

**Abraham Isaac Kook** (1865–1935) was the first Ashkenazi chief rabbi of the British Mandatory Palestine, the founder of Yeshiva Mercaz HaRav Kook (The Central Universal Yeshiva), Jewish thinker, Halakhist, Kabbalist and a renowned Torah scholar. He is known in Hebrew as ברה"ק קוק והכה קחצי מהרבא *HaRav Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook*, and by the acronym היארה (HaRaAYaH), or simply as "HaRav." He was one of the most celebrated and influential rabbis of the 20th century.

## 4 Ways Rav Kook Looks at Art

**Source #1:** When I lived in London, I would visit the National Gallery, and the paintings that I loved the most were those of Rembrandt. In my opinion, Rembrandt was a saint. When I first saw Rembrandt's paintings, they reminded me of the rabbinic statement about the creation of light. When G-d created the light, it was so strong and luminous that it was possible to see from one end of the world to the other. And G-d feared that the wicked would make use of it. What did He do? He secreted it for the righteous in the world to come. But from time to time, there are great men whom G-d blesses with a vision of the hidden light. I believe Rembrandt was one of them, and the light of his paintings is that light which G-d created on Genesis day.

- **Interview, Jewish Chronicle, 9 September 1935**

The UK's oldest and most widely-read **Jewish** newspaper, covering news, sport, lifestyle and religious features of interest to **Jews** worldwide.

**Source #2:** The true talent of a visual artist, when he is at the peak of his abilities – and especially one whose talent has been sanctified by the Spirit of G-d – is to be able to see the depths of existence, both in their physical and spiritual dimensions....

All these things which are said generally of the Creator – as we value the wonders of the creative wisdom altogether, we must find a model in a wise and whole man devoted to purposeful creation. The highest and most blessed of all artists was Bezalel, who created with the Spirit of G-d. he completed a real picture, which demands a great wisdom of positioning the physical parts in it, positioning its lights and shadows, its buds and flowers, etc., the intention and extreme attention to detail to reach the essence of the purity of existence.

-**Source: Ein Ayah, Berachot, volume 2, p. 263, article 30**  
Ein Aya is a commentary on Ein Yaakov- The Aggadic sections of the Talmud

**Source #3:** “Literature, painting, and sculpting are able to bring to fruition all the spiritual concepts engraved in the depths of the human spirit, and so long as one brush is missing, which is stored away in the depths of the spirit – which ponders and feels – but has not been realized, there is still an obligation on the purposeful work to realize it.

The matter is self-evident, that only these treasuries, that when they are opened they will sweeten the air of all existence. It is good and beautiful to open them.

‘From every utterance which came out out of G-d’s mouth, the entire world was filled with fragrance’ (Shab. 88b)

**Source: Ohr Hamizrach (1903) p352-354**

Bezalel is considered a leader even though all he did was create the Tabernacle and its vessels. But since the image of the Tabernacle and all its vessels, as well as individual designs which were made as purposeful creation – with G-d’s Hand these images engraved the spirits of Israel with Torah, testimony, and fear of G-d. Designs contain the spirit of their true creator, and according to the high level of the artists’ soul, his attainment of holy traits, a pure and good mind, and the Spirit of G-d, so will his designs enrich and benefit others. Therefore, though we cannot make too many sculptural designs – to establish an entire ethical system based on them – since we have the pure Torah of G-d which includes every path of life to the highest degree. But those designs which we were commanded to make, it is understood that they contained great power to direct souls to the beautiful ideas contained in them. If so, the purity of spirit of the entire nation was dependent on them, since it was G-d’s advice to educate the people through the Tabernacle and the designs of its vessels. It was likewise dependent on the spirit and holiness of the great thinker who conceived of this holy creation – Bezalel. Therefore, he certainly is a leader and shepherd of Israel.

**Source: Ein Ayah, Berachot, volume 2, p. 261, article 27.**

**Translations from Orot:** translation Bezalel Naor, Jason Aronson 1993