

Encl. Jan. 11, 1960]

By the Grace of G-d
11th of Teveth, 5720
Brooklyn, N. Y.

Mr. & Mrs. Ernest Weill
886 Alpine Drive
Teaneck, New Jersey

Greeting and Blessing:

I duly received your letter of December 21st with the enclosed reproduction of Mrs. Weill's sculptures, which are returned herewith as requested.

Although the art of sculpture is not in my domain, I, nevertheless, take the liberty of making the following observations in connection with the subject matter of our discussion when you were here, namely, with regard to the Baal-Shem-Tov.

To be sure, an artist has the prerogative of certain so-called artistic license, and may use his imagination in a work of art representing a person according to his mind, especially where no authentic likeness exists, as in the case of the Baal-Shem-Tov, for the pictures purportedly representing the Baal-Shem-Tov are not his likeness but of another one of the Baale-Shem. However, I can safely assume that in your sculpture you wished to represent in a symbolic way the ideological person, namely, the founder of the Chassidic movement. Hence, as we have touched upon the subject, though not quite adequately, it should be borne in mind that the soul of Chassidism is ecstasy and inspiration, and the ability to see even in simple material objects the Divine "Spark" and the Divine "Light" which is their true reality. Such ideas would be reflected, as might well be imagined, in rather refined facial features, which express a longing for the sublime together with profound inner spiritual strength, coupled with serenity and gentleness. Thus, one would imagine the Baal-Shem-Tov to be of a patriarchal type, with a flowing beard and, perhaps, disheveled locks of the head, crowning highly refined facial features, etc. I would also like to emphasize another feature which is characteristic for the teachings of Chassidism, namely, the interest in and tender care of the Jewish child, which could be personified in the Baal-Shem-Tov holding the hand of a small child. Incidentally, it is well-known that the Baal-Shem-Tov's first activities, even before he revealed himself, was as a teacher of very young children. Of course, the sculpture may be intended only to reproduce his head or bust, without accompanying figures.

I have no doubt that you had your own reasons for choosing to personify the Baal-Shem-Tov in your particular way, and I would like to know your motivations.

In connection with the above, I am enclosing a copy of my recent message, in which there is a reference to the work of the Baal-Shem-Tov.

Mr. & Mrs. Ernest Weill

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I send you my prayerful wishes that the change in direction relating to your work, of which we spoke, should come about in a much easier and more gratifying way than you might expect at first.

Hoping to hear good news from you,

With blessing,

By