

Rosh Hashanah 5784

*Arielle Stein*

“Your task

is to make one color

look like six.

After that,

you must make six colors

look like one.

This should happen all in yellow,

on one piece of paper,

by Monday.”

Ugh,

Josef Albers, color theorist,

strikes again.

The first thing a person learns

in painting class

is to never

use paint directly from the tube.

Doing such a thing would make assignments

like the one just noted

impossible.

Thinning and mixing the paint

with turpentine

and tiny specs of other hues

makes it usable.

It is only after this process

of an artist making the paint

their own

that painting begins.

For me,

this lesson was surprising

and delightful.

After years

of learning to seek out

one,

preordained,

correct answer at school,

I was presented with a scenario

where honing my own creative abilities

was the point.

In order to explore color theory,

learn figurative painting

and engage in making conceptual art,

developing my own

tools

of creation

was the task.

For me,

this approach to learning

was a powerful deviation

from the status quo

I had experienced

in most educational settings.

This centering

of developing one's own

individual creative tools

helped me to see creativity

and thinking outside of the box as holy

in a world that frequently

does not.

*Bereishit Barab Elohim...*

*In the beginning,*

*God created...*

Tomorrow morning,

we will read

this first line of the Torah,

in Genesis 1,

begins with God

creating.

God is first introduced

as a creative

not caretaker for the needy

not redeemer

not savior

but creative.

God is presented to us

as a maker of worlds.

Through separating darkness from light

and creating each category

of living thing,

God layers this world

with more and more detail.

God marks each set of these creations

with the phrase

*and it was good.*

As anyone who has ever painted,

sculpted,

written texts,

composed music,

worked in a lab,

or acted in theatre

can tell you,

such self assessment

after a first draft

is rarely the case.

Nevertheless,

spec by spec,

as each day of the creation myth unfolds,

God's creative palette expands.

But what did God use to create the world?

Did God use God's paint straight from the tube?

The mystical text,

Sefer Yetsirah,

(Book of Creation)

teaches that God used Hebrew letters

as the building blocks

with which to create the world.

*God drew them,*

*hewed them,*

*combined them,*

*weighed them,*

*interchanged them,*

*and through them*

*produced the whole creation*

*and everything destined*

*to come into being.*

This is not the usual

*God spoke the world into being.*

No.

This is something more.

With each action;

drawing, hewing, combining, weighing and interchanging,

God creates

with intention, physicality and intuition.

According to this text,

even God doesn't use a material

exactly as it is received!

God works and reworks

Works and reworks

Works and reworks

the letter blocks,

making these materials God's own,

until they become fit for the task at hand.

A rabbinic tradition

dating back even earlier

the Midrash on Genesis

(Genesis Rabbah)

teaches that even the Torah itself

claims to be a tool related to God's art-making!

In the midrash, the Torah says,

*'I was the tool of God's artistry,'*

*referring to the fact that God who builds in this world...*

*does so from the knowledge*

*of an artist.*

*And the artist themselves*

*does not create from their own knowledge,*

*but rather*

*from their tools and implements,*

*in order to know how*

*to make rooms and carve designs.*

God creates neither world nor Torah

with paint

straight from the tube.

According to our

ancient, Jewish traditions

God learns from God's materials

experimenting

and exploring.

If God made the universe

in the mode of an artist,

learning from God's materials,

what does this mean for us?

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ

בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ

*And God created humankind in the divine image,*

*creating it in the image of God—*

Genesis teaches that on the last, active day of creation,

God created humanity.

These first people were created



*Btzelem Elohim,*

in the image of God.

Like God,

we too have the ability to recognize

the building blocks

at our disposal,

and we too

can craft them

into tools for creation.

Grounded in intention,

physicality

and intuition

we might learn to embrace the truth

that we are meant to work and rework

experiment

explore

and never rely on using our version of paint

in its original form.

Master of color theory

Josef Albers

taught his students:

*If one says 'Red'*

*–the name of the color*

*and there are fifty people listening,*

*it can be expected*

*that there will be fifty reds in their minds.*

*And one can be sure*

*that all these reds*

*will be very different.*

Albers taught that ultimately,

although the red each person imagines

is different,

each person has a red that comes to mind.

In fact, these endlessly varying shades of red are what is essential.

To be fully human

creation in God's image

is to be gifted with innate creative capacities

that take many forms.

Albers took his interpretation of color one step further, teaching:

*And in the end, the study of color is the study of ourselves.*

We are all working with our own tools of creation

whether we are turning 6 colors of paint into one,

editing an article

working in a lab

or layering the universe.

It is not the size of the creative task that determines holiness.

Rather,

it is the deceptively simple practice of creating.

This year,

let us be written into the book of holy creativity,

and let's hope

God knows

how to use

each red we pictured.