty of which earthly beauty is merely a reflection. When we relate to our experience of beauty in this way, we can redeem aesthetic experience and convert it from a source of sin into an experience of inherent value.

Prayer and the Beauty of God: Rav Soloveitchik on Prayer and Aesthetics, R. Joshua Amaru¹⁴

D] RABBI CHAIM BROVENDER - ART AS ROUTE TO AHAVAT HASHEM

33. We seem to have a natural predilection for the aesthetic; we are drawn to the beautiful and repulsed by the horrible in nature—even though it is difficult to define the exact parameters of each. This is not the result of study or understanding, but a natural inclination with which we seem to be endowed.

10. R. Amaru notes that ‘the reader will note that each gesture corresponds to one of Kant's Critiques. The intellectual gesture is that understood and analyzed in The Critique of Pure Reason, the ethical in The Critique of Practical Reason, and the aesthetic in The Critique of Judgment.’

11. The Torah u-Madda Journal (13/2005) p164 - https://www.yutorah.org/_cdn/_shiurim/148-176%20Amaru.pdf. R. Amaru's article is a review of the book - Worship of the Heart: Essays on Jewish Prayer, R. Yosef B. Soloveitchik, which was published posthumously (2003).

12. Ibid pp165-167.

13. Worship of the Heart: Essays on Jewish Prayer, R. Yosef B Soloveitchik in 2003, p50

14. Ibid pp167-168.

It is true that the term “beautiful” can indicate a variety of things and lacks a clear or simple meaning. Almost everything can be seen as beautiful by someone, or as reflecting his or her particular point of view. But there are enough people who seem to be affected in a similar way by certain visions to make us think that “beautiful” is real and has been programmed into the human personality. It is possible that one of the reasons we are endowed with an innate sense of beauty is to enable us to stand with wonder and awe at the creation, or at least at those moments which, in an almost miraculous way, direct us to the beauty of the divine craft.

If we have been robbed of the miraculous moment, if we do not see anything in the workings of God’s world other than the causal principle, if “uncertainty” does not create the option of awe, then perhaps we have to turn to beauty - the special quality of the creation which takes our breath away and leaves us enraptured with wonder. It may be that beauty and the aesthetic moment provide the only possible contemporary entrée to discovering God’s love in the creation. The beautiful sunset is really there. The snow-capped mountains are really there - they inspire in us the notion that creation is perfect and appropriate for us and us alone. Difficult though it may be to define the subject of aesthetics, there is no doubt that we are impressed by “beauty” (or its opposite). But there is one further point. We are not simply given the gift of perceiving a beautiful landscape or moment; we are able as well to reproduce that beauty or moment in a variety of ways.

The *ruah memallela* enables man to practice his appreciation of aesthetics in creation in a number of ways. We are able, for example, to recreate the sunset, or the highlands of Scotland, by painting and reproducing God’s world as art. Art (or poetry or music) becomes an interpretation of the aesthetic feeling within us. We take note of the sunset, deciding that it is a vision that has meaning and that leaves an impression, and we try to reproduce it as art. Art as a human endeavor is an attempt to connect to that aspect of creation determined by the aesthetic consciousness to be beautiful. Art represents the world of beauty (in the sense that it inspires wonder) but also necessarily interprets it

Art is about becoming part of the wondrous experience of gazing on beauty. The wonder of the world as created is sufficient; the enterprise of the artist is to restate it and to make it his or her own, in some way. If we learn to look at the work of art in the proper manner we should be able to connect to this human vision of beauty, which originates in God’s created world but insists that beauty must ultimately be seen, reflected, or interpreted by the human view.

Looking at the divine sunset in nature encourages us to produce our own sunset; to use words, music, and the plastic arts to reproduce, and then to express in a personal way, the sunset that is God’s gift of beauty. Further, the sunset we have produced, written of, or painted, becomes in itself an object of wonder and amazement. If it is true that for the believing person a sunset can be inspiring, if the natural beauty we encounter tells us that we are experiencing God’s love and should reciprocate, then it may also be true that the representation of the beauty in nature through art grants us entrée into the special experience of God’s love, seen through the prism of human creativity.....

Looking into the created world is available to all who have faith, in order to prod and develop that faith.

Towards Ahavat Hashem: Art and the Religious Experience, R. Chaim Brovender¹⁵

E] RABBI NATHAN LOPES-CARDOZO - ART AS A PROTEST AGAINST COMPLACENCY

34. So many people fail to appreciate the profound and positive impact that nature’s beauty can have on the lives of those who take the time to marvel at it. Parallel to this phenomenon, we also witness a widespread lack of appreciation for art and music. Religious school systems give little if any consideration to these matters, and they are not emphasized in most observant homes. This is a worrisome development, as this apathy toward aesthetics contradicts, in many ways, the very spirit of authentic Judaism.

Natural beauty, art, and music exist to disturb our complacency. Their purpose is to awaken in us a sense of wonder. And while beauty, art, and music facilitate that wonder, the role of religion is to provide us with the means to respond to it.

Artistic expression and religious observance are both forms of protest against taking the world for granted. The perception of objects as beautiful is an inexplicable phenomenon, and any attempts to rationalize the concept of beauty will be doomed to fail. The same is true for musings on the definition of art, which belongs to a world beyond words. Real art does not reproduce the visible but rather reveals the invisible. Consequently, not even artists are able to explain the beauty that resides within their creations. In fact, good artists are usually shocked by the work they produce. In general, they cannot explain their art any more than a plant can explain horticulture. This failure of the rational mind to categorize and define puts man in direct confrontation with the ineffable, and warns him not to fall victim to the simplistic belief that science can give him any insight into the mystery of our existence. Thus, natural beauty and art can be conducive to religious awakening.

