

[May 25, 1965]

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By the Grace of G-d
28th of Iyar, 5720
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Mr. Chayim Yaakov Lipschitz
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Greeting and Blessing:

This is to confirm receipt of your letter in which you refer to the issue of the proposed "Sculpture Park" in Jerusalem. I must confess that I was surprised to note your attitude toward this matter, and I trust that you will not take it amiss my objections. I believe you have not been fully informed on this subject.

The opposition to this project does^{not} emanate from any particular party only, but is widespread indeed. Even non-religious circles are opposed to it. Unfortunately we live in such a materialistic world that material considerations prevail over others, so that contrary points of view are hushed up in the press.

A "Sculpture Park" in Jerusalem is quite incongruous with the character of the Holy City, which has a tradition of holiness, not only for Jews but also for gentiles, for a period of the past 4000 years. It has always been the symbol of monotheism, free from graven images in any shape or form. You surely know, as anyone else, how much blood was shed by the Jews for the preservation of this sacred status of the city when the Romans tried to make it Aelia Capitolina. Thus, even from the point of view of esthetics and art, a public display of this kind would not only be in bad taste, but a real dissonance.

I will cite the opinions of some prominent Jews on this project. These are just a few of many similar expressions, and I bring only these as no one can accuse them of "religious bias."

These opinions were excerpted from interviews published in the weekly Panim el Panim, No. 54 (16th of Iyar, 5720):

The poet Nathan Zach:

Whether we like it or not, Jerusalem serves for very many people as an active historic symbol, which is still valid today. The basic principle of monotheism, including the ban on the graven and molten image, has in the course of

generations been woven into this symbol.... It is very characteristic that we who at every opportunity bring to the headlines of the press new archeological finds.. shut ourselves up behind our "secularism" when we are called upon to display a little respect for our past. ...

(Nathan Zach, who nicknamed the project "Terah's Park" (an allusion to the idolatry of Terah, Abraham's father), cites the young sculptor Yehiel Shemi and others who could certainly not be called "reactionaries" who are equally opposed to the project.)

Gershon Jack, an educational authority, explains his opposition as follows:

We bring up our children to feel proud of our people and its uniqueness of tradition. There are values which have been formed over thousands of years of our history. We cannot uproot ourselves from it all. One of the centers of our national sensitivity is Jerusalem. How can we desecrate it?

David Zakkai:

A person like me, generally speaking, does not consider sculpture as a forbidden art. However, there are two compelling reasons why we should oppose the Sculpture Park in Jerusalem: a) With all our heretical views, Jerusalem is a unique city. As for me, whenever I go up to Jerusalem, the Holy City, I am overcome with emotion and never cease thinking: I am in Jerusalem! For three thousand years of its history, Jerusalem has established its peculiar attitude toward the graven image. Many Jews died, many were the rebellions and much blood was shed, all because of graven images. We must not destroy this attitude. b) A closed museum might be understood; even then - no sculptures of a christological character. But the issue is a public Sculpture Garden - to make Jerusalem a world center for sculpture. This is a violent contradiction to the whole character of Jerusalem.... Moreover, we are only a part of our Jewish people.. a very substantial part, who see a transgression in this. We have a responsibility to those Jews also. The would-be benefactor should be told that not all gifts can be accepted unconditionally!

Prof. Dov Saden:

I need not call upon the honored commandment, 'Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image'... but judging by the noisy publicity of the donor and especially the recipients.. demanding to make it a central aspect of the city... Here there is room for apprehension. Jerusalem's central character cannot be changed by an accidental collection of a stranger and strange spirit, even if he be a Jew. Its centrality comes from within and is intrinsically its

own.... To establish as its center a collection of statues which had been accumulated by the caprice of a pampered individual - would mean to fix the character of the city not compatible with its character.... It is not a question of attitude toward the art.... If I were asked, What could more fittingly characterize the inner aspect of Jerusalem, I would say a "House of T'Nach (Bible)" - to exhibit the Bible in all its editions, translations, exegeses in all languages....

Uri Avneri, Editor of Olam Hazei (a radically "modernistic" publication):

I am opposed to compulsory religion of any kind. I am also opposed to hurting the feelings of others.... Were the State of Israel... to decide to create a national museum for the art of sculpture, and the exhibits were to be chosen by an authoritative body, I would welcome it (though I should ask myself whether Jerusalem is the right place for such a museum). However, what is happening here is that an alien "benefactor" who has made an impromptu collection of sculptural merchandise of third and fourth rank, has donated it to Israel, and so, quite by accident, would be created a museum of doubtful merit.... The artistic education of Israel should not be subjected to such accidental donations.... As for Jerusalem, each city has a character of its own, emanating from the city's national and religious history. I am not sure that the Sculpture Garden fits into this character (of Jerusalem)....

The poet Benjamin Gelai:

It is a question of a monument. The monument of Jerusalem is the absence of statues in it. On no account can this be compromised.... A Sculpture Garden is something wonderful, but not for Jerusalem.... Jerusalem should be a center science, culture, literature and any art but sculpture.... This time we, secularists, understand that the religious Jews are right. It must be explained to the man (B.R.) that what he demands is the unconditional surrender of a tradition of 4000 years. He has no moral or ethical justification to insist on his condition.

The poet Nathan Alterman (in Davar):

... One need not be an extremely sensitive person - not even Jewish - to feel and recognize the degree of paradoxality... from any aspect of culture or history... it is difficult to imagine a place less suitable for such a project. Neither Jew nor gentile can ignore (the spiritual essence) of this city; certainly not force upon it such an anti-cultural and anti-artistic breach in the name of culture and art, above all.

I trust the above comments will suffice to put the matter in its proper perspective.

With the approach of Shavuoth, the Season of Our Receiving the Torah, I send you my prayerful wishes for a happy and inspiring festival.

With blessing

M. Schwartz

Since the transcription of this letter had been delayed, there appeared in the meantime my message for Shavuoth, a copy of which is enclosed. I hope you will find it interesting.