15. Chapter 3, *Wisdom From All My Teachers: Challenges and Initiatives in Contemporary Torah Education* (ATID 2003), ed Jeffrey Sacks and Susan Handelman

The Talmud (Berachot 57b) adds another dimension to our understanding of the role and importance of aesthetics: "Three things grant a man serenity of mind: a beautiful dwelling, a beautiful wife, and beautiful furnishings." Probably this statement relates to another remark by the sages (Pesachim 65a) : "The world cannot exist without perfumers and tanners; happy is he who deals in perfumes, and woe to him whose trade is tanning [because of the unpleasant odors produced in the tanning process]."

The Sages made a number of remarkable observations concerning beauty. The Torah (Bamidbar 35:4) commands the urban planners in Israel to leave 1000 amot (cubits) of untilled land around each of the cities to be given to the Levites, allowing nature to manifest its beauty. The Sages (Bava Batra 24b-25a) further mandate that one must remove all unseemly objects, and even not plant trees in the immediate vicinity of a city, to ensure that the landscape will always be pleasing.

Beauty – whether in nature, art, or music – can calm us when we are stressed, or inspire our creativity and spur us on to great accomplishments. Jewish educators should encourage our children to study and appreciate natural beauty, art, and music. This should be done within the framework of the school and home, with emphasis on the religious significance of the aesthetic experience. With the proper perspective, visiting an art museum, or taking a walk in the woods, can effect real spiritual growth.

.....

To look at a Rembrandt and allow its beauty to wash over one's mind is not just a sensory delight, but a religious experience that God, in His kindness and wisdom, has granted His creatures.

Of course, we know that some music, paintings, and photographs implicitly conflict with our sense of decency and good taste, and convey messages that directly oppose the Jewish conception of holiness. But at their apex, classical art and music have the capacity to make us look beyond the mundane world and perceive the miracle of all existence frozen in an eternal moment, or in a heavenly combination of musical notes. Today we are confronted with many artists and musicians whose only goal – motivated largely by a lack of real talent – is to shock. Consequently, their popularity will fade away, since each of their pieces can only shock us once. This does not excuse us, however, from completely ignoring the beauty that does exist within the world of art and music. To refuse to listen to a refined piece of music is to close oneself off from one of the most sublime experiences our world has to offer.

It is time for the religious community to put this matter back on its agenda.

On Music Baths And Art As Religious Protest, R. Nathan Lopes Cardozo, (May 2019)¹⁶

F] RABBI SCHUBERT SPERO - ART AS AN EXPRESSION ON IMITATIO DEI?

35. (שמואל א ב:ב) אין קדוש כה' כי אין בלתי ואין צור באלהינו. מאי אין צור כאלהינו? - אין צייר כאלהינו.

ברכות י.

Chazal describe God as the ultimate sculptor in that he created Man.

36. שכל נצח צמחור והוא נצח בידים, שגומר (הבליס קלטיה) [אחור וקדם לרתינין] ופשת עלי פפכה

רש"י בראשית א:כו

Rashi stresses that Man was made directly by the 'Hand' of God.

37. Thus, the designation of "sculptor" or "artist" reflects the special attention and love with which God creates man, implying not only functionality and usefulness in the product but beauty as well.

Rabbi Schubert Spero, Towards a Torah Esthetic, Tradition Issue 6:2 (Spring-Summer 1964) p 57

- Does this perspective of God enjoin us to copy God's artistry¹⁷ under the general mitzva of 'vehalachta bidrachav'?

16. <https://www.crescas.nl/columns/webcolumnlopescardozo/a24oz/On-Music-Baths-And-Art-As-Religious-Protest/>. R. Cardozo ends the essay by attributing its inspiration to R. Avraham Yehoshua Heschel.

17. In Part 2 we will be'H explore the significant halachic limitations, especially regarding sculpture.

38. But is sensuous beauty as innocent as mere play? Ever since man ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, 'the imagination or the thoughts of his heart was continually evil'. The esthetic experience arouses emotion and affords pleasure, both of which are to be distrusted. Pleasure strengthens men's lower impulses and infects them with an abnormal thirst for more. Emotion for emotion's sake creates a turbidity of the soul, withers the temperate part of human nature and constantly threatens to plunge the individual into the abyss of voluptuousness and excess. While our society is still attempting to locate the boundary between art and pornography, Judaism maintained that where the physical passions are involved, a man with his capacity for imagery can not have esthetic experiences without crossing the narrow ridge of sinful self-indulgence.

Rabbi Schubert Spero, Towards a Torah Esthetic, Tradition Issue 6:2 (Spring-Summer 1964) p 62

39. I believe the above represents a fair picture of the extent and complexity of Judaism's suspicion of sensuous beauty. Nevertheless, I wish to propose that on the basis of the metaphysical status of the category of the beautiful, one can, in all consistency, find a place for art for art's sake in the life of the observant Jew. In other words, if art is the discovery of the beautiful, and the beautiful reflects the voice of God, then the Jew not only may but should surround himself with art objects and indulge in artistic creativity subject to two limitations: 1) That the activity does not replace the centrality of Torah; 2) That the particular subject matter is not objectionable to the moral sense of Torah there are others, Maimonides among them, who say that man "should gaze upon pictures and other beautiful objects." While Maimonides advocates this solely for purposes of mental relaxation, I am suggesting that esthetic appreciation involves a positive religious value.

Rabbi Schubert Spero, Towards a Torah Esthetic, Tradition Issue 6:2 (Spring-Summer 1964) p 63